

## A Grammatical Analysis of Biseni Clause Structure

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a grammatical description of the clause structure of Biseni; a dialect of Ijò, spoken in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The paper establishes the typological classification of clauses and sentences based on syntactic properties and communicative functions, analyzes grammatical relationships that hold in intra-clausal strings and evaluate the peculiar movement operations attested in complex clause structures. Findings show a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order for the basic clause structure, while attesting a **Kẹ** COMP that functions as a conjunct linking the embedded clause to the matrix and also as focus marker. A v-movement operation that is at variance with Ndimele (1994) and Koopman (1983) assertions on v-movement is revealed, as analyses show inter-clausal movement from v-position in SPEC-I' of the matrix clause to another v-position in SPEC-I' of the embedded clause in a rightward demotion operation. Focused elements are left in-situ, while topicalised constituents are moved from base generated position to pre-subject position through fronting. Question words in interrogative structures either remain in-situ in base generated non-subject position or are moved rightward to a post-verbal position, devoid of AUX/Subject inversion or Do-insertion. Findings contribute to linguistic knowledge in the areas of theory, policy and pedagogy and are recommended to researchers interested in exploring the peculiarities of Biseni clause structure, as insights provided can serve useful educational purposes for national and multinational agencies interested in exploring the intricate idiosyncratic forms of Nigerian grammars and developing instructional materials for teaching and learning such grammars

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### 1.1 Introduction

This paper is a description of Biseni clause structures. The analysis highlights the inherent specific characteristics and idiosyncratic features of the clause structures in the dialect, facilitating proper documentation and preservation for present and future generations of the Biseni people. The paper makes presentations tailored at providing a systematic account of the structure of the clause structures as they reside in the mind of competent speakers, appropriately referred to as internalized grammar (I-grammar). For languages without literary materials, the I-grammar is the only grammar and because it exists just in the minds of speakers, it is prone to the vagaries of the mind and a fleeting competence that is usually occasioned by the

adverse effects of multilingualism and language contact, such that we find many smaller and undocumented languages being confronted with the challenge of younger speakers with declining competence and proficiency, worsened still by the highly mobile nature of the present generation, a ubiquitous internet and the Nigerian Pidgin. In the light of such threats, providing a descriptive account of such grammars, and in this case, a description of the clause structures for a smaller speech form like Biseni cannot be over-emphasized, as it expands on existing linguistic knowledge.

Biseni is the term used to describe the speech form and its people. It is a dialect of the Ijo language, with Okordia and Oruma as its closest sisters (relatives) with which it shares significant degrees of intelligibility and cognate percentages ranging from 81% (Biseni and Okordia), 66% (Biseni and Oruma), 69% (for Okordia and Oruma) Worufah (2007, p.11).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Many indigenous languages in Nigeria are not developed, by way of having standard orthographies or even any form of documentation. This is a major challenge to the growth and survival of these languages, particularly in the present era of globalization and the accompanying rapid spread of world lingua francas such as English and even the ubiquitous nature of the Nigerian Pidgin, leading to language endangerment and possible death of many small and oppressed languages. This is true because the general assumption is that languages with smaller number of speakers in Nigeria are presently being confronted with a threat of the ever increasing frontiers of English and the Nigerian Pidgin. To capture the enormity of the problem and to bring it home, we refer to Crystal (2004, p.vii) which quotes the statement issued by linguists attending the 1992 International Linguistics Congress in Quebec, Canada:

As the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and, if possible, sponsoring programs of linguistic organizations for the description in the form of grammars, dictionaries and texts, including the recording of oral literatures, of hitherto understudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages.

Given the position taken by linguists at the Quebec Conference, Crystal (2004, p.vii) also reports the response of UNESCO:

Although its exact scope is not yet known, it is certain that the extinction of languages is progressing rapidly in many parts of the world, and it is of the highest importance that the linguistic profession realizes that it has to step up its descriptive efforts.

Thus, the fact that linguists need to step up their efforts in language research, documentation and writing of grammars for the many under-researched and undocumented languages cannot be overemphasized, for which this study is part of efforts and contributions at solving the problem; because Biseni needs to be properly described and documented to provide the needed materials for pedagogy and guide against endangerment.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

This paper uses the descriptive approach to grammatical studies where presentations are objective, non-judgemental, as are actually constructed and used by speakers of the dialect. It relies on real-world instances of language use in order to derive rules about the ways in which people actually produce language. Descriptive grammars are linguistic studies that document languages according to speakers' actual usage, understanding and acceptance, devoid of prescriptivism. Descriptive grammars are the products of linguistic documentation reflecting the knowledge of competent native speakers of particular languages. This makes Ndimele (1999, p.80) define descriptive grammar as "an approach to the study of grammar which seeks to account for the way the speakers actually use their language without reference to an approved standard or the grammatical structure of another language." The definition seeks to present the structures of a language and their use by speakers of the language, like the present study that collects and analyse data without being judgemental about the naturally occurring linguistic situation. Studies of this nature are mostly motivated by the desire to preserve the grammar, particularly in situations of possible endangerment.

## **2.1 Methodology**

Data for this study are elicited primarily by direct contacts with language consultants in the field where in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and actual utterances are recorded. The secondary sources of data are from published and unpublished works consulted in the course of the study such as books, journals, theses, etc. Data were collected in the form of oral interviews of competent speakers and the intuition of the researcher. Questions relating to areas of specific interests are drawn to cover different areas of the research, for which data on Biseni equivalents of the metalanguage (English) phrases, clauses and sentences are provided and subsequently analyzed. Discourse centered approach where some conversational utterances are recorded, from which analyses are made to capture naturally occurring speech components. The GB is the framework adopted in this paper.

### 3.1 Functional Types of Clauses

#### 3.1.1 Relative Clause

Relative clauses modify noun phrases by describing their referents (Moravcsik 2006, p. 221). This implies that they function as adjectives by specifying the meaning of nominal elements in the form of supplying additional information. The complementizer (COMP) **Kẹ** ‘that’, introduces the relative clause and follows the head noun in Biseni. It can function as a subject and object modifier or serve as a complement of the head noun in a prepositional phrase.

1.     Apẹlẹ wari ẹlẹ [kẹ sẹ-sun-má]  
      PN   house front COMP stand-ASP-PST  
      ‘Apẹlẹ that stood in front of the house’
2.     Owiye biyọ kọn [kẹ Kuro-má]  
      3SgS pond side COMP fall-PST  
      ‘He that fell by the side of the pond’

The bracketed parts of the sentences above are relative clauses that modify the subject head nouns. Other examples are:

3.     Bẹ     túbọ   kẹ     wáminí             wari-ẹ   bó-má  
      Det   man   COMP Poss   house-EMP come-PST  
          NP                   Relative clause  
      ‘this is the man who came to our house’

In example (3) reference is made to the subject NP (Bẹ túbọ); the matrix, by the relative clause (kẹ wáminí wari-ẹ bó-má), indicating a relative clause that functions as subject complement. Example (4) contains a relative clause that functions as object complement:

4.     aye   owiyée kí   ì       pírí   fún   kẹ   disi-ma  
      She   him   INF   me   give   book   COMP like-HBT  
      ‘she likes the book that he gave to me’

**Fún** (book) is the object of the verb **pírí** (give) that the relative clause (kẹ disi-ma) modifies. Notice again that in Biseni it can also be said that the relative clause follows the head noun in subject position. In (3) the head noun is **túbọ**, and it is followed by the relative clause as is introduced by the complementizer **kẹ**. This is also true for (4) where the relative clause functions as object complement as in **kẹ disima** (the relative clause) follows **fún** ‘book’ the Direct Object being modified. A further exemplification is:

5.     ì       yóú- túbọ   disi   ere   kẹ   bénā sún-má  
      My   friend       like   woman COMP here stay-HBT  
      ‘the woman that my friend likes is the one that stays here’

#### 3.1.2 Noun Clause

It is “a clause whose syntactic role is seen as that of a noun or noun phrase: thus, in particular, a ‘complement clause’ such as **that I would help**, in **I said that I would help**” (Matthews 1997, p. 249). In other words, a noun clause functions just like a noun or NP in that it can serve as the subject of a sentence, object of a verb,

subject/object or prepositional complement. In Biseni, a noun clause may or may not be introduced by the **ke** COMP:

6. (a) wá daḃóú ke ibedáówéí b'ra nu-a  
We father COMPclan-head Adv. Know-NEG  
(manner)  
'We did not know that his father is the clan-head'
- (b) ọ á ɓire b'ra wamini bulọ sọ-a  
He she marry (manner) our heart enter-NEG  
'That he married her didn't please us'

(c) \* ọ á ɓire wamini bulọ sọ-a

Notice that while (6a) has the **ke** COMP in the noun clause (**daḃóú ke ibedáówéí**), same does not appear in (6b); ọ á ɓire b'ra.

It is apparent therefore that when the noun clause functions as the object of the verb, the COMP is required (cf 6a), but when it functions as subject as in (b) the **ke** COMP is not obligatory. Observe also that the manner adverbial (bira or b'ra), that translates to 'how' in English, is an integral part of the Noun clause in Biseni without which the construction is ill-formed as in (6c).

### 3.1.3 Adverbial Clause

As is the case in other languages, Adverbial clauses in Biseni specify the action of verbs just like single adverbs do. In addition, they answer to the following, questions, indicating causal, temporal, manner, locational and contrastive meanings:

- (a) tiye-duḃoní? 'why'  
(b) niga-yen? 'how'  
(c) inde ogo-a? 'when'  
(d) nánāā? 'where'

Examples of Adverbial clause are typed in bold face:

7. (a) Áyee tiyé-duḃoní wónú-témá-á?  
She why(QW) leave-PERF-Q  
'Why did she leave?'  
(b) Áyee **olulu-furu** **ke** **duḃo-ni** wónú-témá  
She angry COMP reason walk-PERF  
'She left because she was angry'
8. (a) Áyee nigá kí ɓé yen yen-ma-a?  
She how (QW) Aux this work do-PST-Q  
'How did she do this work?'  
(b) Áyee **ní** **gba** **b'ra** **ke** yen-ma  
She you said how COMP do-PST  
'She did as/how you said'
9. (a) Ní inde-ogo ɓó-má-á?  
You when(QW) come-PST-Q  
'When did you come?'  
(b) Ni **ní** **sini** **fiye** **fiyo-ni** sọ ɓo-ma  
I you when food eating when enter come-PST  
'I came in when you were eating'
10. (a) Owiyée nana fi-ma-a?  
He where (QW) die-PST-Q  
'Where did he die?'

- (b) Owiyée wáminí yen-yen edan kẹ fi-ma  
He our work-place where/there COMP die-PST  
'He died at our work-place'
11. (a) Owiyée inḁ-ogo wónú-tẹ-má-á?  
He when (QW) move-PERF-PST-Q  
'When did he leave?'
- (b) Wá sini seiyo-ni owiyée wonu-tema  
We while dancing while he move-PERF  
'We were dancing while he left'

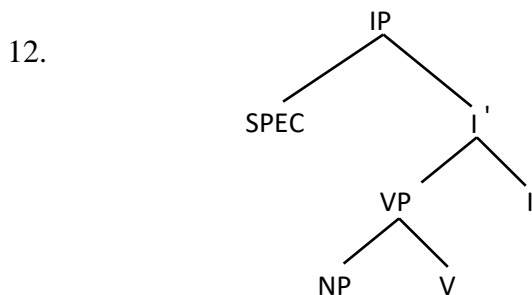
Notice that all the question words (QW) and their corresponding COMPS in the adverbial clauses all have different realisations. This is different from English, for instance, where you have some correspondence between the QW and the COMP in temporal, locative and manner adverbial clauses.

The COMP marker or subordinating element **kẹ** is not always overtly **indicated** in subordinate adverbial clauses, as is seen in (9b) to (11b) where it is omitted, leaving the subordinating conjunctions alone. However, when the COMP is made overt in such constructions, it is not ungrammatical but viewed as clumsy speech. Observe also that the subordinator '**sini ... ni**' acts as a correlative conjunction, and is used to conjoin an adverbial clause that expresses either a temporal or contrastive notion, even as you may have seen that the tone of the question marker is conditioned by the preceding segment.

#### 4.1 Structural Analysis of the Sentence

##### 4.1.1 Simple Sentence

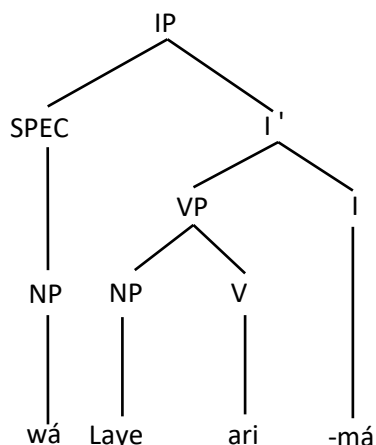
It is called a simple sentence because it contains just a single (Main) clause composed of one subject and a predicate, and expresses a single idea. The Biseni simple sentence has the structure thus:



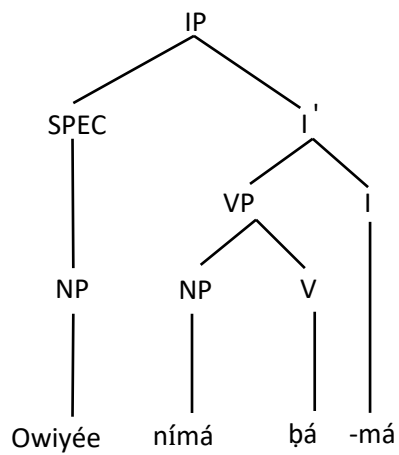
The schematic representation can be interpreted as:

IP (Inflectional Projection) dominates SPEC (Specifier) and Inflection-Bar (I'), I' dominates Verb Phrase (VP) and Inflection (I), VP dominates Noun Phrase (NP) and Verb (V). The V is the last element and is preceded by the object (NP) in the Biseni simple sentence, given its SOV simple sentence structure.

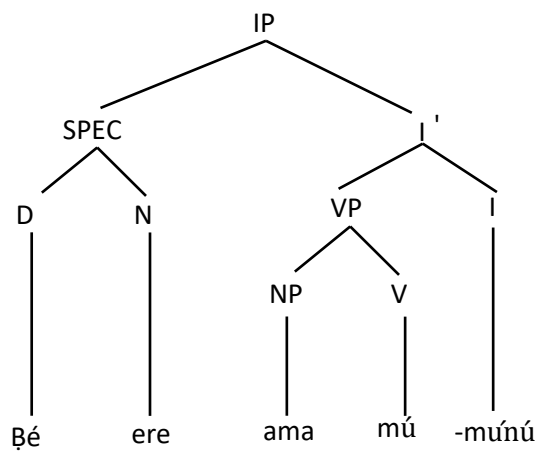
13. (a) Wá Laye ari-má  
We Laye see-PST  
'We saw Laye'



- (b) Owiyéé nímá ɓá-má  
He animal kill-PST  
'He killed an animal'



- (c) ɓé éré áamá mú-múnú  
this woman home go-PERF  
'this woman has gone home'

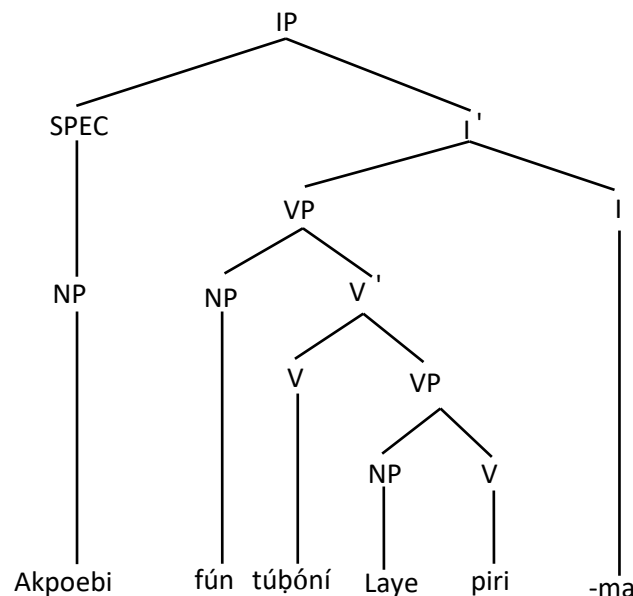


The sentences in (13) can neatly be divided into subject and predicate, with **wá**, **owiyée** and **be ere** serving as subjects while the rest of each of the sentence serves as the predicate which all contain verbal complements. However, it should be noted that the complement is optional as its occurrence or absence is dependent on the nature of the verb in terms of whether it requires such. The next example typifies a simple sentence without a complement.

14. Ere wari yina-kimi fi-témúnú  
That house owner-person die-PERF  
'The owner of that house has died'

'*ere wari yina-kimi*' functions as the subject and '*fi-témúnú*' is the predicate without a complement. The transitive/intransitive dichotomy makes for the occurrence or absence of a verbal complement. For double object simple sentences with three place argument positions; the subject (SPEC), Direct Object and Indirect Object, the following example suffices:

15. Akpoebi fún tuḃo-ni Laye piri-ma  
PN book buy-for PN give-PST  
SPEC D.O. I.O.  
'Akpoebi bought a book for Laye'



#### 4.1.2 Compound Sentence

It is composed of two simple sentences linked together by a coordinating conjunction. Coordinators in Biseni are **mọ** 'and' and **fia** 'but', as there is no equivalent of the English 'or' in Biseni.

##### Examples:

16. Ik<sup>w</sup>e-ni chin-ḃo-ni i mọ fọ mu  
Quick-IM return-come-IM me and market go  
'Return quickly and join me to the market'
- 17a. Ni mu-sa fia ni ọwọ ari-a  
I go-COMPL but I him see-NEG  
'I went but did not see him'
- b. \* Ni mu-sa fia owo ari-a

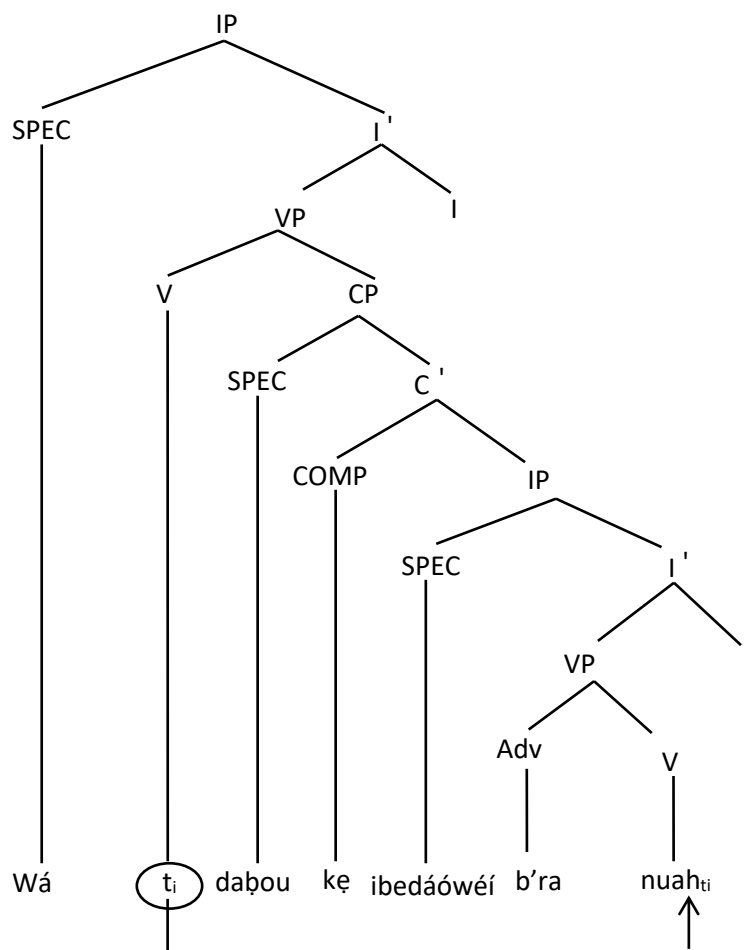


If the subjects of the two co-ordinate clauses are the same as in (17), they are both retained, because deleting one of them renders the sentence ungrammatical in the lect.

#### 4.1.3 Complex Sentence

Our discussions on clause and its types will suffice here, as complex sentences are made up of the Matrix (Independent) and Embedded clauses:

18. wá daḃóú kẹ ibedáówéí b'ra nu-a  
we father COMPclan-head Adv. know-NEG  
(manner)  
'we did not know that his father is the clan-head'



The verb movement (v-movement) noticed in Biseni is peculiar and different from what is reported in Ndimele (2004, p. 108-109) which indicates that:

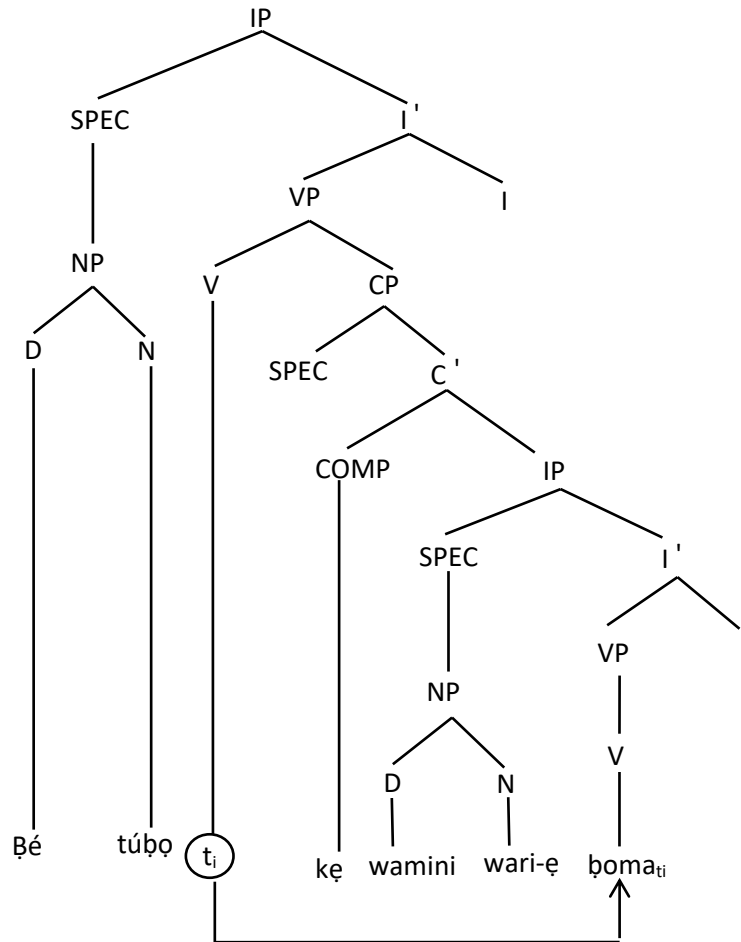
“V-movement is a local process because, it involves the movement of a constituent from a particular position into an empty portion within the same clause ... it involves the movement of a verb (the head of the VP) into INFL (the head of the IP).”

Whereas what Ndimele (2004) and Koopman (1983) report is an intra-clausal movement of a verb from the VP into INFL within the same clause, the rightward movement in Biseni is necessitated by the SOV structure, such that though the movement is a demotion, the verb is made to become the final element in the structure, and the movement inter-clausal, from a v-position in a higher clause to an empty v-position in the embedded clause, leaving a trace in the higher clause where it had occurred in the D-structure at the matrix. This movement is necessitated by the absence of the **verb to Be** in the lect and to forestall the generation of

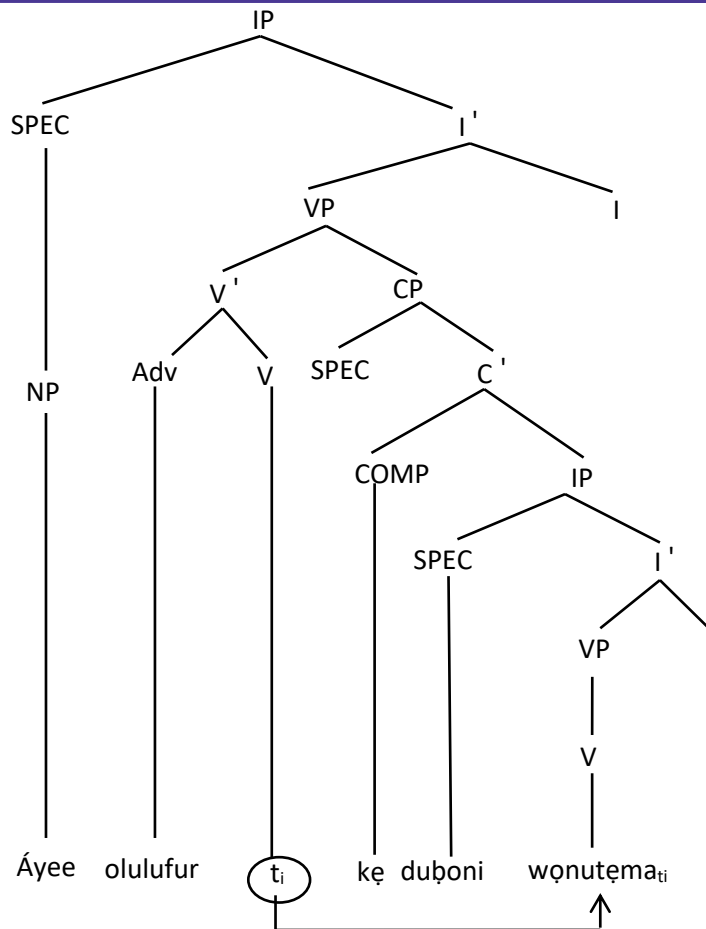


ungrammatical structures. V-movement in Biseni does not violate subadjacency condition (SC) of move-a transformational rule, as it crosses just the SPEC-C' bounding node.

19.    Bé                   túbọ                   kẹ                   wamini                   wari-ẹ                   bó-má  
          this               man               COMP               our               house-LOC   Come-PST  
'this is the man who came to our house'



20.    áyee                   olulu-furu                   kẹ                   duḃoni                   wọnu-tẹ-ma   she                   angrily  
          COMP               reason               walk-PERF-PST   'she had left because she was   angry'



So, the position in the higher clause from which the verb is demoted to the lower clause is co-indexed with the verbs **nuah**, **ḡoma** and **wọnutẹma** in the examples (18-20) for the purposes of co-referencing.

Notice that the embedded clauses in (18) to (20) are joined to the matrix by the complementizer **kẹ** functioning as the subordinating conjunction.

## 4.2 Functional Analysis of the Sentence

### 4.2.1 Declarative Sentence

This is the type of sentence that is used to give information, make statement or assertion. According to Aarts (2001, p. 58), “They are syntactic configurations which usually display an unmarked order of the functional categories; Subject, Predicator, Direct Object etc”. This goes to say that declarative sentences are those that clearly indicate the order of sentence elements (word order) of a language. The following are examples indicating how the order of sentence elements in Biseni is known through declarative sentences:

- |     |                            |                |              |                 |
|-----|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 21. | Á                          | yei            | iru          | dísí-má         |
|     | <b>Her</b>                 | <b>husband</b> | <b>drink</b> | <b>like-HBT</b> |
|     | S                          |                | O            | V               |
|     | ‘Her husband likes drinks’ |                |              |                 |
| 22. | ì                          | dumire         | wárí         | yíná-má         |
|     | <b>My</b>                  | <b>brother</b> | <b>house</b> | <b>have-TML</b> |
|     | S                          |                | O            | V               |
|     | ‘My brother has a house’   |                |              |                 |
| 23. | Amìni                      | wárí           |              | yíná-yáh        |
|     | <b>They</b>                | <b>house</b>   |              | <b>have-NEG</b> |
|     | S                          | O              |              | V               |
|     | ‘They do not have a house’ |                |              |                 |

It is observed that while the first two examples (21 and 22) are affirmative sentences, the third (23) is a negative sentence, implying that declarative sentences can either be affirmative or negative. Again, though we have indicated that the examples are understood to be making statements, yet they can be uttered with a rising questioning voice tone pattern that will then transform them into questions.

#### 4.2.2 Imperative Sentence

An imperative sentence is the type that is used to give directives or commands. Therefore, it is used to tell person(s) to do something.

The subject of the imperative sentence, which is normally a second person nominal (Noun or Pronoun), is usually implied and not expressed or overtly indicated, with the exception being the situation where the First Person Plural Pronoun functions as the subject of an imperative:

24.      wá                      áamá                      mú!  
            we                      home                      go  
            (we                      go                      home)  
            ‘Let us go home’

Notice that the English translation of example (24) has an overt object (us) of the verb (let) which is the first element in the sentence. However, the difference in Biseni is the overt presentation of a First Person Plural Subject Pronoun. If this is not the case, and the overt ‘wa’ is not part of the sentence, then the subject becomes an implied second person singular or plural pronoun:

25.      a.              (ní)      áamá                      mú!  
                         (you) home                      go  
                         Sg  
                         ‘(you) go home’  
                         Sg
- b.              (á)      ama                      mú!  
                         (you) home                      go  
                         Pl  
                         ‘(you) go home’.  
                         Pl

Notice also that the verb, as in many other languages, is in the imperative (base form) and uninflected.

#### 4.2.3 Interrogative Sentence

They are remarkably different from Declarative Sentences, as they are used in asking questions to which a response or information is provided. Depending on the response or information sought, interrogative sentences are usually grouped into **Yes/No** interrogatives, **Open** interrogatives (also called Question Word Interrogatives or Wh-questions) and **Alternative** interrogatives.

Biseni explores these different ways of asking and interrogating respondents to elicit information.

The Yes/No, Question Word and Alternative questions are marked with an inflectional -á suffix attached to the stem of the verb (or the final verb in the case of an alternative question).

##### 4.2.3.1 Yes/No (Questions) Interrogatives

They are referred to as Yes/No questions because they require responses that are either Yes or No to affirm or reject the notion which necessitated the question. In Biseni, the difference between a Declarative and the Yes/No interrogative which derives from the declarative is in the suffixation of the -á question inflection to

the verb stem with an associated high tone transforming the declarative to a Yes/No question, where the Yes/No response in Biseni is either **iin** 'yes' or **inyá** 'no':

26.	<b>Declarative</b>		<b>Yes/No Question</b>
(a)	Owiyée áamá mú-má He home go-PST 'he went home'	→	Owiyée áamá mú-má-á? he home go-PST-Q 'did he go home?'
(b)	áye sei-má She dance-PST 'she danced'	→	áye sei-má-á? she dance-PST-Q 'did she dance?'
(c)	ni tubọ yé fí-má My child something eat-PST 'My child ate something '	→	ni tubọ yé fí-má-á? my child something eat-PST-Q 'did my child eat something?'

#### 4.2.3.2 Question-Word (Open) Interrogatives

They are introduced by question words otherwise known as interrogative pronouns, also referred to as wh-questions in linguistic parlance, due to the regular occurrence of 'wh' in the word initial position of all the interrogative pronouns, except 'how' which begins with 'h' the second letter of the 'wh'; who, when, where, which, why. Examples of question words, or interrogative pronouns in Biseni are:

tibáa	'who'
tiyé	'what'
nigáa	'where'
inḑéa	'which'
nanáa	'which (place)'
inḑe ogo	'which time (when)'
niga yẹn	'how did (how)'
tiye duḑoni	'what reason (why)'

The use of any of these question words in a question requires that the respondent provides specific information as a response that addresses the needs of the question. Whereas the question-word interrogative in English is realised through an auxiliary/subject inversion (switch) or do-insertion in the absence of an auxiliary, and the question word moved leftwards to the pre-clausal (left most) position, in Biseni it can remain in-situ (in the same position [subject] with the item it queries) in base generated non-subject position or be moved rightwards to a post-verbal position:

27.	(a)	Tiye pa-ma-á? What happen-PST-Q 'What happened?'	(e)	Ní bẹ yẹn-ye tiye pa-á? You this do-thing what kind-Q 'What have you done?'
	(b)	Tibáa Owu-yo-á? Who cry-PROG-Q 'Who is crying?'	(f)	Bée Kpa tibá-á? This again who-Q 'Who is this again?'
	(c)	Ní tiyé yẹn-ma-á? You what do-PST-Q 'What did you do?'		
	(d)	Owiyée tibá ɓire-ma-á? He who marry-PST-Q 'Who did he marry?'		

#### 4.2.3.3 Alternative Interrogatives

28.    ĭ yún samu?

‘Is it my mother?’

29. (a) B́e mini íngbé-má samu afiri-ma-á?  
This water cold-TML ALT hot-TML-Q  
'Is this water cold or hot?'

(b) Wá bó samu wá chin-á?  
We come ALT we go(back)-Q  
'Should we come or go (back)?'

(c) Ní fíyẹ́ fẹ́-má samu iru ọ-má-á?  
You food eat-FUT ALT drink drink-FUT-Q  
'Will you eat or have a drink?'

Whereas Exclamative Sentences in English are usually associated with (an initial) question-word, in Biseni they may or may not be so regularly constructed with a question-word. However, whether there is a question-word or not, it usually would end with the interrogative marker, **-á** and its associated high tone even when the construction is clearly not an interrogative and do not elicit any kind of response. Thus, they are used to express emotions unlike interrogatives, declaratives and imperatives. Consider the sentences below:

30. (a) Bée kpá tiye-á !  
This again QW-Q  
'What is this again!'

(b) Bée kpá ere ebi bira-á !  
This again girl beautiful Adv-Q  
(of manner)  
'This girl is so beautiful!'  
'What a beautiful girl!'

(c) Bée kpá fiye imbiḷe bira-á!  
This again food sweet Adv-Q  
(of manner)  
'This food is so delicious!'

It is important to indicate that the occurrence of the question marker is significant because its final high tone signals that the construction is an exclamative sentence without which it could best be considered as a declarative sentence.

### 4.3 Non-Basic Clause Types

#### 4.3.1. Focus Constructions

Focus constructions are derived structures where particular elements like subject, object, verb etc are given prominence or emphasis through syntactic processes which range from movement (fronting, backing, clefting, dislocation etc), stress/accent or particle. When movement is used to facilitate focus, it has the tendency to change the basic word order of the language, as sentence elements are moved from their base generated positions in order to be highlighted or given prominence. That is why McIntosh (1984, p. 231) sees focus as “a constituent that introduces new or highlighted information...”

It is pertinent to indicate that not all constituents can be focused in every language as there are some language specific constraints placed on certain constituents in this regard; for which an attempt to focus will only produce ungrammatical structures.

However, what is attested in Biseni regarding focus is that it can be achieved with nominal elements, verbs, adverbs, adjectives and prepositions:

31. (a) Ebi izi bá-má (Basic sentence)  
Ebi fish kill-PST  
'Ebi killed a fish'
- (b) Ebi kẹ izi bá-má (Derived sentence)  
Ebi COMP fish kill-PST  
'It was Ebi that killed a fish'
- (c) Ebi izi kẹ bá-má (Derived sentence)  
Ebi fish COMP killed-PST  
'It was a fish that Ebi Killed'
- (d) Ebi izi bá-má kẹ biyọ sin-má  
Ebi fish Kill-PST COMP pond bail-FUT  
'If Ebi shall kill some fish, then he'll bail the pond'
- (e) Ebi dán kẹ wa ọwọ ache-má  
Ebi tall COMP we him take-FUT  
'It is when Ebi gets tall that he'll be accepted'
- (f) Ebi kuru-o kẹ wari kuro-má  
Ebi under-LOC COMP house fall-PST  
'Ebi was under when the house collapsed'
- (g) Ni mẹ siramu kẹ wa ẹlẹ ache-má  
2sgs run fast COMP we first take-FUT  
'It's when you run fast that we'll come out first'

Example (31a) is the basic structure from which others are derived. The COMP particle **kẹ** is used to indicate focus, and the focused elements are not moved but left in-situ. For this reason, the basic SOV word order is unaffected by focus constructions. In (b) the subject (Ebi) is focused, in (c) the object (izi) is focused, while example (31d-e) focus the verb **bama**, the adjective **dán**, the preposition **kuru** and the adverb **siramu**. The focus marker **kẹ** usually permits the focused element to occur as its immediate precedence.

#### 4.3.2 Topicalisation

Whereas our discussions on focus indicated the absence of movement of constituents in the lect, topicalisation which is often confused with focalization, usually involves movement of constituents from their base generated positions to a position of prominence (usually the pre-subject position) in Biseni, through fronting. Leech and Svartvik (2002, p. 211) indicates that “in most statements, the topic is the subject of the sentence”. So, for us, when a constituent or sentence element that originally occurs elsewhere in a base generated sentence is moved to a position of prominence (the pre-subject position), such is achieved through topicalisation, and the derived sentence referred to as topicalised sentence:

- |     |     |   |           |
|-----|-----|---|-----------|
| 32. | (a) | Tiḃá    ḃéná    gu-ma-á?<br>Who    here    dig-PST-Q<br>'Who dug here?'   | → Base    |
|     | (b) | Bena    tiḃá    gu-ma-á?<br>Here    who    dig-PST-Q  | → Derived |
| 33. | (a) | Ni biya-gile iru ḃo lámu<br>I yesterday drink drank well<br>'I drank well yesterday'  | → Base    |
|     | (b) | Biya-gile ni iru ḃo lamu-má<br>Yesterday I drink drank well-PST   | → Derived |
| 34. | (a) | Inḃa kimi ḃe aru-ḃ sḃ-ma-á<br>How-many person this canoe-EMP enter-TML-Q<br>'How many persons will enter this canoe?'             | → Base    |
|     | (b) | ḃe aru inḃa kimi sḃmaá<br>This canoe how-many person                      enter-TML-Q<br>'How many persons can enter this canoe?' | → Derived |
| 35. | (a) | Ní nana mu-má-á<br>You where go-PST-Q<br>'Where did you go?'  | → Base    |
|     | (b) | Nana ni mu-é?<br>Where you go-Q   | → Derived |

Notice that fronting is accompanied by inversion and constituents that are usually topicalised are adverbials and objects (of verbs). The subject/objects inversion results in OSV derived word order as we find in example (35). Nothing is left behind in the extraction site, but such extraction triggers a change in the base question marker from '-á' to '-é', conditioned by the ATR situation of the preceding segment as is observed in (35).

#### 4.3.3 Modal Constructions

We use the term, here, to refer to constructions made in consideration of situational perceptions that condition choice of lexical items in speech act, as against grammatical requirements of a language, regarding certainty, ability, humility, authority, compulsion, requirement, permission, probability submissiveness, possibility, willingness, wish etc. These are also referred to as modalities in the literature.

Ability, possibility and willingness are all achieved as speech acts in Biseni through the suffixation of **-ma** (future meaning affix) to the verb root or stem that expresses such:



36. (a) Ni yẹn pá mú-ma  
I do bringforth-FUT  
'I can do (it)'
- (b) wá pí rẹ pá mú-ma  
We rich bringforth-FUT  
'We can be rich'
- (c) Owiyée ní ọ firi yẹn bi yẹn-ma  
He you him send work whatever do-FUT  
'He will do whatever work you ask (send)'

In (36a), 'bring-forth' translates to or implies 'ability'. **Pámú** which literarily translates to the English 'bring-forth' indicates ability or what the word 'can' represents in English. (36b), uses same **pámú** plus the future marking suffix **-ma** to express (future) possibility. Example (36c) shows how willingness is expressed through a future meaning mixed with volition by the suffixation of **-ma** to the verb root '**yẹn**'.

Probability is expressed by the use of the word **kánfọ** 'maybe' or 'may' which usually precedes or is preceded by the subject:

37. (a) kánfọ ní wá rí kọ rọ-ma  
Maybe I house build-FUT  
'Maybe I will build a house' . .
- (b) Bẹ túbọ kánfọ bẹ é rẹ ọ rẹ-ma  
This man may this woman marry-FUT  
'This man may marry this woman'

**Máki** is used to express compulsion and requirement, while a wish is expressed with an occurrence of **-ma** suffix at the end of the verb that indicates the wish and another on the word **dọ** 'want' that usually occurs as the last verb in the serial verb construction:

38. (a) Ní máki ní fẹ yẹ yẹn-ma  
You must I say thing do-FUT  
'you must do what I say'
- (b) Ní sugulu-o mú-má dọ-ma  
I school-EMP go-FUT want-FUT  
'I wish to go to school'

Humility and submissiveness as speakers' attitude in speech act are achieved in the lect through verb serialization, where the last verb is usually **pamu-ma** suffixed to **fọ** (the probability marker), while permission is begun in sentences by **i-ḡamu** 'please':

39. I-ḡamu, ní ẹ rẹ sili kẹ i pí rí pá mú-ma-fọ, i sì  
Please you that money if me give ability-FUT-PrM me call.  
'Please call me if you may be able to give that money'

#### 4.3.4 Serial Verb Constructions

They are "one in which two or more successive verbs are joined together with no connecting particle, clitic etc", Matthew (1997, p. 339). Serial verb is also referred to as verb serialization in the literature. It is the occurrence of more than one finite verb in the same predicate, unlike a typical English sentence where only one finite verb is allowed in a clause. It is a process that facilitates verb stringing in a predicate where they (the verbs) are all placed at the same rank scale with none serving as a subordinate, given the absence of a

connective or conjunction that would have separated the verbs into a matrix and subordinate clauses. They usually take just one subject and negative marker in Biseni, while tense and negation are marked on the last verb through suffixation and shared by the verbs.

40. (a) Aye ɓo lá-**múnú**  
She come arrive-PERF  
'She has arrived'
- (b) Ni mú séí-**yō**  
I go dance-PROG  
'I am going to dance'
- (c) Ebi fún áchí ɓó-**má**  
Ebi book take come-PST  
'Ebi came with a book'
- (d) wá ana mú tuɓo-**yah**  
we yet go buy-NEG  
'we have not yet gone to buy...'

Notice that in (40a), the perfective aspect marked on the last verb **la** 'arrive' is also shared by **ɓo** 'come'. The progressive aspect marked on **séí** 'dance' in (b) is shared by the first verb **mú** 'go', while the past tense **-ma** and negation **-yah** in (c) and (d) are shared by the respective preceding verbs **áchí** 'take' and **mú** 'go' respectively.

### 5.1 Conclusion

The paper analysed the clause structures of Biseni grammar and notes the existence of matrix and subordinate clauses, where the matrix is the superordinate clause. This makes the subordinate clause to be embedded to the matrix often by the **kɛ** subordinator, but this is not obligatory. Sentences in Biseni are classified based on two parameters viz; syntactic properties and communicative function. In terms of syntax, simple, compound and complex sentences were recognised, while based on communicative function, Declarative, Imperative, Interrogative and Exclamative sentences were distinguished. A peculiar v-movement was reported in Biseni complex sentence that involves the movement of a verb in a higher clause to an empty verb position in an embedded (lower) clause. This v-movement is inter-clausal, and at variance with Ndimele (2004, p. 108-109) reports on v-movement, seen as a local process because it involves the movement of a constituent from a particular position into an empty portion within the same clause. Focused elements are left in-situ while topicalised constituents are moved from base generated position to pre-subject position. Interrogative structures have the Q-words in-situ in non-subject position or moved rightward to post-verbal position, without Auxiliary/Subject inversion or Do-insertio. The **Kɛ** 'that' complementizer is firmly established as the element that introduces the relative clause in Biseni which usually functions as subject or object complement or complement of a prepositional phrase. **Kɛ** is also used to indicate focus. Adverbial clauses specify the meaning of verbs with a peculiarity of the COMPs in the adverbial clauses having different realizations from their corresponding question words. The movement attested in Biseni complex sentence is peculiar as it is a rightward movement from a higher v-position to an empty v-position in an embedded lower clause. This finding vitiates the position held by Ndimele (2004 p. 108-109) which sees v-movement as a local process within the same clause. Topicalization in Biseni involves movement of constituents from base generated positions to the pre-subject position by fronting. Serial verbs are attested in Biseni. They usually take just one subject and negative marker, while tense and negation are marked on the last verb through suffixation and shared by the verbs.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The following are our recommendations:

- i) The knowledge provided by this study can serve useful educational purposes for Government; the Ministries of Education and other persons interested in teaching and learning Nigerian grammars.

- ii) The study is also recommended to linguists and other researchers interested in exploring the peculiarities of Biseni grammatical structures and its unique movement operations examined herein.

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