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Grammatical Units Occupying The Subject Slot In MO/DJG

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Abstract

The task of this study is primarily to investigate the grammatical units which occupy the subject position in the Mo/Djg language. Thus, the study finds answers to the question: "What are the grammatical elements which occupy the subject slot in Mo/Djg?" The study used micro-ethnographic design since its concern is to identify and concentrate on a specific aspect of the Mo/Djg language – the subject as a clause element. Using homogeneous sampling, the study purposefully sampled thirty (30) educated Mos/Djga (speakers of the Mo/Djg language). Short simple English sentences containing Grammatical units occupying the subject position designed by the researcher were given to them to translate into Mo/Djg. This was to see which grammatical units could or not occupy the subject slot in the Mo/Djg language. Also, some of these sentences were given to some members of the staff of the Mo/Djg project of GILLBT to translate into English. This was to ensure further correctness of the units in subject position since they are professionals working in the Mo/Djg language. The translated versions were then collected as data and analysed, taking cognisance of the units occupying the subject slot in English. The results showed that just like in English, nouns, pronouns, numerals, and clauses occupy the subject position in Mo/Deg. It was then concluded that the linguistic or grammatical units realising the subject are similar to those in English.

Key words: Mo/Djg, Subject, Clause, Elements, Grammatical or linguistic units

1. Introduction

The Mo/Djg language is one of the minority languages in Ghana and less known in academia. It is a member of the Gur language family and spoken in some parts of Northern Ghana in Bamboi, Jama, Kapenta, Jugboi, Tasilima, among others in the Bole District. It is also spoken in the Brong-Ahafo Region in Busuama, Kandige, Manchala, Longoro, Yaara, Tarbang, Mantukwa, in the Kintampo North District. Yet, it is spoken in places such as Adadiem, Dokachina and Bonakire in the Jaman North District of the Brong-Ahafo region and also in places like Dwoboi, Wireke, and Zagala in La Cote d'Ivoire. The indigenous speakers of the language are called Djga but the language is Djg which means "grow" or "multiply". The language has a number of dialects and the one chosen for this study is the Longoro dialect because it is the most aboriginal of all the other dialects.

The language does not have an existing written grammar, although the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) is making the effort to write some basic grammar in the language. Therefore, to undertake any syntactic studies in such a language, it is only proper to compare it with one that has a well established morph-syntax.

The study addresses the problem of the lack of useful syntactic literature on the clause elements in Mo/Djg, particularly the linguistic or grammatical units realising the subject. It, thus, studies the subject as a clause element and specifically discusses the linguistic items that can occupy the subject slot in Mo/Djg, taking cognisance of the same linguistic items occupying the subject position in English.

The importance of this study cannot be over emphasized as its findings would be useful to the GILLBT in their The effort to write the basic grammar of the Mo/Djg. The finding would equally be important to linguists and students who are interested in the syntax of the Mo/Djg language.

1.1. The Elements Of A Clause

A clause is seen as a "...group of words that has the presence of a verb... and a subject..." Quagie (2010). This means that a clause should have a subject and a verb as the key components in order to be appropriately described so. The verb and the subject have a syntactic structure. The verb together with its complements is called the predicate, and it is for this that Sekyi-Baidoo (2000:457) explains the clause as "...a group of words containing a subject and predicate – each of which can be expressed or implied." This consideration of the clause by Sekyi-Baidoo also includes elliptical sentences in which either the subject or the predicate is left out but the sentence is still analysable as a clause. Although Wiredu (1999: 30 – 31) acknowledges that the presence of the subject and the predicate (verb) is necessary and important in identifying the clause, he is of a very strong view that the presence of the verb is more important in determining a clause. He thus says:

... any time we call a group of words a clause, it means that there is a verb in its structure. This implies that a sequence of words will be a clause if there is a verb in the sequence. Thus, there will be no clause if one cannot identify the verb.

It is important to state that every clause is made up of phrases and that every phrase performs a specific role in a clause. These roles which the phrases perform in a clause are called elements of a clause, Wiredu (1999: 91 – 92). These roles are: the subject (S), the verb (V), the object (O), the complement (C), and the adjunct (A). For instance we can analyse the clauses in Mo/Djg below into their respective elements as follows:

- (a) Hammond (S) di(V) kondikwa la (O)
- Hammond eat-PAST food ART
 - Hammond ate food the
 - Hammond ate the food
- (b) Ya (S) le (V) Atta Mills (O) yanomoa (C)
- 1PL elect-PAST Atta Mills 1PL POSS leader
 - We elected Atta Mills our leader
- (c) Bie la (S) chc dom (V) kjrjdj (A)
- Child DET lay-PAST sleep well
 - Child the laid sleep well
 - The child slept well

This study looks exclusively at the S and the units or linguistic items which function in the subject (S) position within the Mo/Djg clause.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study uses the ethnographic research design. This is because it allows the researcher to select certain aspects of language to study. Creswell (2008) states that the ethnographic design allows the researcher to describe, analyse, and interpret „a culture-sharing group.s shared patterns of behavior ... and language.. But of the several types of ethnographic designs, the researcher used the micro-ethnographic design because it allows one to focus „on a specific aspect of a cultural group.... say language and allows for the selection of a specific aspect of the language to study, thus, in this case the linguistic elements that occupy the subject position.

2.2. Sampling And Population

The homogeneous sampling method of investigation was applied in this study because the researcher was interested in the linguistic elements which occupy the subject slot. Therefore, the population was purposefully sampled, making sure that the people selected could demonstrate through speech and written forms how these linguistic elements could occupy the subject slot. Therefore, thirty (30) people who could read and write fluently in both English and Mo/Djg were selected. Of the thirty people, twenty (20) were selected from four indigenous towns namely Busuama, Longoro, Mantukwa and Manchala. Of these twenty (20), five people were selected from each town. This was to cover a large area of where indigenous Mo/Djg is spoken and also to have possible variations but acceptable presentations of the grammatical or linguistic units in the subject position. Again, ten (10) people were selected from among the staff of Mo/Djg project of GILLBT. This was to ensure that more accurate presentation of the grammatical or linguistic units occupying the subject slot was obtained since they are professionals working to develop the language. Short English sentences containing the linguistic elements in the subject position were given to them to translate into Mo/Djg. The translated versions were then analysed.

3. Abbreviations Used

For the purpose of this study, the following abbreviations have been used:

- A = adjunct
- ADJ = adjective
- ART = article
- AUX = auxiliary
- BE = the BE form of the verb (is, am, are, was, etc)
- C = complement
- DET = determiner
- DEM = demonstrative pronoun
- INTP = interrogative pronoun
- NEG = negation
- O = object
- PAST = past
- PL = plural
- PREPART = present participle
- PRO = progressive

POSS = possessive
 2PL = second person plural
 3PL = third person plural
 1PL = first person plural
 3PSPOSS = third person singular possessive
 3PS = third person singular
 3PLOBJ = third person plural in objective case
 S = subject
 V = verb

4. The Subject As A Clause Element In Mo/Djg

The subject according to Wiredu (1999:93) and Sekyi-Baidoo (2000:455) is the element which represents the actor, performer or the doer in a clause. This means the subject is that portion of a clause which executes the action expressed by the verb. It, thus, answers the question, „who?. or „what?. Taylor (2004), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) and Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) intimate that the subject is typically a noun phrase which occurs before the verb in simple statements and after the „operator in yes-no interrogative. sentences and determines the number and person of the verb. Similarly in Mo/Djg the subject is a noun, a pronoun, or a nominal group which performs the action denoted by the verb. The subject normally occurs first before the verb in simple declaratives in Mo/Djg. For example, in the sentence:

Tolo nc j njn djje
 Girl DET is person ADJ
 Girl this is person good
 This girl is a good person

the subject is “Tolo nc” which comes first before the verb “j”. The subject then is that which answers the Mo/Djg question “Ome?” (who?) or “bckwa?” (what?). If the Mo/Djg question:

“Ome dj lcc obie?”

Who is beat-PRO 3PSPOSS child?
 Who is beating her child?

were to be asked from the Mo/Djg statement:

Haah la dj lcc o bie
 Woman DET is beat-PRO 3PSPOSS child
 Woman the is beating her child
 The woman is beating her child
 the answer will be “Haah la” (the woman).

In yes-no questions, the subject comes first before the verbal element as in:

Bechala dj chc kjj?
 Bechala is sleep-PRO or?
 Bechala is sleeping or?
 Is Bechala sleeping?

Therefore, in the following questions:

O j paa kjj?
 3PS is farmer or?
 He is farmer or?
 Is he a farmer?
 Nyoate la j wono woraa?
 Dog DET is can bark?
 Dog the is can bark?
 Can the dog bark?

the subjects are “O” (He) and “Nyoate” respectively.

5. Units Realising The Subject In Mo/Djg

It appears from the information above that only nouns can occupy the subject position in the Mo/Djg language. It is Therefore appropriate to examine what linguistic unit can occur in the subject slot in Mo/Djg. The linguistic items that can occur in the subject slot in Mo/Djg according to Anto (2011:81) are the noun, the pronoun, and the numerals. Besides these, Wiredu (1999:94) discusses the clause as another unit which can take the subject position.

5.1. The Noun As Subject

The noun according to Annan (2000:95,192) is the most common unit which occupies the subject slot in English. Similarly, in the Mo/Djg language it is the commonest unit that takes the subject position. Nouns, according to Thakur (1998: 18) and Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:70) can be classified into proper and common. The proper nouns in Mo/Djg are names like Kofi, Bechala, Busuama, Kintampo, Afrika (Africa), etc., and they can occupy the subject slot. Example:

- (a) Njnsom dj kure tcn sukuu ta.
- Njnsom AUX read book school PREP
 - Njnsom is read book school-in
 - Njnsom is reading a book in school.

- (b) Akraa j Ghana bwj-jen.
- Accra is Ghana-GEN town-ADJ
 - Accra is Ghana.s town big
 - Accra is Ghana.s biggest/capital town

The common nouns can be classified into count and non-count nouns. The count nouns in Mo/Djg include: tcn (a book) njn (a person), boncc (a boy), ne (water) and all other nouns that can form plurals. The non-count nouns include: Sugaswjn (gold), bwaala (rain), deera (dream), pjo (wind), and all other nouns which do not have plural forms. Either of these classes of the common noun can occur as a subject in Mo/Djg. Example:

- (c) Dem la lc kpcgbini.
- House DefART is bush-PREP
 - House the is bush-in
 - The house is in the bush

- (d) Pjokpeg la kuugedaa la.
- Wind-ADJ DET break-PAST tree DET
 - Wind strong the broke tree the
 - The strong wind broke the tree

In the above sentences Dem and Pjo are count and non-count nouns respectively. The plural form of Dem is demre (houses) but pjo is always singular.

5.2. The Pronoun As Subject

Like English, Mo/Djg pronouns usually occupy the subject slot. The classes of pronoun in Mo/Djg are: Personal pronoun: N (I), He (you), O (he/she/it), Ya (we), and Ba (they). These are used in the subjective case as in the following examples:

- (a) N dc deene
- 1PS have house-PL
 - I have houses
- (b) Yadjkaadem
- 1PL are go-PRO house
 - We are going house
 - We are going to the house

5.2.1. Possessive Pronoun

The personal pronouns in the Mo/Djg language are:

N kon (mine), He kon (yours), O kon (his/hers/its), Yakon (ours), and Ba kon (theirs). These possessives have their plural forms as: Nkwa (“mines”/my “owns”), He kwa (yours/your “owns”), O kwa (his/her/its “owns”), Yakwa (ours/ “our owns”) and Ba kwa (theirs). These are used in the subjective sense as in the following sentences:

- (a) Yakon la kan
- 1PL own DET big
 - We own the big
 - Ours is big
- (b) Ba kon j anj
- 3PL own is two
 - They own is two
 - Theirs is two

5.2.2. Reflexive Pronoun

The reflexive pronouns in the language are: Nte (myself), Hete (yourself), Ote (himself/herself/itself), Yate (ourselves), Bate (themselves), and Hete (yourselves). Interestingly, unlike English pronouns, these are used in the subjective case as in the following sentences:

- (a) Yate tooleabini
- Ourselves are-NEG inside
 - Ourselves are not inside
 - We are not involved
- (b) Bate kaalc
- Themselves have go-PREPART
 - Themselves have gone
 - They have gone

5.2.3.Relative Pronoun

The relative pronouns in Mo/Djg are: waa, haa, baa, yaa, and maa, all of which mean who and will normally have human nouns as antecedents. However, waa can have both human and non-human nouns as antecedents. aa is yet another relative pronoun which means which and always has a non-human noun such as: pen, book, house, tree, farm, etc as antecedent. waa is indicative of the third person singular, haa both the second person singular and plural, baa the third person plural, yaa and maa indicative of the first person plural and singular respectively. aa is always indicative of the third person non-human plural. In the Mo/Djg language all of these relatives can occupy the subject slot normally in negative declaratives. Below are examples of how some of them are used:

- (a) Waa nagra nyin.
- 3PS-NEG quarrel like
 - He/She/It-not quarrel like
 - He/She/It doesn't like quarrelling.
- (b) Baa nee nyc.
- 3PL-NEG water drink
 - They-not water drink
 - They don't drink water
- (c) Maa gj dc.
- 1PS-NEG that get
 - I-not that get
 - I don't get that

5.2.4.Demonstrative Pronouns

There are four demonstrative pronouns which can be used in the subjective case. These are: onc which means this, and which means these, gj which means that and anal which means those. Examples of their use are seen below:

- (a) Onc j yakon
- This BE ours
 - This is ours
- (b) Anc ba bonc ka
- These come-PAST here before
 - These came here before.
- (c) Gjmagrc
- That-BE good
 - That is good.
- (d) Anla j yakwa
- Those BE ours
 - Those are ours

5.2.5.Interrogative Pronouns

There are four such pronouns in Mo/Djg. They are: ome (who), bckwa (what), bjwee (when), and lepera (where).ome is always used to refer to human nouns; while bckwa, bjwee and lepera are used to refer to non-human nouns, time, and place respectively. They are used in interrogative sentences only. For instance:

- (a) Ome yog jal nc?
- INTP sell-PAST fowl DEM?
 - Who sold fowl this?
 - Who sold this fowl?
- (b) Bckwa hjj nyin?
- INTP you-BE like?
 - What you are like?
 - What do you like?

5.3. The Clause As A Subject

The subject role is performed not only by nouns or pronouns but also the clause. As a matter of fact it is the dependent clause that performs this role as in the sentences below:

- (a) Waa Hammond aa bola la j kpela
- What Hammond say-PAST DET is true
 - What Hammond said the is true
 - What Hammond said is true
- (b) Laala chjga ta toma jj
- Cloth wash-PRO NEG work is
 - Cloth washing not work is
 - Washing clothes is not work

In the examples above, we observe that the dependent clauses: Waa Hammond aa bola la and Laala chjga are subjects of the verbs j and jj respectively. In the Mo/Djg language only two types of the dependent clause can perform the subject role. These are:

(a) the nominal clause: These are clauses that begin with waa or kj as in the following example:

- (i) waa aa chiga la chagle yaa sipila
- What AUX happen-PAST DET show-PAST 3PLOBJ eye open
 - What has happened the showed us eye open
 - What has happened showed us a lesson
- (ii) Kjya j dohna laa Korowii jj nyin
- That 3PL are richman-PL NEG God is like
 - That we are richmen not God is like
 - That we are richmen is not what God likes

The above examples show that under the nominal clause in Mo/Djg we can distinguish between the nominal that and the nominal interrogative clauses.

(b) the participial clause: these clauses usually begin with kwaa plus the verb or a noun plus the verb as exemplified in the following:

- (i) kwaakura dea nc bini wer
- things-read-PRO room DET inside good
 - things reading room this inside good
 - Reading in this room is good
- (ii) Kwaadi j tjjga tj kontaale bwa
- Things-eat-PRO is medicine for creature DET
 - Things eating is medicine for creature all
 - Eating is medicine for all creatures
- (iii) Tcnkura dea nc bini wer
- Bookread-PRO room DET inside good
 - Bookreading room this inside good
 - Reading in this room is good
- (iv) Kondikwa di j tjjga tj kontaale bwa
- Foodeat-PRO is medicine for creature DET
 - Foot eating is medicine for creature all
 - Eating/Eating food is medicine for all creatures

In the illustrations above, we notice that (i) and (ii) begin with kwaa plus the verbs kura and di respectively, while in (iii) and (iv) the nouns, tcn and kondikwa are followed by the verbs kura and di respectively.

5.4. The Numeral As A Subject

Apart from occurring as qualifiers, numerals can also occur as a subject or a headword in Mo/Djg. Example:

i. Anue wer ii. Munkaa som

five ADJ last ADJ

Five good Last sweet

Five is / are good The last is / are fortunate

In the examples above, anue and munkaa are numerals and they function as headwords

There are two types of numerals in Mo/Djg namely, cardinal numerals and ordinal numerals. Cardinal numerals include: anj (two), anaarj (four), anumjl (six), etc, and they can function as NG headwords as in the following:

a. Anaarj balc b. Anumjl kan

four come-PAST six ADJ

Four came six enough

Six is / are enough

The cardinals cannot occur with the modifying determiners and so it is wrong to have the following:

i. * Ome anue - whose five

ii. * Ya atoro – our three

However, the cardinals can freely occur with the adjectives as modifiers as in the following:

iii. Onjiga bjnkpc. iv. Andjjga anaarj

ADJ one ADJ four

Small one good four

The ordinal numerals include: Sitcc (first), munkaa (last), njjte (second), nuete (fifth), etc. They each can function as an NG headword. Example:

a. Sitcc nc na somb. Nuete la jega first DET see-PAST sweet fifth DET small

First saw sweet fifth the small

The first are / is happy the fifth is small

The ordinals in Mo/Djg can occur with the central determiners (the central determiners in Mo/Djg are the possessives, the interrogatives, and the genitives), as modifiers as in the following:

i. Ya nuete nc ii. Kofi naarjte la

1PL fifth DET kofi-GEN fourth DET

Our fifth this Kofi.s fourth the

This fifth of ours / our fifth kofi.s fourth

iii. Ome fite nc?

INTER tenth DET

Whose tenth this?

Whose tenth round is this?

In the examples above, we notice that the ordinals, nuete, naarjte, and fite in (i), (ii), and (iii) respectively have

„Ya., „Kofi., and „ome. as modifying determiners respectively. However, unlike the cardinals, the ordinals cannot occur with the adjectives. It is therefore; wrong to have the following as an acceptable structure in Mo/Djg:

* Onjiga njjte

ADJ second

Small second

The second small

*Onba. numjlte

ADJ fifth

Big fifth

The big fifth

The syntactic difference between the cardinals and the ordinals is that, whereas the cardinals cannot occur with those central determiners, the ordinals can. Again, whereas the cardinals can freely occur with adjectives as modifiers, the ordinals cannot.

6. Findings And Conclusion

The linguistic or grammatical units that can occur in the subject position in Mo/Djg are: the noun, the pronoun, the numeral and the clause. It is therefore worthy of conclusion that these units realising the subject slot in Mo/Deg are similar to those of English. The Mo/Deg language, therefore, has a headword unit similar to that of English.

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