

Understanding Ibibio Clause Structure from the Perspective of English Language

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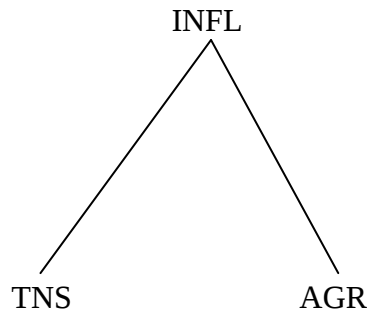
Introduction

A universal clause structure should be bounded by agreement relations (Chomsky, 1991&1992). It is assumed that elements at [Spec, AGR-S''] and [AGR-S] must agree overtly in specific terms, and therefore hold a Spec- head agreement relation. There is also the covert agreement which holds between the Spec of AGRO and the verb complement. The present research endeavour is premised on Chomsky's universal clause structure, Pollock's Split-INFL Hypothesis and Baker and Willie's postulation that every functional head in Ibibio- Aspect, Auxiliary, Mood, and Participle, as well as Tense- acts as a probe, capable of initiating an Agreement relations to propose a clause structure for the Ibibio language. This notable pattern in the analysis of the Ibibio clauses serves as the motivation for the proposed clause structure for Ibibio, a member of the Central Lower Cross subgroup of the Delta group of the New Benue-Congo language family. It is in the light of the situation explicated above that this research seeks to examine the basic linguistic elements that could lead to a better understanding of the Ibibio clause in structure specifically when studied from the perspective of English language.

Theoretical Consideration

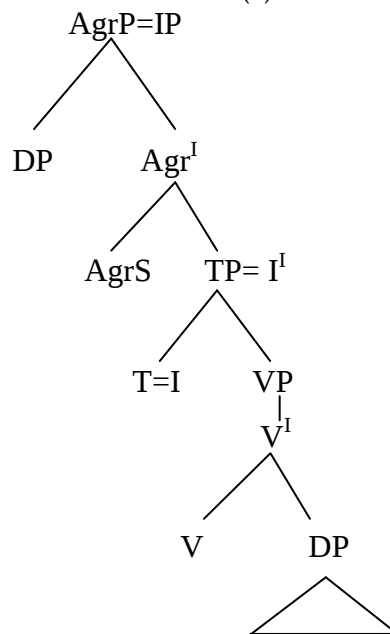
The core credo of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) has been to establish a grammar that can account for all human languages. Pollock (1989), in explaining the basic clause structure in natural languages, disagrees with Chomsky's (1986) proposition in the Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT) and argues that Chomsky's analysis of the INFL (as shown in (1)) as one category, consisting of more than one set of features such as [+TNS] [+AGR] is misleading.

1)



Pollock's novel idea earns the concept the sobriquet, Split INFL Hypothesis. Split INFL Hypothesis was necessitated by the need to account for multiple inflectional morphemes in her comparison of French and English syntax. Pollock hypothesised that to account for the different functional projections in English and French, the INFL must be decomposed into TP and AgrP. Following this, each of the set of the bundle of features contained in the INFL should be viewed as the syntactic head of maximal projections such as TP, AgrP, AspP, et cetera in their own right. Based on this standpoint, Cook and Newson (1988:180) present a more articulated basic clause structure in (2).

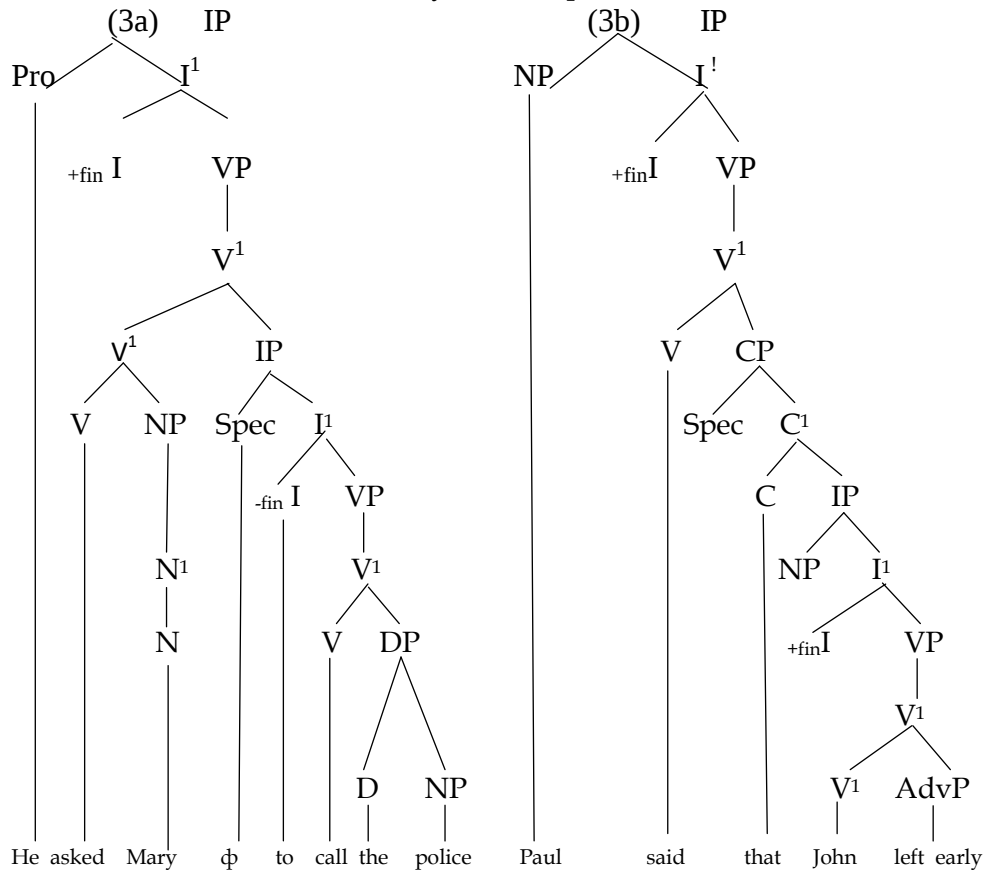
(2)



In (2), the INFL or IP is replaced by the AgrP, with the Agr^I dominating the TP. TP replaces the I^I and has AgrS as its sister node. TP and the AgrS

are in turn dominated by AgrP^I. The head of the TP is T which is the position which was formally occupied by I head that is [+TNS, +AGR]. DP is, again, proposed as the object of the sentence within the domain of the VP. Split Infl Hypothesis is significant to the present study. This is because Ibibio is an agglutinative language in which words are built by merging different morphemes together into a lengthy sequence. There are several morphemes in Ibibio which serve as heads of functional categories. They are AspP, TP, NegP, FocP, et cetera. Split Infl Hypothesis will be able to perfectly account for the different mergers that constitute the Ibibio basic clause structure.

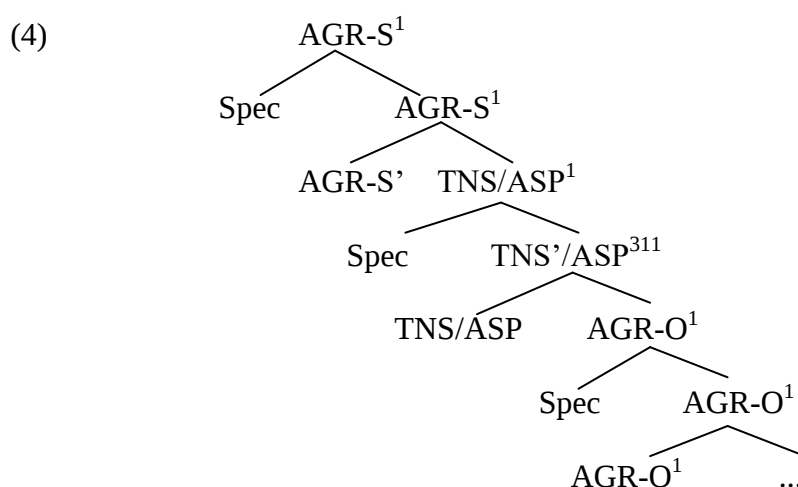
The trees in (3a, b) show how grammatical categories are merged with either [$\pm$ TNS, $\pm$ AGR] in Chomsky's earlier postulation.



There is a binary merger to generate the structure in (3a). The verb *asked* is a projection from the lexicon and merges with the NP *Mary* to form the VP: *asked Mary*. This, in turn, merges with the *to infinitive*: *to call the police*. The

resulting *asked Mary to call the police* is not complete because of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) requirement that ‘finite constituents require a subject’ (Radford, 2004:54) and in the examples in (3a,b), the finite verb *asked* is not preceded by a subject. It is only when it further merges with an appropriate subject like, ‘He’ that the construction can become a maximal projection: *He asked Mary to call the police*.

The same process is replicated to (3b). However, the difference lies in the fact that while in (3a) the verb *asked* merges with a *-fin* embedded clause to form the larger I¹, in (3b) the verb *said* merges with a *+fin* CP clause to do so.



Chomsky (1991, 1992) having argued that there exist an object agreement element in addition to the proposed subject agreement, proposes a universal articulated clause structure in (4). According to Yuka (1999:3), Chomsky’s postulation in (4) illustrates that AGR-O and an option of TNS/ASP as functional heads means that ‘whichever of the heads (TNS/ASP) features in this position... projects either into TNSP or ASPP, (as the case may be).’

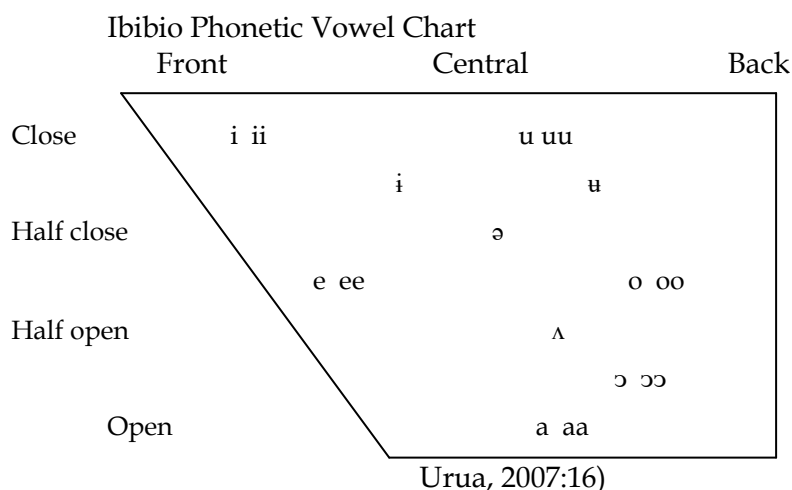
The Ibibio Orthography

Ekah (2008:92) submits that the orthography of a language is principally the system of spelling made up of symbols consisting of glyphs and diacritics adopted in writing. The Ibibio spelling system maintains a degree of consistency. Consistency here denotes that Ibibio words are spelt the way they are pronounced. Ashby (2011:2) calls this phenomenon ‘phonemic spelling’ and explains that it is a situation where there is a spelling-to-sound rule. Ibibio words such as *ènò* (gift), *Abàsi* (God), *imá*

(love), *nd̩* (marriage), *k̩m* (greetings) and many others point to the one-to-one correspondence that exists between the Ibibio sounds and the Ibibio spelling system.

The present paper adopts the simplified orthography presented in the Ibibio vowel chart in (Figure 1) for the spelling and transcription of the Ibibio words. The chart pools a number of characters from the IPA and as well selects some letters from the Roman alphabet. The orthography has been used in several studies (Urua, 2007, Baker and Willie, 2010, Essien, 1990 et cetera) and therefore has been standardised.

Figure 1

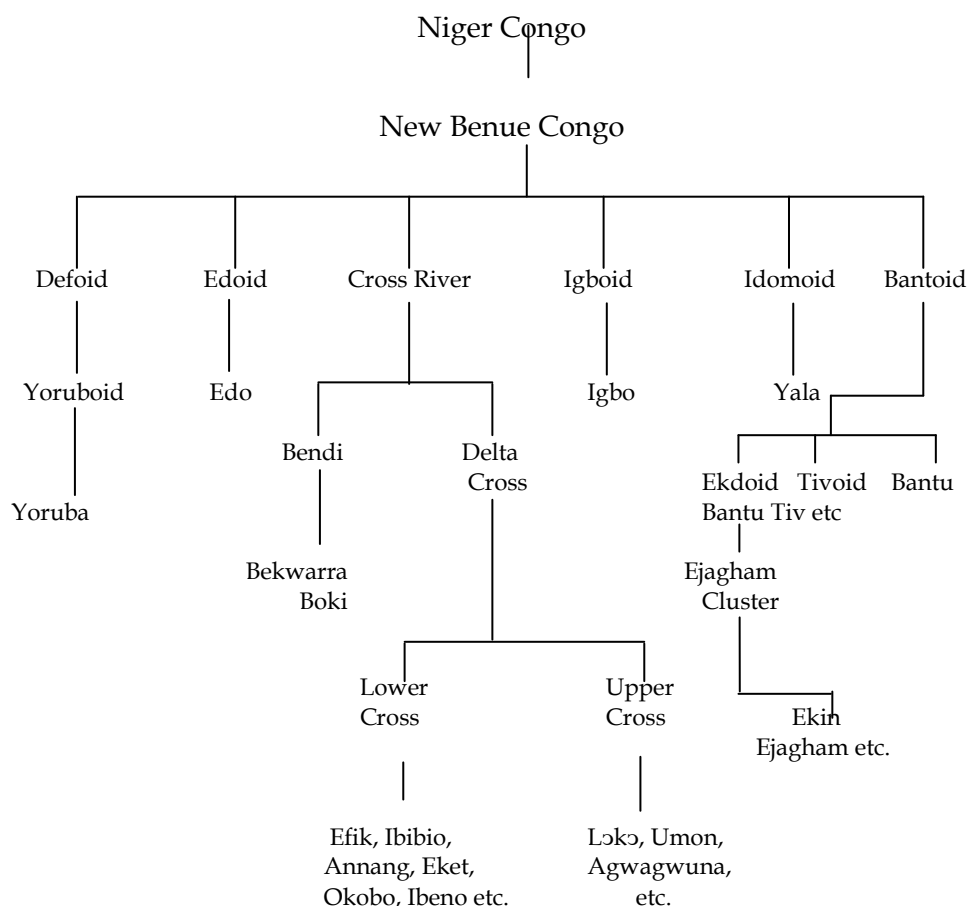


The Ibibio language family

Genetically, Ibibio belongs to the Central Lower Cross subgroup of the Delta group of the New Benue-Congo family branch. The New Benue-Congo family, in turn, belongs to the Niger-Congo subfamily which constitutes part of the larger Niger-Kordofanian language family. The Niger Congo family is considered the largest family of languages in Africa (Greenberg quoted in Urua, 2007:2). Standard Ibibio language is spoken in Uyo, Itu, Uruan, Etinan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ubium, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ikono, Ini, Ikot Abasi, Mkpāt Enin, Ibiono Ibom, Onna and Eket which are all local government areas in Akwa-Ibom State located in the South-South geo-political region of Nigeria (Urua, 2007:1). Varieties of Ibibio (still in Akwa-Ibom state) are Itu Mbon Uso, Ikwere, Nkari and Ukwa which Essien (1990: ix) designates 'small languages'. These varieties of the language are noticeable, because as Willie (2011:30) remarks, they have degrees of mutual intelligibility with the mainland Ibibio except for the fact that the 'intelligibility is unilateral between the speakers of these

varieties and the speakers of the standard Ibibio.’ (Figure 2) is a tree representation of the Ibibio language family.

Figure 2: The Niger Congo Language Group.



(Greenberg quoted in Asibong, 2002:115)

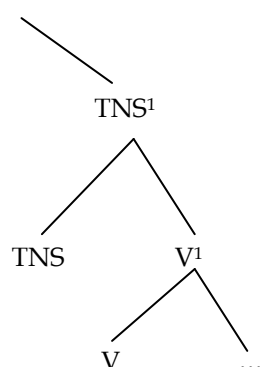
Tense as Functional Head in Ibibio

Verbs are, in addition to capturing actions (whether mental or stative), able to inflect for present and past events. Tense is a category that locates the action of a verb on a timeline in relation to the time of speech relating to the action in question. Present tense shows that the time of the situation expressed by a verb is concurrent with the time of speech, while past tense shows that the time of the situation of the verb precedes the time of

speech. In some languages such as Ibibio, tense features are marked morphologically and/or phonologically.

Yuka (1999: 3) avers that what holds between the TNS and the predicate head is spelled out on the caveat that a predicate must be in a C-command relation with the tense as shown in (5):

(5)

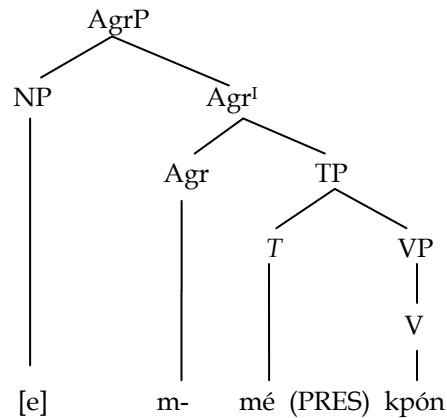


Tense in Ibibio is mainly marked morphologically with explicit tense morphemes. Ibibio overt tense markers are generally prefixes. The Ibibio tense system parallels the classical tripartite system of past: *mà-/ké-* (non-proximant) and *mé-* (proximant); present: *mé-* and future: *yá-* (proximant) and *yà-* (non-proximant) all occupying identical syntactic position in an Ibibio clause. However, Ibibio tense may also be marked inherently or covertly. This is common with the third person nominative pronouns. Covert tense can occur with other persons especially in negative statements. The following sentences typify tenses in Ibibio.

- 1a Mmo-òwó é-yà é-dí
 People 3plS FUT 3plS come
 ‘People will come’
- b M-mé -kpón
 1sgS PRES- big/fat
 ‘I am big/fat’
- c Archibong á- má kít Emé úbàkúsén
 Archibong 3sgS PAST see Emé morning
 ‘Archibong saw Emé in the morning’

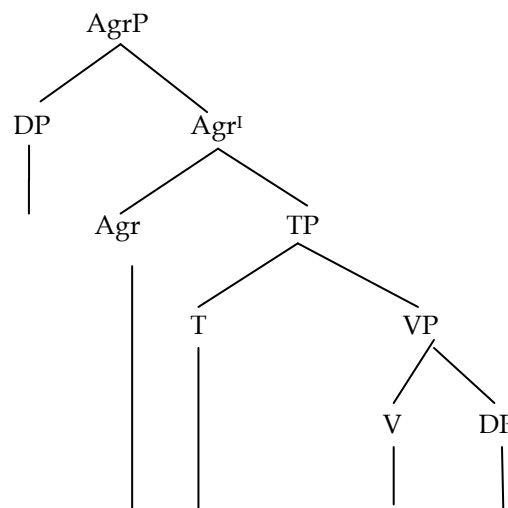
The sentences in (1a-c) are represented on the tree diagrams below in (6a,b).

(6a)



The tree analysis in (6a) exemplifies a case of an overtly marked tense in the Ibibio language. The word *kpón* in Ibibio is a verbal item which means 'big'. The present tense morpheme *mé* added before the root verb *kpón* locates a stative action underway at the time of speech. (Ami) *mé kpón* therefore means 'I am big'. However, the semantic implication of the sentence in (6a) is peculiar. It describes an action which occurred sometimes in the past but the effect persists into the present. Therefore, the act of becoming big is not instantaneous. Despite this, it may be argued that *mé kpón* describes an action in present tense in Ibibio. However, in a situation where the tense marker precedes an event verb such as *dia* 'eat' to generate *mé- diá*, 'I have eaten', the action expressed in the verb becomes present perfect. In (6a), the TP is immediately dominated by the Agr^I while the TP in turn immediately dominates the VP. The tense marker is in a c-command relationship with the VP. Consequently, the VP is preceded by *mé-* which is the head of the TP.

(6b)



Archibong a màá (PAST) kíd Emè

The analysis in (6b) shows how past tense is marked in the Ibibio language. The simple past tense is overt in the structure and is realised overtly as *màá*. The root verb *kíd* is an action verb which means ‘see’. The past tense marker *màá* simply expresses the fact that the act of seeing *Emè* occurred in the past before the time of speech. The AgrP^I dominates the TP which in turn dominates the VP.

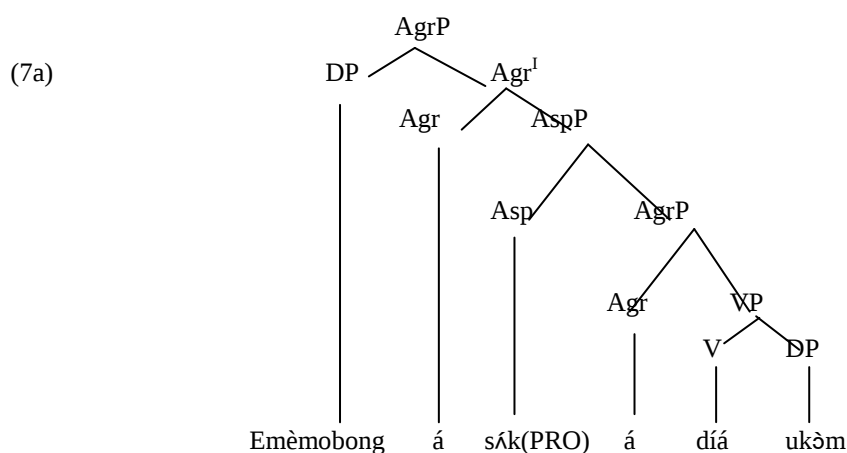
Aspect as a Functional Head

The Ibibio language has a rich and complex aspectual system which captures the various internal temporal constituents of verbs. Aspect in Ibibio can be marked overtly through grammaticalisation and duplication, while some verbs can display aspect inherently. By marking aspect inherently, we mean that the verb does not have an overt grammatical marker or morphological realisation for it except by tonal alternation. In Ibibio this could be achieved via a rising tone. The overt markers of the aspectual system in Ibibio are the perfective *mé-*, the inceptive *dí/yé-*, the imperfective *sák-*, (progressive) and the habitual *sí-*. The following sentences contain aspect markers in Ibibio.

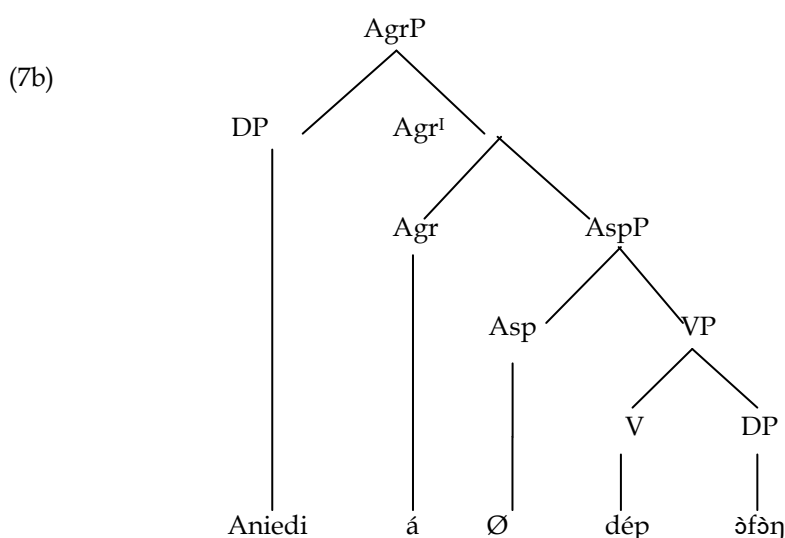
2a Emèmôbông á sák á díá úkòṁ
 Emèmôbông 3sgS PROG 3sgS eat plantain
 Emèmôbông is eating plantain

b Aníédì á Ø dép òfòṅ
 Aníédì 3sgS PERF buy dress
 Aníédì has bought a dress

The sentences may be represented on the tree diagrams below in (7a,b).



In (7a), the AspP node is dominated by the AgrP which in turn immediately dominates another AgrP node. The Asp marker *sAk* is the head of the AspP. The Asp head occurs between the first and the second Agr markers which are represented by *á*. The tree analysis of the sentence in (7a) shows that the Aspectual progressive functional marker *sAk* serves as a prop, initiating another agreement marker right after it on the left hand side of the verb *diá* 'eat'.



(7b) displays inherent Perfective Asp. It is obvious that the verb *dép* pronounced with a high tone, has inherent tense and inherent perfective aspect which is not morphologically represented unlike in (7a) where the prefixes *sAk*- overtly marks progressive aspect. *Á- dép ðfðŋ* in the context used in the sentence in (7b), given the appropriate tone, means *has bought a dress*. With this realisation as presented in (7b), the inherent Asp marker as represented by the null ($\emptyset$) comes between the Agr marker *á* and the verb *dép*. However, despite the fact that Asp is empty ($\emptyset$), it still initiates some sort of agreement before it.

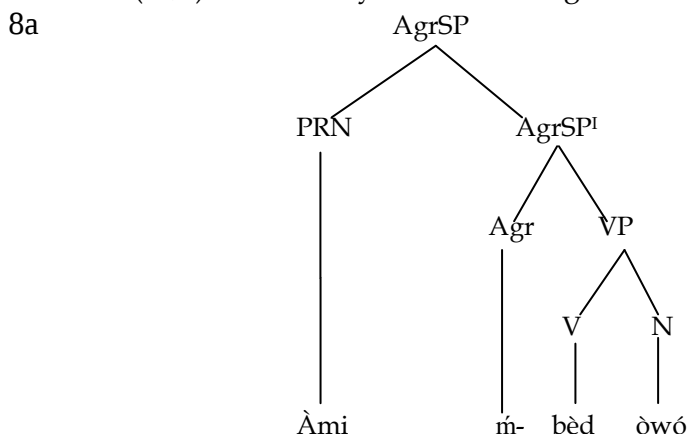
Agreement as Functional Head

There are different affixal elements that precede verbs to agree in person and number with the subject at SPEC-I^l position in Ibibio. There are 1st, 2nd and 3rd person subjective pronouns in Ibibio. Just like in other languages, the subject is checked by the appropriate AGR features for a

merger. This agreement is marked by some prefixes which indicate person and number. These prefixes (to adopt traditional terms) are called concord or personal markers (Essien, 1990:75), and are *m̃-* indicating first person and prefixed before a verb; *í* indicating the first person plural; *è-* and *é-* indicating both the second person plural and third person plural and *á* equally indicating the second person and third person singular. Contrary to English, the Ibibio language has a rich subject agreement system. The prefix *m̃-* agrees with the first person singular subject (*àmi*) while *á-* agrees with the second (*àfò*) and third person singular (*ènyé*) respectively. The plural subject verb is marked by *i-* for first person plural (*h̃nyìn*), *è-* and *é-* for second (*h̃dùfò*), and third person plural (*òmmò*) respectively. The sentences that follow (adapted from Essien, 1990:76) exemplify subject-verb relation in the Ibibio language.

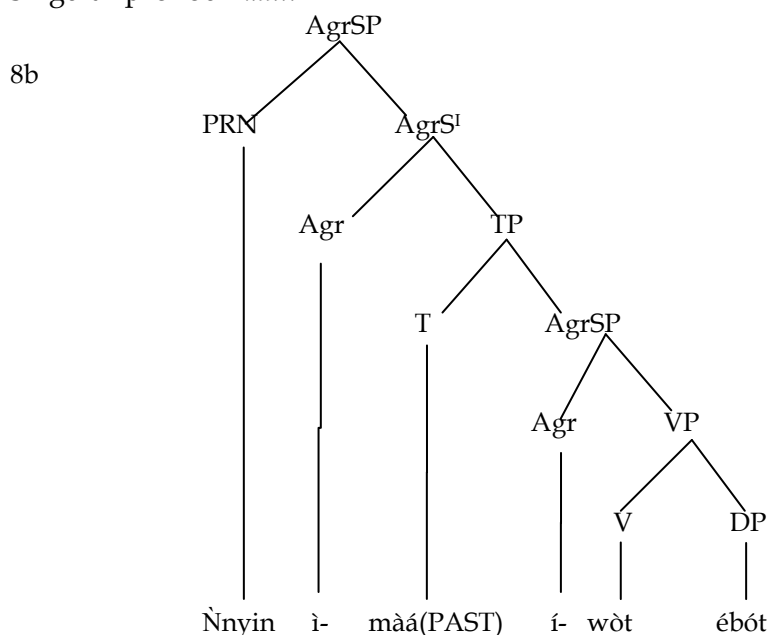
- 3a *Àmi m̃-bèd òwó*
 I 1sgS wait person
 ‘I am waiting for somebody’
- b *Ñyin ì-bèd òwó*
 We 1sgS wait somebody
 ‘We are waiting for somebody’

The sentences in (3a,b) can be analysed on tree diagrams in (8a,b)



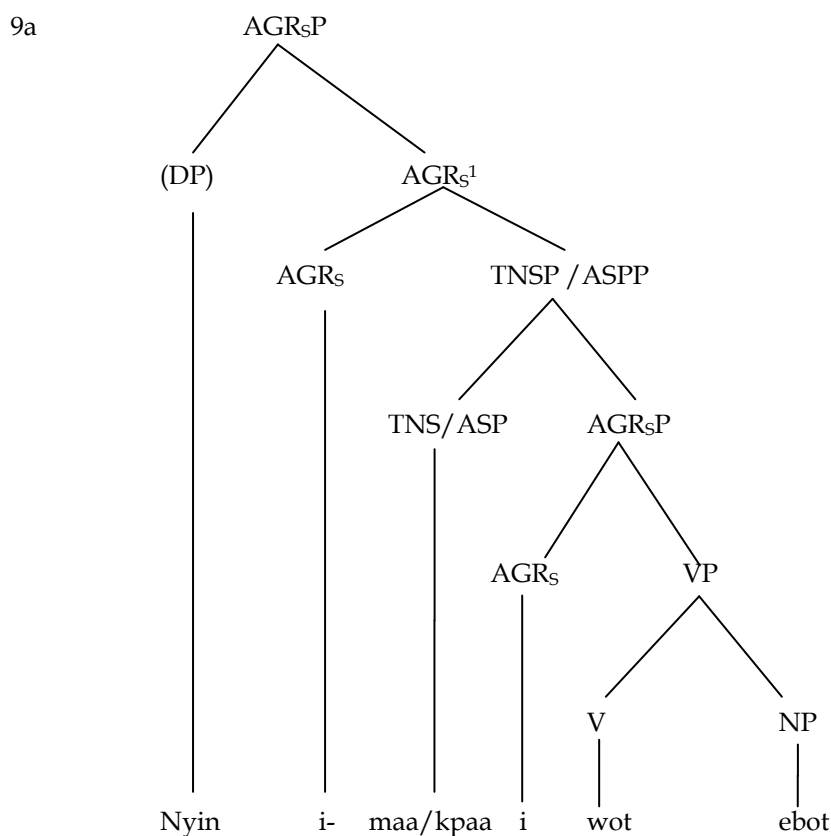
In (8a), there is agreement between the SPEC that is the subject pronoun *àmi* ‘I’ and the verb *bèd* ‘wait’. This agreement is evident in the presence of the prefix *m̃-* before the verb root *bèd*. Similarly, the pronominal *àmi* ‘I’ is marked for number and person because it refers to the person speaking at

a moment in a discourse context. It is first person singular pronoun. On the contrary, a sentence such as *Àmi à-bèd òwó will be ruled out because the concord marker à prefixed to the verb bèd does not agree with the first person singular pronoun àmi.



The tree in (8b) illustrates a situation whereby the concord marker ì- is prefixed on a verb, surprisingly, with the past tense marker, -màá. The sentence also shows that it is possible to mark subject agreement in Ibibio at two places in a sentence with only one verb. The sentence: *Nnyin ì-màá í-wòt ébót* 'we killed a goat' expresses an action in the past. This is marked by the prefix *màá*. The first concord marker ì (pronounced with a low tone) precedes the past tense marker *màá*, while the second concord marker í (pronounced with a high tone) precedes the verb *wòt*. Where the concord marker as illustrated in (8b) appears at two places, the first marker, for instance, ì- has the TP as a sister node, while the second concord marker has the VP *wòt ébót* 'kill the goat' as a sister node.

Having considered some functional projections in the Ibibio language, namely TNS, ASP and AGR, we propose the basic clause structure for Ibibio in (9) to capture categories which are overtly generated and which form the psycho-cognition of an Ibibio language speaker.



(9a) is a representation of the basic clause structure in the Ibibio language. Our major goal has been to model a clause structure, capturing an Ibibio native speaker psycho-cognitive system that “underlies the production and comprehension of sentences in the language” (Radford, Atkinson, Britain, Clahsen, and Spencer, 2002:406). It is evident in the diagram that the maximal projection is headed by AGR affix. This is motivated by the fact that Ibibio has a rich subject AGR system and the various verbal functional phrases (such as Aspect, Mood, Tense et cetera) are projections of the AGR phrase (Baker and Willie, 2010). Therefore, unlike English AgrP dominates TP. In (9) the DP position is in brackets because finite clauses in Ibibio with agreement features can be licensed as a maximal projection without an overt subject. “Functional heads do not agree with the subject directly; rather each agrees with the next highest functional head within the extended projection” (Baker and Willie, 2010). Our proposal of (9a) as a basic clause structure for the Ibibio language aligns with the general goal of UG. The phenomenon of multiple AGR in the Ibibio language affirms Chomsky’s “theory of Agree in which any

functional head can be the probe in an agreement relation, and any functional head can be the goal in such a relation" (Baker and Willie, 2010).

Summary and Conclusion

The present paper examined the trajectory of the inquiry into the internal structure of the basic clauses in human languages, and particular emphasis was placed on the grammatical aspects of Ibibio clause structure considered from the perspective of the English language. The paper took off from Chomsky's (1991, 1992) universal clause structure, Pollock's (1989) Split INFL hypothesis and Willie and Baker's study of Ibibio heads, to propose an articulated clause structure for the Ibibio language. Given the foregoing scholarship, (9a) is parameterized for Ibibio. The paper, in involving in the examination of this highlighted issues with the implications in the comparative language situations, sought to further enlighten speakers of and researchers into the internal dynamics of the highlighted aspects of the two languages.

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