RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Auxiliary in Spoken Nigerian English

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ABSTRACT

This paper on the use of interrogative clauses in spoken Nigerian English examines the ungrammaticality in the spoken output of Nigerian L2 users of English in auxiliary - main verb relationship in three different areas of sentence constructions. These are interrogative clauses with head-to-head movement and wh-movement all of which undergo the syntactic process of subject-auxiliary inversion as well as negative and declarative sentences. Data from spoken discourse were gathered, analysed and evaluated with insights from Transformational Generative Grammar. Contained in the data are sentences which undergo inversion and those which do not. From the findings, the dominant feature observed in all the sentences in the data is the inflection of the main verb along with the auxiliary verb whereas in a verbal sequence which contain modal/dummy *do* auxiliary, it is the auxiliary which carries agreement and tense features while the main verb does not. The findings also indicate ignorance of the grammatical rule on the tense of the main verb in a sequence of verbal elements. The paper concludes that the aspect of ungrammaticality identified involves inflection and inflection is an area of difficulty to Nigerian English bilinguals.

Keywords: Auxiliary, Inversion, Movement, Interrogative Clause

1.0   Introduction

Language use involves appropriate linguistic behaviour in the areas of sounds, words, sentence construction, vocabulary and communication of meaning. Because of the vast nature of human language, sometimes, the selection and combination of language items result in inappropriate usage, especially in nonnative linguistic contexts such as Nigeria. New English patterns have emerged in the English spoken and written by nonnatives. Due to interconnection between education and competence and performances, one would expect that the level of performance in English among educated elite in the country will approximate that of standard British variety of English and contain less inappropriate features, especially in grammar, but this is not always the case as the discussion of the topic under investigation reveals.

Walsh (1961) cited in Ogu (1992) observed that there were emerging peculiarities in the use of English among the educated elite in Lagos State, Nigeria, especially among those who returned from England. The emerging peculiarities of those days have not abated as they still manifest in different forms among Nigerian L2 (second language) users of English. This paper investigates the use of auxiliary verbs by Nigerian speakers of English.

2.0   Internal Structure of Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are helping verbs in that they help main verbs to express tense, aspect, mood, voice, negation, ellipsis, etc. and several

syntactic operations in English depend on the auxiliary (Ndimele, 1999, Fromkin, Rodman, Hyams & Hummel, 2006, Aarts, 2008, Radford, 2004). Two types of auxiliaries are identified in linguistic literature – primary auxiliary verbs and modal auxiliary verbs. Aarts (2008) sub-classifies auxiliary verbs into modal auxiliaries, aspectual auxiliaries, the passive auxiliary *be* and dummy auxiliary *do*. He explains that modal auxiliaries are always finite by having tense feature but do not inflect by taking inflectional affixes like *–s* present tense and *-ed* past tense endings even though they have past tense form as in can/could, may/might, shall/should, will/would except must. This information is relevant to this investigation.

Aarts further states that aspectual auxiliaries express aspect – progressive and perfective as well as show how the main verb is perceived in relation to the time of the event or state of affairs. He also adds that passive auxiliary *be* involves movement of structures and insertion of the verb *be* which results in the construction of passive structures. The fourth sub-type, according to the source, is the dummy auxiliary *do* which occurs in negative constructions and the formation of interrogative sentences from declarative sentences. Of all the auxiliary sub-classes identified, it is only the passive auxiliary *be* which is not critical to this discussion.

3.0 Interrogative Sentences

There are different types of interrogative sentences in English, some of which are wh-questions, rhetorical questions, polar questions, etc. (Stephens, 2014). Wh-questions and polar questions are derived through movement of lexical items from one position to another. It may be Verb movement, NP-movement, Wh-movement and movement in interrogative sentences (Radford, 2004). Movements are constrained since grammatical rules are constrained as the following examples show:

1(a)   Victor *will graduate* this year.
(b)   *Will* Victor *graduate* this year?
2(a)   My son *drives* carefully.
(b)   *Does* my son *drive* carefully?

Sentences (1a) and (2a) are declarative sentences while (1b) and (2b) are polar questions derived by preposing the modals *will* and *does* in front of the subject NPs (noun phrases) *Victor* and *my son* respectively through the inversion of word order between the subject and the auxiliary. It is only the auxiliary and the subject that swap positions in (1b) while the main verb does not and in (2b), the dummy *do* auxiliary is inserted into (2a) immediately after the subject *my son* in the deep structure and moved to the subject position to derive (2b). In English, subject-auxiliary inversion is possible only when a sentence contains a subject immediately followed by an auxiliary verb (Radford, 2004) as in the examples and where there is no overt auxiliary in the sentence as in (2a), the dummy auxiliary *do* is inserted in the deep structure (Radford, 1997, Culicover, 1976) so that the deep structure representation of (2a) is "My son does drive carefully", according to Culicover earlier cited.

Sentences of the nature discussed are derived through the application of a sequence of one or more transformations. Linguistics transformation involves a change in the structure of one linguistic structure to another (Ndimele 1999, Tomori, 1977) characteristic of transformational grammar. This grammatical theory explains the kind of grammatical rules which govern the changes and the final formation of utterances (Tomori, 1977). Transformation is about sentence adjustment, re-arrangement or change when all the transformational rules required for grammaticality have applied. Transformation may require deletion, insertion, substitution, or movement of linguistic elements as in examples (1) and (2) in that what appears on the surface structure is a derivation which is different from its deep structure.

4.0 Presentation of Data

The corpus of data for analysis were drawn from spoken discourse of Nigerian English bilinguals in different discourse situations like informal communication and from speeches in formal situations. Given the prevalence of ungrammaticality in sentence outputs with auxiliary verbs in different types of interrogative clauses among these bilinguals, different types of sentences with auxiliaries were gathered, analysed and evaluated using insights from transformational generative grammar. Also contained in the corpus of data are ill-formed structures with a sequence of

Maria-Helen Ekah

verbal elements as may be observed in the following:

1. *Can you slapped me?
2. *Did he told you the price?
3. *Why did the people continued to demonstrate?
4. *I did felt for him.
5. *The consignment did arrived on time.
6. *How did the assignment got to the students?
7. *I didn't locked my car.
8. *He doesn't knows me from Adam.
9. *My friend, don't bothered me again.
10. *How does he knows I am here?
11. *Did you saw the man you went to meet?
12. *Voters did not turned out as expected.
13. *When the prophet calls a person, he will prophesies to that person.
14. *When did you came in?
15. *He didn't caught me with a piece of paper.
16. *I will opened the can of warms that day.
17. *I told you it doesn't worked that way.
18. *He asked me, "Will you married me?"
19. *Should we called the police?
20. *Can we ever won without adequate preparation.
21. *Did the electoral officer announced the correct result?
22. *Will he appealed the judgement of the court?
23. *Must we showed the world our nakedness.
24. *The guests shall arrived on time.
25. *She can't says what is in her mind.
26. *Will they employed all those that applied?
27. *Thank God you didn't saw the man.
28. *Did she in truth stole the money?
29. *It seems the man didn't hear me. Did you heard me?
30. *Did we invited any of you?
31. *Do not starts a sentence with and have you heard?
32. *Did the candidate told his supporters he was stepping down?
33. *Did Akpan didn't called in yesterday as he promised.
34. *Mama said she would visit you. Did she came?
35. *Does that man knows what it means to be a teacher?
36. *He didn't informed members of his constituency he was decamping to another party.
37. *A child may exhibits tendencies that baffle the parents.
38. *How did you solved the problem.
39. *The girl didn't called her parents immediately.
40. *He does not only talks about but also legislates.
41. *Do not begins a quarrel when the situation does not warrant it.
42. *Why did Nigerian government relinquished Bakassi to Cameroon?

5.0 Analysis /Discussion of Data

Three types of interrogative sentences are contained in the tokens. The first type of interrogative sentences is derived by head-to-head movement; the second are sentences derived through wh-movement while the third are statements and negative sentences. For ease of analysis, these different types of sentences are categorized into three sets. Set A is for interrogative sentences which undergo head-to-head movement; Set B is for sentences which undergo wh-movement while Set C contains negative and declarative sentences with infelicities in auxiliary – main verb relationship.

5.1 Head-to-Head Movement Infelicities

Tokens 1,10,17,18,19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 32 and 34 are products of head movement operation in which the subject noun phrase (NP) moves from its head position to the head position of auxiliary phrase with which it swaps position in a syntactic operation called head-to-head movement typical of head-to-head movement operation (Carnie, 2007, Adger, 2003, Cook & Newson, 2007). When the head of a phrase moves to another head position to form an interrogative sentence as in the tokens in Set A, the movement triggers off subject-auxiliary (NP-Aux) inversion, whether the auxiliary verb occurs overtly in the sentence as in Tokens 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25 or inserted as in 1, 10, 27, 29,

31, 33, 34. In agreement with inversion principle, the verb is placed ahead of the subject (Norquist, 2016). The resultant questions are structurally derived from declarative sentences through the inversion of the subject and the auxiliary following NP-Aux inversion rule (Ndimele, 1999, Lamidi, 2000). The deep structure representation of the tokens in Set A is symbolically represented as follows:

NP$_1$ AGR   Tns   M   X

Fig. 1: Deep structure representation before head-to-head movement

In consonance with SVO English word order, in Fig. 1, the subject (NP$_1$) occurs before the auxiliary verb (Aux) in the form of modal (M) which carries agreement and tense features attached to it then followed by X. X represents the verb and its complement that is the verb (VP) and other elements subcategorised by it. Such element includes the subject in the verb is transition (Culicover, 1976, Lamidi, 2000). The non-interrogative form of the tokens in Set A using Token 1 as an example is as follows:

You   AGR   Pres   Can   Slap me
NP   AGR   ⌐TnS   M   X⌐
1   2   3

Fig. 2: Deep Structure representation of Token 1

The deep structure of the sentences in Set A is as follows (excluding the grammatical errors). *You can slap me. He (did) tell you the price/he told you the price, you did see the man you went to meet/you saw the man you went to meet, we should call the police, we can win without adequate preparation and the electoral officer announced the correct result/the electoral officer did announce the correct result.* With the application of question transformational (Tq) rule, the surface structure of Fig. 1 after head-to-head movement then becomes:

AGR   Tns   M   NP$_1$ X

Fig. 3: Surface Structure representation after head-to-head movement

The diagram shows that NP$_1$ (the subject) swapped position with the modal/dummy do auxiliary as observed in all the tokens in Set A and by grammatical rule is already tensed. By this rule, the correct derivation is "Can you slap me? Did he tell you the price? Did you see the man you went to meet? Should we call the police? Can we win

without adequate preparation? Did the electoral officer announce the correct result? ignoring the grammatical errors in the tokens. In each of these derivations, the VP does not partake in the movement. This movement yields the following derivation in Set A using Token 1 as a representative example:

AGR   Pres   Can   you   Slap me?
AGR   ⌐Tns   M   NP   X
2   1   3⌐

Fig. 4: The derived structure after head-to-head movement

This diagrams shows that each of the tokens in Set A are transforms of simple declarative sentences shown in Fig. 2 derived through the application of a sequence of one or more transformations which change each of the sentences from one structure to another, that is, from declarative to interrogative clauses.

The output in all the tokens conforms to the syntactic process of head-to-head movement. To form the interrogative sentences in Set A, the subject and the auxiliary exchange positions (see Fig. 4) through the syntactic process of inversion since in transformation, there may be sentence adjustment, re-arrangement of lexical items, a change in sentence structure, insertion of lexical item and movement of linguistic elements from one position to another (Tomori, 1977, Ndimele, 1999). In Token 1 and others of its kind in that, set movement has taken place while Token 2 and members of this class are derived through the insertion of *do* in the deep structure (declarative form) then moved to the subject position where it displaces NP subject in the surface structure (interrogative form) and occupies its slot as canvassed by Culicover (1976), as argued by (Radford, 2004) or *do* is inserted in the surface structure and placed in pre-subject position. The derived structure is polar question in whichever way the derivation is viewed. The two levels of structural representation are placed in correspondence (Crystal, 1997).

However, there is a grammatical disparity between the representation in Fig. 4 and Nigerian English bilinguals output in our data. Their outputs violate the principle of head-to-head movement in interrogative sentences in that, in moving the

auxiliary in each of the tokens to pre-subject position, even though the auxiliary has acquired agreement and tense features, the main verb also inflects for tense, from slap to *slapped*, tell to *told*, see to *saw*, call to *called*, win to *won*, slap to *slapped*, steal to *stole*, invite to *invited*, know to *knows* even when the had auxiliary acquired agreement and tense features before movement, which why the sentences are. The VP does not enter into ungrammatical agreement relationship with the subject in head-to-head movement (Norquist, 2017).

The fact is that modals occur in the first position in a sequence of verbs in an English sentence, and if a modal is present in the sequence of verbs as in the tokens – *can you slap, did he tell, did you see, shall we call, can we win…, can you slap*, etc, then no other tense marking can be found on the English verbs (Culicover, 1976, Carnie, 2011). This postulation affects modals, *do, have* and *be* auxiliary verb. Our outputs show that both auxiliaries and lexical verbs are tensed whereas syntactically, lexical verbs are not dominated by Aux node but by VP (Verb phrase) node (Chomsky, 1981, Lamidi, 2000).

The ungrammaticality of the structures (**can you slapped, *did he told, *did you saw, *shall we called*, etc.) is traced to the inflection of the main verb in each of the sentences. In yes/no questions such as the ones under discussion, the auxiliary which occurs before the subject NP carries tense attached to it as the first verbal element, in which case, the tense affix is attached to the right node (Aux), but in the tokens, tense affix is also attached to the main verbs. The modal moves with its agreement and tense features to pre-sentential position. Lexical verbs, as a matter of grammatical rule are stuck inside the VP, as a result, do not undergo head-to-head movement as NP and Aux do but remain in-situ in their canonical position (Radford, 1997, 2004, Cook & Newson, 2007). It is during the movement of the auxiliary which is the head of the auxiliary node to the NP subject position headed by the noun that the confusion arises and the ungrammaticality occurs. It is observed in the tokens that when the auxiliary is in the past, the main verb is also in the past (**did he told*) and when the auxiliary is in the present, the main verb is also

in the present (**Does he knows*), etc. Also, the tense feature of the auxiliary spills over to the main verb in the clause in violation of NP-Aux inversion rule.

5.2   Wh-Movement Infelicities

Set B consists of another form of interrogative clauses which undergo head movement operation. These sentences contain the wh-elements when, where, why, what and how. *How* is also included among wh-questions because the answer to a question initiated by how comes in the form of a statement as it is with answers to wh-words questions. In each of the tokens – 2, 5, 9, 12, 13, 38 and 42, a wh-element is placed at sentence-initial position. Each of them contains subject, auxiliary and direct object typical of wh-words and also undergoes subject-auxiliary inversion (Aarts, 2008). In each of the sentences, the verb sub-categorise an NP complement as a matter of requirement by taking a direct object, whether lexical or clausal, to form the interrogative sentences. In Set B, the wh-elements are placed before the auxiliary after inversion. The movement is not about swapping of positions as it is in head-to-head movement, but the wh-word which originated in the VP of the declarative phrase marker moves to the complementizer (COMP) position in the derived structure.

To derive a wh-question, according to Lamidi, (2000, p. 130) "AGR, tense and modal move to the nearer NP in accordance with NP-Aux inversion rule before the application of affix hopping rule. "The movement still preserves the affixes and the tense features of the main verb so as to maintain the grammaticality of the sentence after movement. This is simple and direct in utterances like "How are you?" which has the declarative P-marker (Phrase Marker) as 'You are how? in which the main verb is *are*. However, the tokens in Set B show the insertion of dummy *do* auxiliary verb in the derived structure hence: **Why did the people continued to demonstrate? (2) *How did the assignment got to the students?(5), *How does he knows I am here? (12)*, etc. while the deep structure of the P-markers read: **The people (did) continued to demonstrate why? The assignment got to the students how and He does know(s) I am here, how?* etc.

Maria-Helen Ekah

Aarts (2008) observes that the wh-elements in the structures undergoing wh-movement are adjoined to the inverted auxiliary which was already adjoined to S, that is, the sentence in its declarative form while Lamidi (2000) argues that AGR, tense and modal move to the COMP nearer to the NP in accordance with Aux-NP inversion rule before affix hoping rule applies. All these arguments are tenable, but with the insertion of *do* in the sentence, the main verb occurs in its base form as bare infinitive. This is not the case in Set B as both the auxiliary and lexical verb in each of the tokens bear tense (*how did the assignment got - *how does he knows, *when did you came in *how did you solved and *why did Nigerian government relinquished*). This is inappropriate because dummy *do* auxiliary performs the function of tense bearer in interrogative sentences (Aarts, 2008) whether in wh-movement or head-to-head movement. In the examples, both the auxiliary and the lexical verb bear tense which is the reason for the ungrammaticality.

5.3 The Auxiliary in Negative and Declarative Sentences

Tokens 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 26, 30, 32, 35, 36, 39, 40 and 41 in Set C are both declarative and negative sentences with a sequence of verbal elements as in: *did felt, *did arrived, didn't locked, *doesn't knows, *don't bothered, *did not turned out, "will prophesies, *didn't caught, *will opened, *doesn't worked, *shall arrived, *can't says, *didn't saw, *do not starts *didn't called, *didn't informed, *may exhibits, *doesn't –talks and *do not begins*. All the tokens contain a verbal sequence consisting of an auxiliary followed by a main verb. While some of the tokens have modals, some have *do* auxiliary verb. In all the sentences, one dominant feature runs through all the sentences and that is the inflection of the main verb headed by the VP in addition to the tensed auxiliary which accounts for the ungrammaticality as it was with head-to-head movement as well as wh-movement interrogative clauses. Even dummy *do* auxiliary behaves as any modal auxiliary by being finite, follow a bare infinitive verb and also bears the tense feature in negative interrogative sentences (Aarts, 2008).

From the analyses of head-to-head movement in interrogative sentences, the inputs on wh-movement and the use of auxiliary verbs in negative and declarative sentences in Nigerian spoken English, it is observed that syntax is not only concerned with meaningful combination of words in sentences but it is also concerned with appropriate use of inflections in sentences. The ungrammaticality in the interrogative sentences is traced to wrong inflectional marking. The findings reveal that inflection is the centre of grammaticality and ungrammaticality in natural languages like English, which emphasizes the need to give it close attention in second language situation.

6.0 Summary and Conclusion

The discussion shows that there is a relative order on verbal elements in a sequence of verbs. This discussion aligns with Culicover (1976) assertion that a yes-no question resembles a declarative sentence in the ordering of verbal elements as Set A and Set C show except that in yes/no questions like the ones undergoing head-to-head movement, tense and the first verbal element in the sequence occurs before the subject NP and follows it if the sentence is declarative. Most importantly, it is tensed and the first verbal element in the verbal sequence forms a single constituent (Aux) and not the entire verbal sequence. The paper shows that two types of verbal constituents are contained in the verbal sequence the first is auxiliary while the second is the verb phrase. It is discovered that in head-to-head movement in interrogative sentences as well as in negative and declarative sentences, it is only the first verbal element, that is, modal auxiliary verb which bears tense and not the main verb. Even in wh-movement, when an interrogative clause contains the auxiliary *do,* it is only *do* that inflects for tense while the main verb does not as it is with modals. Modals and dummy do are always finite and are always followed by verbs in the base form. The paper presupposes that what obtains in the use of auxiliary in interrogative clauses by Nigerian speakers of English may be true of other speakers of English in L2 situation in other countries.

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