An Analysis of the Verb Phrase (VP) of Basic Nigerian Pidgin Sentences

By

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Abstract

This study was carried out to illustratively analyse the verb phrase (VP) of Basic Nigerian Pidgin Sentence because studies have revealed that pidgin which may surpass the three major languages of Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) in terms of population of speakers is not recognized as a "language" because it is yet to be standardized. At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that the basis for accepting Nigerian Pidgin (and perhaps all pidgins) as a language should be in the facility of its usage by all. In order to achieve the aforementioned goal, both live pidgin utterances and written samples were randomly collected through the library and field research methods. For the analysis, basic Chomskyean phrase structure rules as propounded in 1957 and 1965 that analyse utterances in terms of their syntactic constituents were adopted as the theoretical framework. At the end of the exercise, findings revealed that though, Nigerian Pidgin has limited vocabulary drawn from the English language (lexifier/superstrate), it (Nigerian Pidgin) has a system

that can be described coherently just like the English language or any other language.

Key Words: Verb Phrase (VP), Nigerian Pidgin, sentences, Chomskyean phrase structure rule and lexifier

Introduction

One of the effects of the contact situation in some West African countries is the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin based on English and that is why it is sometimes called contact language which reflects the fact that the language emerged when social groups came into contact(s) or marginal language which reflects the reduced grammar and vocabulary of the Pidgin.

However, despite the fact that Pidgin is creolising in some states like Delta, Rivers, Edo, Bayelsa and a few others where it (Pidgin) is being used for broadcasting news over the Radio and Television and in public enlightenment programmes including entertainment, numerous advertisements and soap-opera in the entire country. Furthermore, pidgin as a language is officially stigmatized and not taught in most Nigerian schools partly

because of its labels such as bad English, improper English, broken English, rotten English etc.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that some scholars like Francis, Quirk, Arts and Arts, Radford, Omamoh and Elugbe have proved that today, Pidgin has a system that can be described coherently. They further state that the words of any language can be classified into categories of different types – nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections and determiners. Evidence at all levels of linguistic description – phonology, semantics, morphology, and syntax has been used to justify their claim, thereby debunking the negative opinion of some scholars that Pidgin is a debased form of the British Standard English (BSE) without grammatical rules.

According to Anagbogu et al, "anything that comes from the mouth of man which systematically conveys meaning, any system of utterance with which people interact in society, is a subject worthy of study" (21). Premised on the foregoing, this study analyses the verb phrase (VP) of Basic Nigerian Pidgin sentences. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, both live Pidgin

utterances and written samples were randomly collected through library and field methods and grouped along the following:

a) Simple sentences

b) Complex sentences

c) Compound sentences

For the analysis, Chomskyean phrase structure rule was adopted as the theoretical framework. The rewrite rule which was used to show the internal structure of each of these sentence constituents is presented as follows:

$$S \longrightarrow NP \quad + \quad AUX \quad + \quad VP$$

Data Presentation

From the data collected through library and field research methods premised on live speech samples and recordings of conversations, jingles, radio and television advertisements, the most representative material used in the analysis are presented as follows:

Simple Sentence

A simple sentence has only one main clause and one finite or lexical verb.

a) Dis na una bank.

(This is your bank)

b) I go marry him sister

(I will marry his/her sister)

c) I don go see am.

(I have gone to see him/her/it)

Complex Sentences

A complex sentence has one independent and one or more dependent clauses. In the T.G. model of grammar, both *clause* and *sentence* have equal syntactic status as "S" (sentence). Normally a dependent clause has a subordinator preceding it e.g. *when*, *which*, *because* etc.

a) I go put oil after him don hot small.

(I will add oil when it is hot a little)

b) You go go heven if you follow Jesus.

(You will go to heaven if you follow/accept Jesus)

c) Price go up because transport add money.

(Price hiked because transport fare increased)

Compound Sentence

This is the combination of two or more simple sentences of equal importance using any of the coordinating conjunctions: or, and, but, etc. However, a semi colon can also be used in place of these conjunctions.

    a) Monkey de work and baboon de chop.

        (The monkey works and the baboon eats/enjoys)

    b) We get oil but we de suffer.

        (We have oil wealth yet we are suffering)

    c) Jesus, you don win; Satan, you don lose.

        (Jesus, you have won; Satan, you have lost)

Analysis of Data

The Verb Phrase (VP)

The VP is a phrase whose head is a verb plus its complements. In order to reflect English sentence possibilities, T. G. Phrase Structure rewrites the verb phrase (VP) as: VP   Vb   + (NP) the VP rewrite rule means that a verb phrase consists of a main verb (MV) plus a noun phrase which is optional.

VP Analysis of Simple Pidgin Sentences

Sentence 1

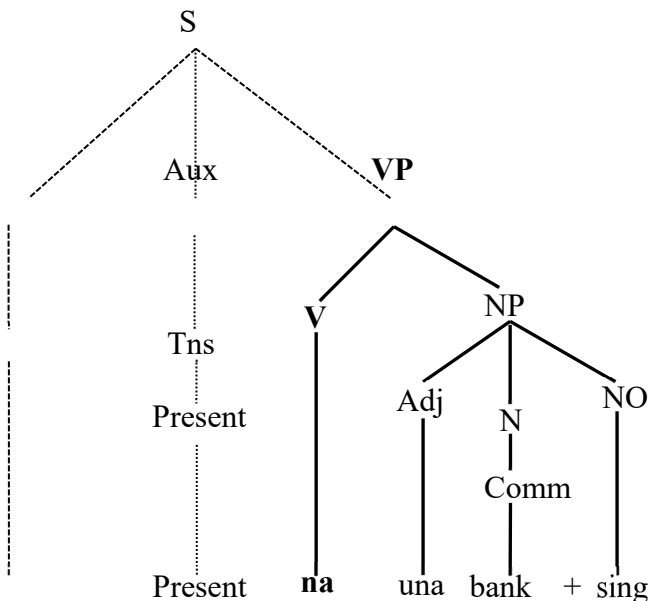Dis na una bank

(This is your bank)

Phrase Marker

VP Analysis of Simple Pidgin Sentences

Sentence A

Dis na una bank.
(This is your bank)

Phrase Marker

PS Rule

S $\longrightarrow$ NP   +   AUX +   VP

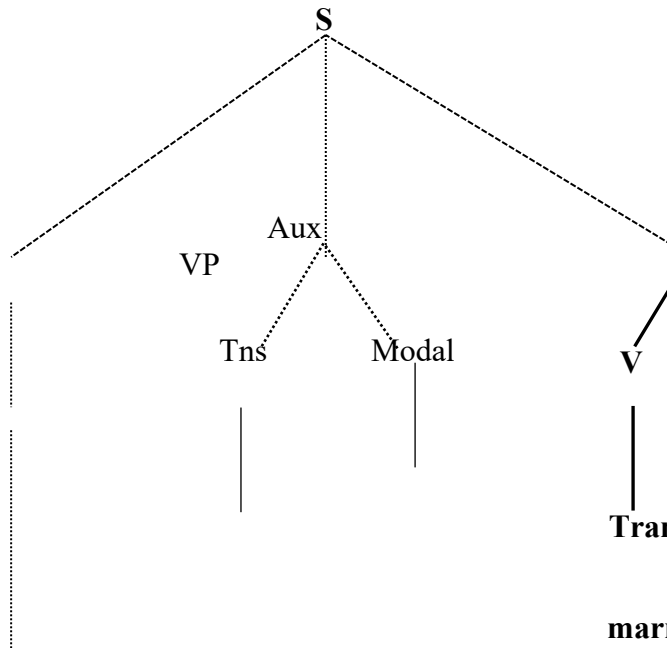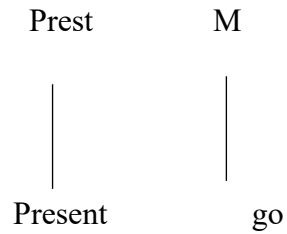AUX $\longrightarrow$ Tns

Tn $\longrightarrow$ Present

LEXICON:

Be $\longrightarrow$ Verb

Sentence B

I go marry im sister.
(I will marry his/her sister.)

Phrase Marker

S

Aux

VP

Tns   Modal

V

Tran

mar

Prest   M

| |

Present   go

PS Rule
S $\longrightarrow$ NP   +   AUX +   VP
VP $\longrightarrow$ Vb + NP
Vb $\longrightarrow$ Trans.

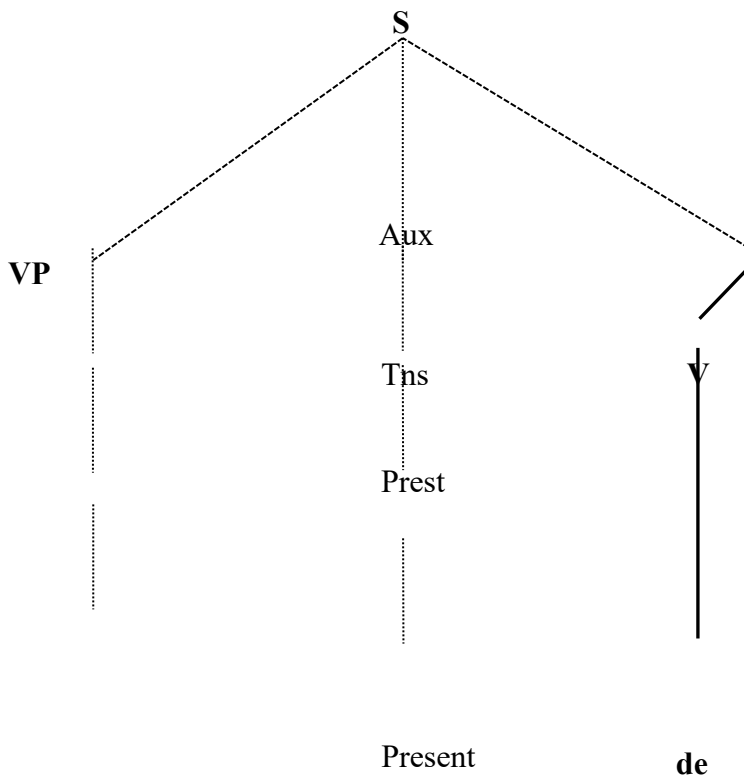**LEXICON:**
Lexical Verb $\longrightarrow$ marry

Sentence C

I de kampe
(I am alright/healthy/O.K./fit, etc.)

Phrase Marker

S

VP

Aux

Tns

Prest

V

Present

de

PS Rule

S ⟶ NP   +   AUX   +   VP
VP   ⟶ Vb + Compl.
V   ⟶ Intr.
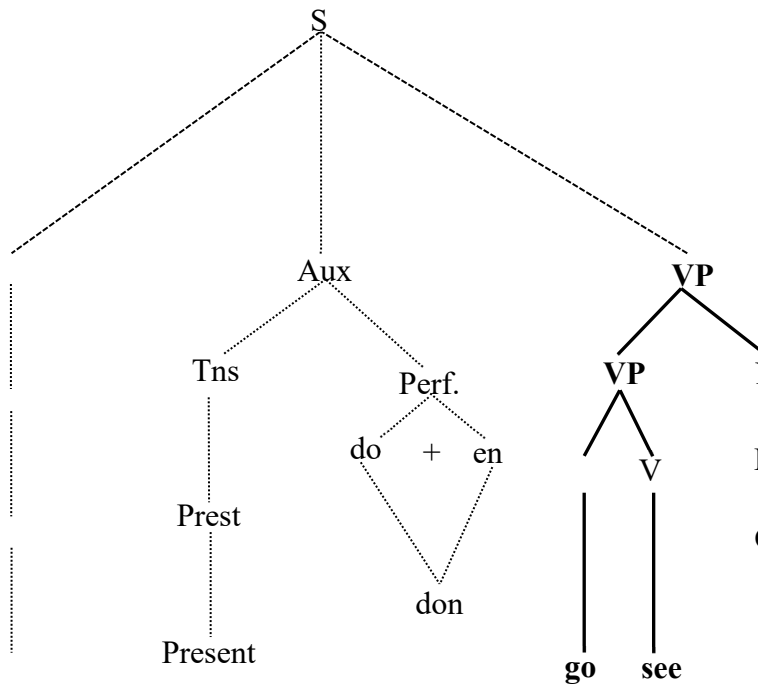Compl ⟶Adv.

LEXICON:
be $\longrightarrow$ de (am)

Sentence D

I don go see am
(I have gone to see him/her/it.)

Phrase Marker

PS Rule

S $\longrightarrow$ NP + AUX + VP

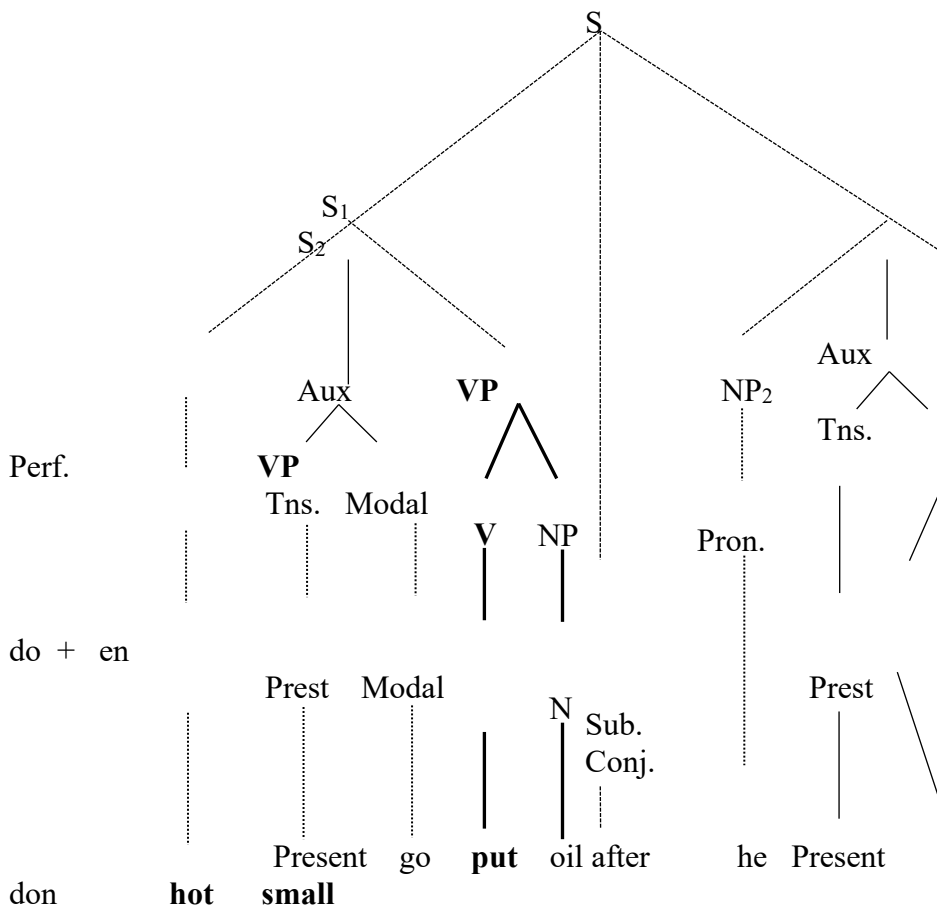VP $\longrightarrow$ Vb + NP

V $\longrightarrow$ Trans

LEXICON:

Trans verb $\longrightarrow$ see

VP Analysis of Complex Pidgin Sentences
Sentence 5

> I go put oil after he don hot small
> (I will add oil when it is hot a little)

PS Rule

S $\longrightarrow$ NP   +   AUX +   VP

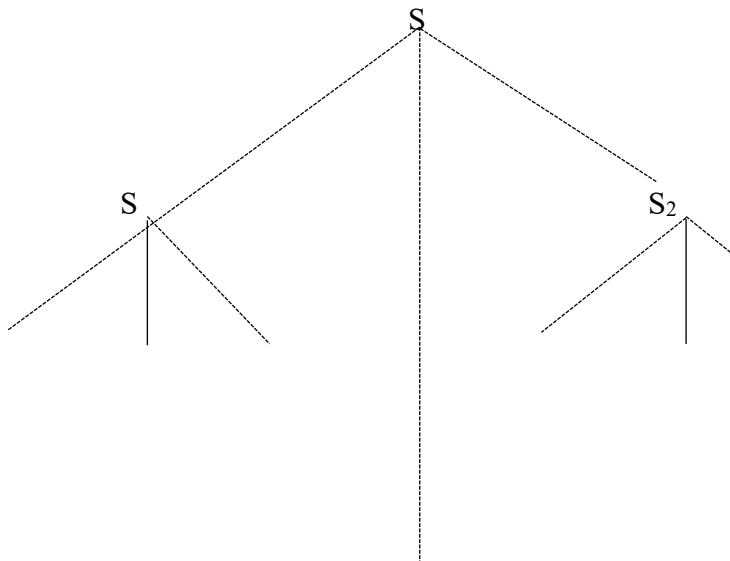VP $\longrightarrow$ V + (NP)

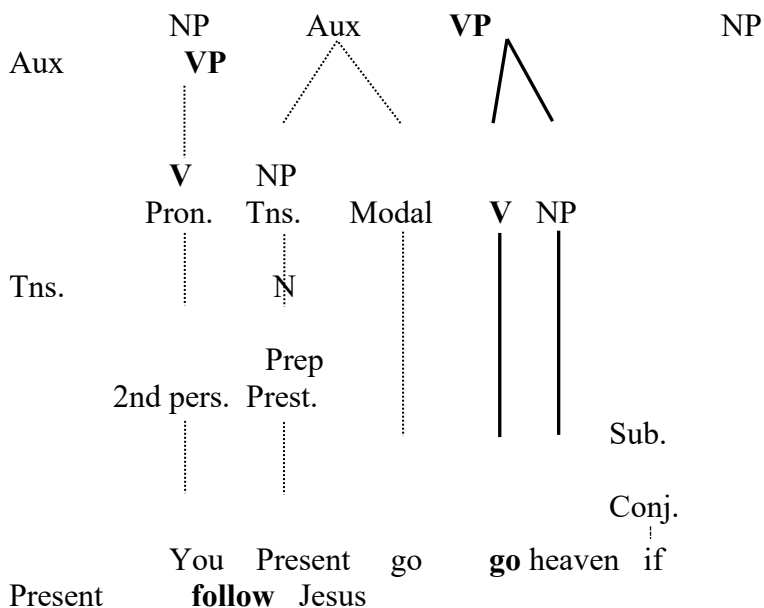V $\longrightarrow$ Transitive

LEXICON:
Trans $\longrightarrow$ put (add)

Sentence 6

You go go heven if you follow Jesus
(You will go to heaven if you accept/follow Jesus)

Phrase Structure Marker

```
                NP        Aux       VP                        NP
Aux             VP
                                    /\
                V     NP
          Pron.   Tns.    Modal   V  NP

Tns.                  N

                      Prep
           2nd pers. Prest.
                                              Sub.

                                              Conj.

          You   Present   go     go heaven  if
Present          follow  Jesus
```

PS Rule

S ⟶ NP   +   AUX   +   VP

V   ⟶ V + (NP)

V   ⟶ Trans.

LEXICON:
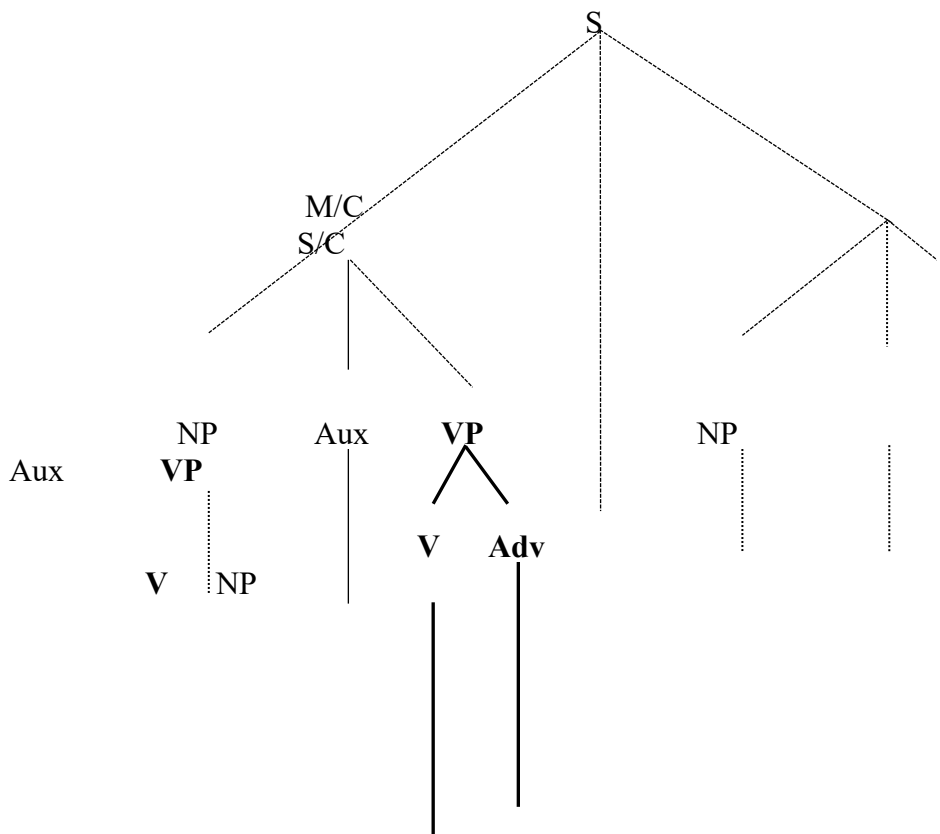verb: go, follow

Sentence 7

Price go up because transport add money.
(Price went up because transport is costly)

Phrase Structure Marker

N   N

Prest

    Prest   Sub.
                          Conj
          N

Price   Present **go** **up** because transport
Present **add** money

PS Rule

S ⟶ NP   +   AUX +   VP
VP   ⟶ V + (Adv) + NP
V   ⟶ { Trans
          Intrans }
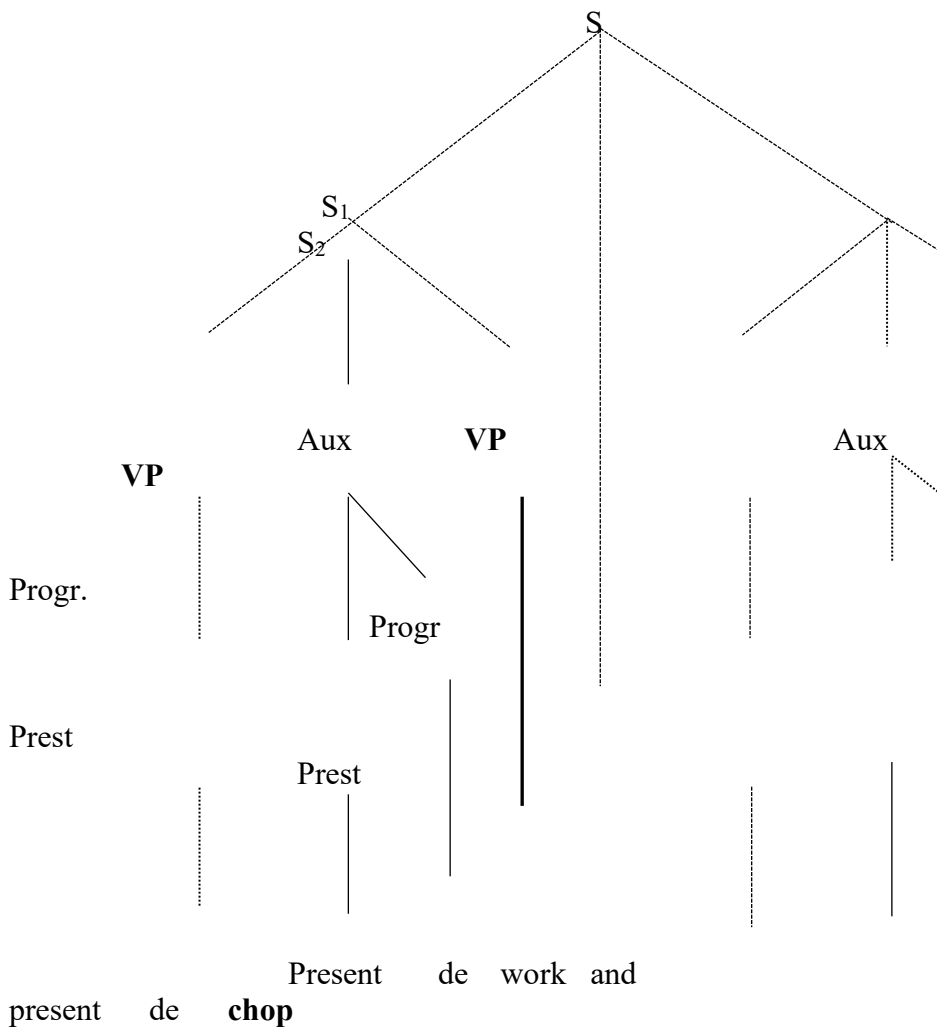
Lexicon:
Verb: add, go
Adv. – up

VP Analysis of Compound Pidgin Sentences

Sentence 8

Monkey de work baboon de chop.
(The monkey works and the baboon eats/enjoys the salary)

Phrase Structure Marker

PS Rule

S $\longrightarrow$ NP   +   AUX +   VP
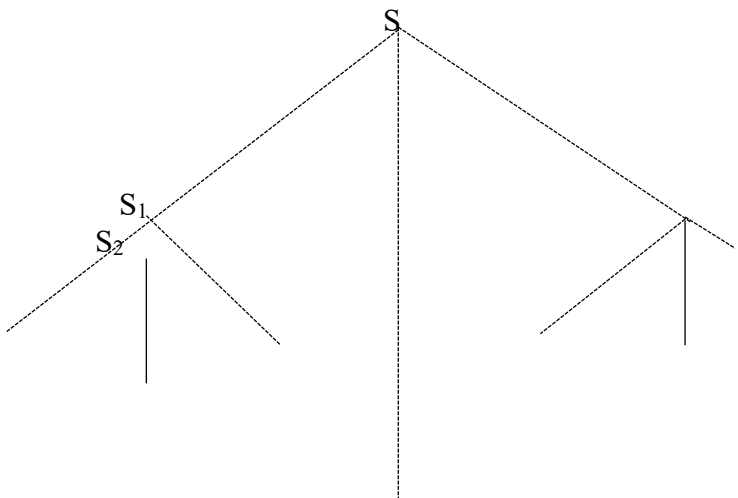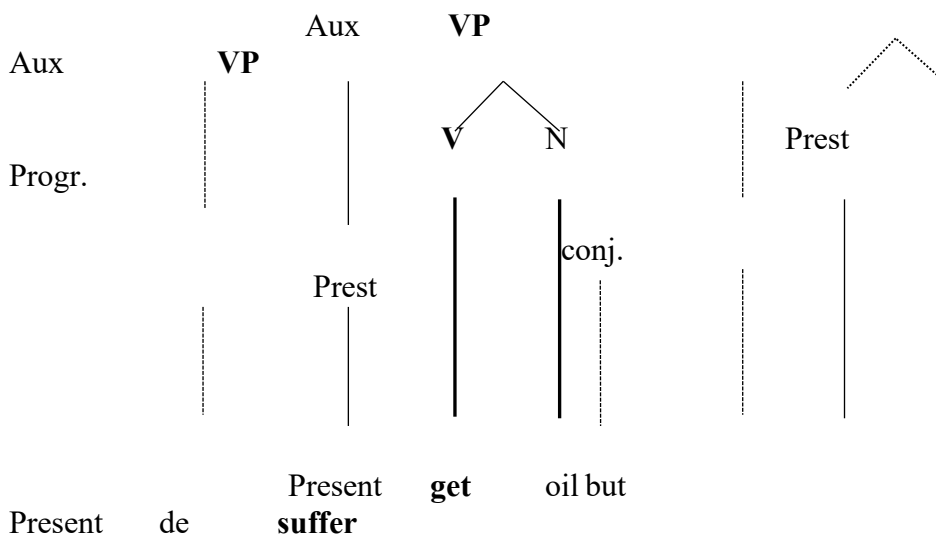VP $\longrightarrow$ VP
V $\longrightarrow$ Intransitive

Lexicon:

Verb: work, chop

Sentence 9

> We get oil but we de suffer.
> (We have oil wealth yet we are suffering)

Phrase Structure Marker

Aux   **VP**   Aux   **VP**

Aux   **VP**   V   N   Prest

Progr.   conj.

                Prest

                Present   **get**   oil but

Present   de   **suffer**

PS Rule

S ⟶ NP   +   AUX +   VP

VP   ⟶ V + (N)

V ⟶ { Trans. / Intrans. }

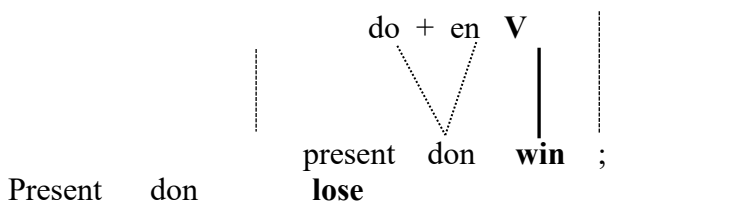**Lexicon:**

Verb: get, suffer

Sentence 10

Jesus, you don win; Satan, you don lose.
(Jesus, you have won; Satan, you have lost)

Phrase Structure Marker

S

S₁

S₂

VP

Aux

VP

Aux

Perf

Tns.

do + en

Tns. Perf

Conj

V

(;)

do + en **V**

present   don   **win**   ;

Present   don   **lose**
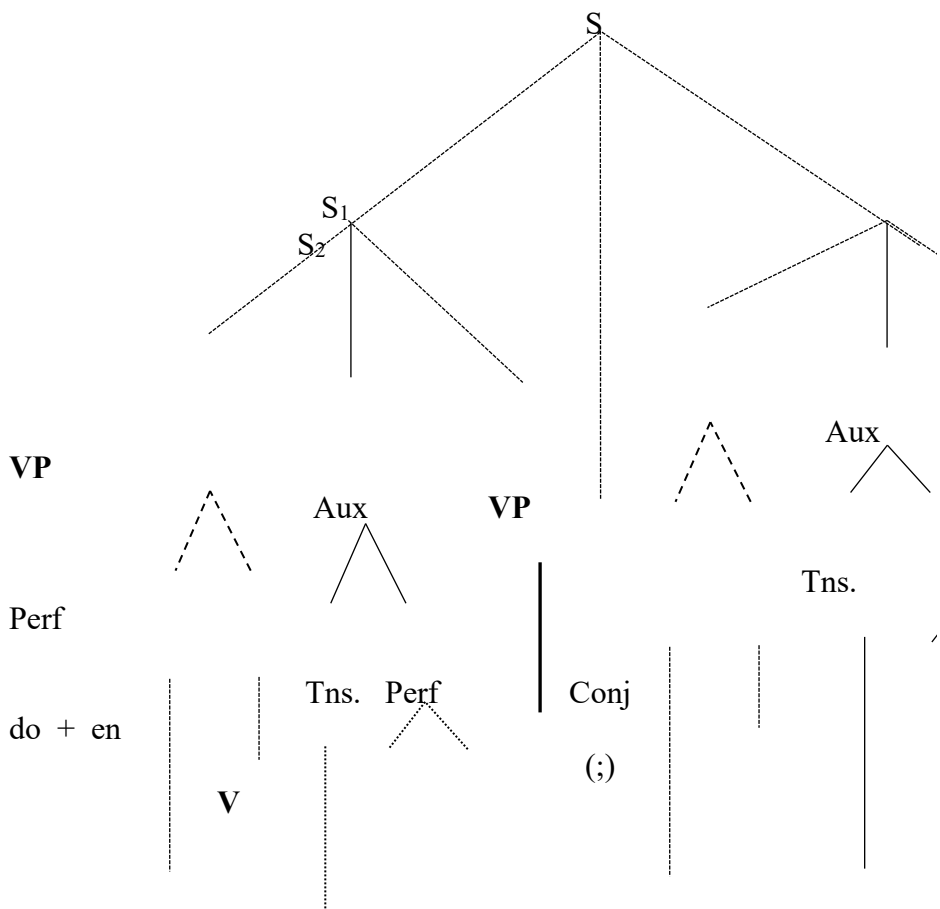
PS Rule
S $\longrightarrow$ NP   +   AUX +   VP
VP $\longrightarrow$ V
V $\longrightarrow$ Intransitive

LEXICON:
Verb: win, lose

Conclusion

A careful study and analysis of the data in this research revealed that Nigerian Pidgin has limited vocabulary drawn from the English language (lexifier/superstrate), it (Nigerian Pidgin) has a system that can be described coherently just like the English language or any other language.

The analysis also revealed that Nigerian Pidgin is characterized by reduced syntax, multifunctionality (one

word to many syntactic uses) and polysemy (one word to many meanings). For example, the AUX and the VP in the sentence

> "I don go see am"

> (I have gone to see him/her/it)

There are lexical and morphological differences stemming from borrowings from indigenous languages as in "don go"… "am", the primary auxiliary "do" is used for the perfective instead of "have", and "am" as the object of NP serve as a cover term for either him, her, or it.

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