

CONSTRAINTS ON IGBO COMPLEMENTISERS

Chinyere B. Onyemaechi¹

&

Onyedikachi C. Orji²

Abstract

The paper discusses complementiser constraints in the Igbo language. Complementisers are functional heads of complement clauses. They are mainly grammaticalised conjunctions. The study aims to examine some of the syntactic constraints which guide the operations of complementisers in the Igbo language. Specifically, Unit movement constraint (UMC), Comp-Island constraint CIC, phrase impenetrability and strong crossover effect were analysed to ascertain the extent to which they apply to the Igbo language. The theoretical principles of Government and binding theory of Chomsky was used to analyse data generated through introspection and materials from internet and library. The complementiser constraints identified in Igbo include: Unit movement constraint, (UMC), Comp-Island constraint (CIC), Upward boundedness condition, strong cross over effect, phrase impenetrable principle and islands. The complementisers *na* and *si* were discovered to be related because both can be glossed as *that* and can occupy the same syntactic position as heads of complement clause, They differ because while *na* can be moved to specifier position at sentence initial position, *si* cannot undergo such movement. Also, whenever the two find themselves in the same syntactic structure with embedded complement clause in the Igbo language, *si* naturally assumes a higher position of finite verb through argument promotion while *na* becomes demoted as the functional head of the embedded complement clause.

Key words : Constraints, Complementizers, Universality, Igbo.

¹Chinyere B. Onyemaechi Ph.D is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri
Chinyereonyemaechi509@gmail.com 08037929530

²Onyedikachi C. Orji Ph.D is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Orjidikachi.c@gmail.com
08037965493

Introduction

The over generalizing power of transformational rules of Chomsky (1981) led to the introduction of constraints in the study of syntax. The essence is to make sure that grammaticality synergises with semantic interpretation. Constraints on syntactic analysis, especially movements, also known as locality constraints place selectional restrictions on co-occurrence and movement of phrases from one domain to another. Locality constraints have been applied to many languages and found successful. Like every other linguistic concept, complementisers are also controlled by some constraints which check its operations in syntactic studies.

The term, complementiser was coined by Rosenbaum (1967). It is used to denote a subordinate that marks a complement clause. Complementisers are functional linguistic categories which introduce complement clauses across languages. They are usually positioned at the left edge of embedded clauses where they function as heads of complement clauses. Complementisers, also known as Comp, highlight basic relationship which exist between main clause and its subordinates in the generative grammar. As a functional head, it links phrases together, that is why it is seen as a very important aspect of sentence embedding and formation of complex sentences. The complementiser phrase, CP is the highest constituent of a sentence. It occupies the specifier position, (SPEC) position whenever it occurs at word initial position of fronted constructions.

Although a linguistic universal concept, the origin of complementiser as a functional syntactic category may vary across languages but the popular view is that they can be traced to grammaticalisation from other syntactic categories. Categories like pronouns, verbs, prepositions and in some languages, noun through grammaticalisation processes can be bleached to become complementisers. For instance, in the English language, the demonstrative pronoun *'that'* functions as both determiner and complementisers. Some complementisers also originate from interrogatives. In the English language, for instance, the question morphemes such as *'how'* also function as complementiser. For example, in the sentence, *'I saw how he beat the child'* the question morpheme *'how'* grammaticalised as a complementiser which introduces the complement clause, *'how he beat the child'*. In Igbo also, the question morpheme *'onye'* is also a grammaticalised comp. An example can be found in wh- movement constructions.

The operations of complementisers differ across languages although it is a linguistic universal concept. Its study and application to the Igbo language provides insight into the extent of its universality. Ndiribe (2019) observes that the Igbo language operates a complex syntactic structure defined by different phrase types occasioned by its peculiar verb structures.

The Igbo language is spoken in the South Eastern part of Nigeria which includes Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, some parts of River state and some parts of Cross River state. It consists of different dialects which sometimes impede mutual intelligibility among speakers. This, however is checked by using the standard form of the language. Igbo has a peculiar verb structure which makes complementation a better platform for its analysis than transitivity. Although studies have been carried out on different aspects of complementation in Igbo, its

centrality in the argument structure of Igbo verbs makes its study always relevant. Also, the universality of Government and binding principles as well as the concept of complementiser and its associated constraints creates a gap especially in the Igbo language, which is the area of this study. This study is therefore an attempt to fill the gap as well as provide current reference work in syntactic studies and in the Igbo syntax in particular. This study examines some of the syntactic constraints which guide the operations of complementiser in the Igbo language. Specifically, Unit movement constraint (UMC), Comp-Island constraint CIC, phrase impenetrability and strong crossover effect were analysed. Analysis of data is anchored on the theoretical principles of the Government and binding theory of Chomsky 1981.

Previous Works

Complementisers in the generative grammar, also referred to as COMP, is a functional category which links words, phrases together. It functions mostly as the head of a syntactic head of a full clause CP. They introduce complement clauses in sentences. Generally, complementisers grammaticalise from other syntactic categories in languages. For instance, in the English language, the demonstrative pronoun 'that' functions as both determiner and complementizer. Some complementisers also originate from interrogatives. In the English language, the question morphemes such as *how* also functions as complementiser. For example, in the sentence, '*I saw how he beat the child*', the question morpheme 'how' grammaticalised as a complementiser which introduces the complement clause, '*how he beat the child*'. In Igbo also, the question morpheme *onye* is also a grammaticalised comp. Complementisers can also grammaticalise from verbs see Mmadike (2015), Onyemaechi (2023). Both identify *si*, the say verb in Igbo as a grammaticalised verb, a complementiser and a quotative marker. The complementiser phrase, CP is the highest constituent of a sentence. It occupies the specifier (SPEC-C) position at word initial position of fronted constructions. An example can be found in wh-movement construction

Foundation studies in Igbo complementation and complementiser is traceable to the works of Nwachukwu (1976) and Emenanjo (1987). Emenanjo observes that Igbo complementisers have definite selectional restrictions and distributional properties. He provides analyses of some Igbo sentences with their selectional restrictions. He identifies '*ka*', '*na*', '*kwa*' and '*ma*' as examples of grammaticalisation in the Igbo language. Writing on the multifunctionality of Igbo clauses, Uwalaka (1997) observes that Igbo complementisers introduce more than one type of clause. The implication of this observation is that analysing Igbo complementisers based on the type of clause each introduces may be difficult. She argues that Igbo complementisers can introduce more than one type of clause. She proposed a feature based approach for analysis of Igbo complementisers. This process involves identifying specific features that can distinguish them for instance, declarative, interrogative and subjunctive. The study identified *na*, *ma* and *ka* as the main complementisers in Igbo. She cites example of '*na*' which functions as an auxiliary verb in the sentence 1 below.

Ngọzi na- aga ahia.

Ngọzi is aux going market.

Ngọzi is going to the market.

Uwalaka notes that any time *na* performs the syntactic role of an auxiliary verb, it selects a DP. *Na* also functions as a preposition. This is illustrated in sentence 2 below.

Sent 2

a. Anụ dī na mkpọ.

Meat is in preserving basket.

The meat is inside the preserving basket.

b. Azụ dī n'ime ite.

Fish is aux inside pot.

The fish is inside the pot.

The behaviour of preposition in Igbo differ from that of other languages. If a '*na*' preposition precedes a noun which begins with a consonant, it is written in full as seen in sentence (2a) above. If on the other hand, the noun it precedes begins with a vowel, 'n' is written, and 'a' is replaced by apostrophe as seen in sentence (2b). below.

'Na' also functions as conjunction; in Igbo. Sentence 3 below illustrates this.

Sent 3

Ji na ede bụ nri.

Yam and cocoayam are food.

Both yam and cocoyam are food.

In line with this view, Nweye (2019) notes that Igbo complementisers do not only play the role of functional heads of embedded complement clauses, but also perform the syntactic role of complementisers in the language. He supports the idea that it is better to identify Igbo complementisers based on their distribution in sentences. This shows that most complementisers actually perform multiple functions in the Igbo language. Okeke (2014) presents an analyses of

ka and *na* and their associated constraints as instances of Igbo complementiser. He identifies clause level selectional restrictions that is, the type of clause each of the complementisers introduce as well as the sensitivity of requiring specific modal markings. He attests that *na* complementiser functions as both auxiliary verb which assists participles, and at the same time as conjunctions and complementiser. This is illustrated in sentences below

Sent 4

(a).Obioma na-edede ihe. (participles)

Obioma is write -Pat something.

Obioma is writing something.

(b).Uju na- asa akwa. (participles)

Uju is aux wash-Pat cloth.

Uju is washing cloth.

(c)Ji na ede, (conjunctions)

Yam and cocoyam

Elu na ala

Up and down

Asogwa, Nwozuzu and Mbah (2013) in their study, identified complex noun phrase, sentential subject constraint, unit movement constraints, co-ordinate structure constraint as examples of syntactic constraints applicable to the Igbo language. They observe that complex noun phrase constraints does not permit extraction of any unit of embedded relative clause. Using the sentence below, they buttress their argument.

Sent 5

Agwuruba kwari ékwà nwéri ègwa eto.

Agwuvuba sew past cloth has colour three.

Agwuvuba sew a cloth that has three colours.

*Egwa eto, ke Agwuruba kwari ékwà (nweri t,)

The sentence above contains the embedded clause, *nwere egwa eto* (have three colours) which cannot be moved as single linguistic units. They argue that any attempt to move any unit from the embedded clause renders the complex sentence ungrammatical. They also note that the use of ‘ma’ and ‘bya’ conjunction elements hinder the operation from coordinate structure constraint (CSC).

Nwenye (2019) in his analysis of complementiser in the Nigerian pidgin identifies ‘say complimentiser’ as a versatile marker which functions as both quotative marker in reported speeches, complementiser which introduces clauses and subordinating function which links clauses in complex sentences. He observes based on findings from data analysed that ‘say complementiser’ in the Nigerian pidgin allows subject/object inversion and that its position varies depending on the sentence structure while its meaning is derived based on context of use.

Ndiribe (2016) notes that Complementisers serve three grammatical functions which includes marking the clause they introduce as the complement of some other word, indicating whether the clause they introduce is finite (i.e. contains a present/past verb/auxiliary or infinitival to); and marking the illocutionary force (i.e. semantic/pragmatic function) of the clause they introduce. For example in Igbo, he observes that *na* introduces a declarative clause, *ma* an interrogative and *ka*, a subjunctive constructions. Ndiribe (2018) identifies complement heads and their syntactic positions in Igbo and tries to establish the co-occurrence restrictions among the heads and their complements. He observes that nouns, verbs, complementisers and prepositions are complement heads in Igbo while Tense phrase, (TPS), Determiner phrase (DP), participle phrase, (Part P), Infinitival phrase (InfP) and Force Phrase (ForP) functions as heads of their respective complements. He notes that in the Igbo language, syntactic positions of heads are predominantly post verbal, only noun heads are preverbal.

From the fore going, it is evident that though both constraints and complementiser are universal concepts of linguistic study, their applicability to various languages differ because different languages have different structures. This study therefore examines the applicability of these constraints in the Igbo language to ascertain the extent of its universality. It also provides an in-depth analysis of syntactic constraints which checkmate the operations of complementisers in the Igbo language and at the same time provides a current reference work for researchers in linguistics,

Unit Movement Constraint

Unit movement constraint (UMC) was postulated by Schwartz (1972) The main principle of this constraint is that members of embedded sentences can only be moved as a string of constituents not as individual linguistic units. In line with this view, Radford (1981) notes that no two unit movements can take place concurrently into COMP position. Ndimele (2004) observes that in UMC, no single movement rule is allowed to extract two or more linguistic units at a time if they do not constitute part of continuous constituent. Mbah (2010) notes that two wh-nodes

cannot be conjoined to Comp simultaneously without resulting in ungrammaticality. He cites the following examples in Igbo.

Sent 6

a. O wutere m *na* *o* *bịara*.

It pain past I that he/she come past.

It pained me that she came.

b. *Na* *o* *bịara* swutere m.

That he/she came past pained me.

In sentence (6), the *na complementiser* cannot be moved in isolation. Any such attempt renders the sentence ungrammatical. This is because the entire noun phrase in italics forms a syntactic unit.

Comp-Island constraint CIC

Meng Fan-mao (2018) defines an island as a syntactic terminology which refers to a clause or structure from which a word can not be extracted as at

random as a theme. It restricts certain dependences or movement of constituents from one syntactic environment to another. The concept was first used by John Robert Ross (1997) in his work entitled constraints on variables in syntax and was further expanded in the Generative grammar by Noam Chomsky and others. Two types of islands are identified- strong and weak islands. A strong island blocks filler gap dependencies while weak

3.0 Data Analysis

In this sub-section, the researcher highlights the Igbo complementisers and analyses their associated constraints

Igbo complementisers are: na, ma, ka, si, onye, ebe, ihe, mgbe, ndi.

3.1. Unit movement constraint (UMC).

Unit movement constraint prohibits an extraction of a single linguistic unit in an embedded clause.

Na complementiser

Sent 7

(ai) *Na ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a bụ ihe gwurụ m ike.*

That Ogu lives pres inside house this is something finish past me strength.

That Ogu lives in this house wearies me.

(ii) *Na n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu bi bụ ihe gwurụ m ike.*

That inside house this that Ogu live is something finish me strength.

That Ogu lives in this house wearies me.

(bi)* *Na ike gwurụ m bụ Ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a.*

* That strength finish i is Ogu live inside house this

(bii)* *Na bụ ihe gwurụ m ike n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu bi.*

* That is something finish i strength inside house this that Ogu live.

(c) *Na Emeka nwetere ọrụ n'Owerri bụ ihe mgbagwoju anya.*

That Emeka got past job in Owerri is something surprise eye.

That Emeka got a job in Owerri is a thing of surprise.

(ii) *Na n'Owerri ka Emeka nwetere ọrụ bụ ihe mgbagwoju anya.*

That in Owerri that Emeka gotpast job is something surprise eyes.

* *Ọ bụ ihe mgbagwoju anya na Emeka n'Owerri nwetara ọrụ.*

It is something surprise eyes that Emeka in Owerri gotpast job.

* *Ọrụ ka Emeka nwetara bụ ihe mgbagwojuanya n'Owerri.*

Sentences (7ai) and (aii) above are grammatical because these complementiser, *na* is the head of the complement clauses. *Na ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a* and *Na n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu bi*. They satisfy the unit movement constraint because they move as a linguistic unit. They also satisfy the principle of upward boundedness condition. Even after the movement, the prepositional phrases remained within the embedded clause, '*na ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a*' and '*na n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu bi*' remains grammatical. On the other hand, sentences (bi) and (bii) are ungrammatical because the complementiser *na* was moved as a single unit. This is contrary to the principle of unit movement constraint which holds that members of embedded sentences can only be moved as a string of constituents not as individual linguistic units. An attempt to demote the prepositional

phrase without its functional head, the *na comp*, renders the sentence ungrammatical. The same applies to sentence (7c). We therefore argue that *na comp* is constrained by Unit movement constraint in the Igbo language.

Ma Complementiser

Sent 8

(ai). Nneka ga- agafe *ma* ϕ *mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme*.

Nneka will aux cross if she knows what she is aux doing.

Nneka will cross if she knows what she is doing.

(ii) *Ma* ϕ *mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme*. Nneka ga- agafe .

If she knows something she is doing Nneka will-aux cross.

If she knows what she is doing she (Nneka) will cross.

The second NP, *Nneka*, in the gloss above is deleted through Equi NP deletion..

(iii)**Ma* ϕ *ga- agafe* *mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme*.

(iv)**Mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme* ϕ *ga- agafe* *ma* ϕ *mara*.

(bi) ϕ ga- adi *mma* *ma anyi* *kwenye*.

It will aux be good if we believe/agree.

It will be alright if we believe.

(ii) *Ma anyi* *kwenye*, ϕ *ga-adi* *mma*.

If we believe, it will be alright.

(iii)* *Anyi*, ϕ *ga- adi* *mma* *kwenye* *ma*.

We it will aux be good believe if.

In sentences (8ai) and (8bi) above, '*ma*' functions as syntactic head of the embedded complement clauses, *ϕ *mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme**, and **anyi* *kwenye**. The same applies to sentence (aii) where the embedded clause, **ma* ϕ *mara* *ihe* ϕ *na-eme**, is moved to sentence initial position as a string of constituents. In the specifier position, *ma* functions as the syntactic head of the inflectional projection. The sentence is grammatical because *ma* remains the functional head. This confirms that no single part of the *ma complement clause*, introduced by *ma*

complementiser can be moved as an individual unit. Its extraction can only be done as a linguistic string. That is why sentences (8ai), (bi) and (bii) are grammatical but sentences (8aii) and (aiii) and (biii) are considered ungrammatical.

Comp-Island constraint CIC

This type of constraint also forbids the extraction of a constituent out of an embedded/indirect question introduced by a complementiser. This is illustrated in sentence (9).

Sent 9

(ai). Udoka juru ma nna ya o zutara ugboala.

Udoka ask-ed if father his he bought past car.

(ii) Udoka juru ma nna ya zutara ugboala.

Udoka ask-ed if father his bought car.

(b) *Ugboala Udoka juru ma nna ya o zutara

In sentence (9ai) and (ii), *ma* functions as heads of the embedded clauses, *ma nna ya o zutara ugboala* and *ma nna ya zutara ugboala* making the two sentences grammatical. Extraction of linguistic unit from embedded relative clauses introduced by “ma” rendered the transformed sentence ungrammatical. Sentence (9b) is ungrammatical because movement of the extracted object of the embedded sentence *ugboala* violates subadjacency condition. The extracted unit travels a long distance before landing at its new site in the specifier position. The moved object requires insertion of *ka* complementiser not a *ma* complementiser to make the sentence grammatical. The embedded complement clause in sentences 9ai and aii constitute islands.

However in sentence (9c) below

(ci) Nneka juru ma nne ya o zutara azu.

Nneka ask-ed if mother her she buy past fish.

(ii) *Azu ka* Nneka juru ma nne ya o zutara ^t.

Fish that Nneka asked if mother her *she* bought.

The direct object was moved to sentence initial position, specifier position, the first comp *ka* was inserted before the first NP. This satisfies the upward Boundedness condition (UBC) which stipulates that no constituent can be moved rightward out of the next higher clause. This implies that UBC prohibits constituent demotions, right movement but allows constituent promotion that is, left dislocation.

Sent 10

(a) *Na Ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a* bụ ihe gwurụ m ike.

That Ogu lives pres inside house this is what finish me strength.

That Ogu lives in this house makes me tired.

(b) **Na ike gwurụ m bụ* Ogu bi n'ime ụlọ a.

*Na bụ ihe gwurụ m ike n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu bi

Sentence (a) and (b) above are grammatical because they satisfy the upward boundedness condition the prepositional phrases *n'ime ụlọ a* remained with the embedded relative clauses *ogu bi n'ime ụlọ*, *n'ime ụlọ a ka Ogu*. (bi) sent (c) and (d) are ill-formed because the preposition phrase was demoted out of the relative clause which housed it. Sentences (c) and (d). do not satisfy the upward boundedness condition. It is evident that the embedded CP is a barrier to extraction in sentences (c) and (d) above.

(11a) *Na Emeka nwetere ọrụ n'oweri* bụ ihe mgbagoju anya

That Emaka got past job in Owerri is something surprise eye

That Uche got a job in Owerri is a thing of suprise

(b) *Na n'Owerri ka Emeka nwetara ọrụ* bụ ihe mgbagwoju anya,

(c) *Ọ bụ ihe mgbagwoju anya na Emeka nwetara ọrụ n'Owerri.*

It is something suprising eye that Emeka got past job in Owerri.

It is a thing of surprise that Emeka got job in Owerri.

**Na ọrụ ka Emeka nwetarabụ ihe mgbagwoju anya n'owerri*

The Strong Cross Over Effect

The strong cross over effect is proposed by Postal (1971). It states that no constituent can be moved across its co-indexed pronoun. Movement rule does not permit movement of a constituent across a pronoun which share the same semantic identity. This is in line with principle B of the binding theory which stipulates that a pronoun must be free in its minimal domain. This is illustrated in the examples below.

(ai) *O kweyere na Nneka ga- alụ onye? echo*

He/she agreed past that Nneka will aux marry who?

(ii) Onye ka ọ kwenyere na ọ ga- alụ?

Who that he agreed past that he will aux marry?

(iii) Onye ka ọ chere Nneke ga- alụ?

Who that he/she think Nneka will marry.

In sentence (c) above there is a case of strong cross over. The adjoined question morpheme *onye* which is equivalent to wh-phrase in English is co-indexed with the pronoun *O* that was crossed during the movement of question phrase to SPEC-C¹ position. This does not satisfy the principle of binding theory which states that a pronoun must be free in its minimal domain. Anaphoric relation should be prohibited between operator or its variable and a crossed over pronoun.

sị complementiser

sị, like *na* comp, introduces declarative sentences, that is, sentences used to declare someone's intention. Examples are given in sentence 10 .

(ai) Ugochkwu *si* na ya ga- abịa.

Ugochukwu said past that he will aux come.

(ii) Ugochkwu *si* ya ga- abịa.

Ugochukwu said past he will aux come.

Ugochukwu said he will come.

(bi) Nne ha chere *sị* na ha ga- eri ji.

Mother them thought past what that they will aux eat yam.

Their mother thought that they will eat yam.

(bii) Nne ha chere *sị* ha ga-eri ji.

Mother them thought that they will eat yam.

In sentence (10ai) and (10bi), *si* functions as a mere emphasiser which its presence or absence does not affect the meaning of the sentence. The emphasiser marker, *si* occupies a higher position than *na* which functions as a complementiser. This is because *na* is located in the domain of the main clause. It is more like a cognate verb. The meaning of *si* is derived from its attachment to the verb *kwuru*. In sentence (10ai) and (bii), *si* functions as a complementiser which introduces embedded complement clauses, *si ya ga- abịa* and *sị ha ga-eri ji*. The main

verb grammaticalises as complementiser. This aligns with the views of Mmadike (2015) and Onyemaechi, (2024) who observe that Igbo verbs grammaticalise as complementisers. In sentences (10ai) and (bi) where *si* functions as a full verb, it is not constrained by anything and so it is free from every form of restriction. On the other hand, in sentences (10aii) and (10bii), where *si* functions as complementiser the head of the complement clause, *si ya ga- abia. and si ha ga-eri ji*, it cannot be extracted as a single unit because it is part of the embedded clause. Attempt to move any part of the embedded clause will result in violating phrase impenetrable principle and violation of island principles. In syntactic islands, movement can only be done as a structure. Sentences (11a-b) confirms this argument.

(ai) Ujunwa maara *si ya ga- alota*.

Ujunwa knows *that he will aux return*.

(ii)* *Si ya ga- alota* Ujunwa maara.

That she will aux return Uju knows.

(bi) Ugonna chere *si nna ya na-ebute ego*.

Ugonna think *that father his is aux hitting money*.

Ugonna thinks *his father makes much money*.

(ii) * *Si nna ya na-ebute ego.ka* Ugonna chere.

That father his is aux hit money that Ugonna think.

That father his is aux making much money Ugonna thinks.

(c) Ugonna chere *na nna ya na- ebute ego*.

Ugonna thinks *that father his is aux hit money*.

(d) Ihuoma *si na ya ga-abu dibia* Bekee.

Ihuoma said *that she will aux be doctor white*.

Ihuoma said *that she would be a doctor*.

In sentences (11ai) and (bi), the *si complementiser* is located in the embedded complement clause thus, it functions as the head of the complement clause. It satisfies the headedness principle that every subordinate clause must have a functional head. The complementiser, *si* licenses the complement clause, *ya ga- alota and nna ya na-ebute ego*. In sentences (11aii) and (bii), movement of *si complementiser* to sentence initial position renders the sentence ungrammatical, because, *si* is not bound therefore the boundedness principle is violated. The principle of phrase

impenetrable principle is not satisfied because any goal c-commanded by the head of a phrase is impenetrable to further syntactic analysis Both *na* and *sị* complementisers are glossed as *that* in Igbo and can even occupy the same syntactic position as head of complement clause, however, both of them cannot successfully undergo movement to sentence initial positions. While *na* can be moved to specifier position at sentence initial position, *sị* cannot undergo such movement. Sentence (11c) illustrates this. Whenever the two find themselves in the same syntactic structure with embedded complement clause in the Igbo language, *sị* naturally assumes a higher position of finite verb while *na* functions as the functional head of the embedded clause. This is illustrated in sentence (11d) above.

(11d)Emeka kwuru sị na ya ga-abịa.

Emeka past say that h/shee will come.

Emeka said that he will come.

*Sị ya ga-abịa ka Emeka kwuru..

Conclusion

The study has been able to show that complementisers exist in the Igbo language just like in so many other languages and they function as heads of complement clauses. Most conjunctions in Igbo also function as complementisers hence, complementisers are seen as grammaticalised conjunctions in Igbo. The constraints that regulate the operations of complementisers in Igbo include: Unit movement constraint (UMC), Comp-Island constraint CIC, phrase impenetrability and strong crossover effect They usually function as functional heads of complement clause. We therefore argue that *na comp* is constrained by Unit movement constraint in the Igbo language unit movement constraint, Comp-Island constraint CIC, upward boundedness condition and strong cross over effect, phrase impenetrable principle and islands. The complementisers *na* and *sị* were discovered to be related because both can be glossed as *that* and can even occupy the same syntactic position as heads of complement clause, However, they differ because while *na* can be moved to specifier position at sentence initial position, *sị* cannot undergo such movement. Also, whenever the two find themselves in the same syntactic structure with embedded complement clause in the Igbo language, *sị* naturally assumes a higher position of finite verb through argument promotion while *na* becomes demoted as the functional head of the embedded complement clause.

References

- Asogwa, P, Nwozuzu, G.I. Mbah, B.M. (2013). Syntactic constraints on Igbo. In *Nsukka working papers in Language, linguistics and literature*. Chris Agbedo (ed). Nsukka: 108-114.
- Chomsky, N. (1981). Lectures on government and Binding. Dordrecht: Foris.

- Chomsky, N. Barriers. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (1978). *Elements of modern Igbo grammar*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Hui, L Fan-mao, M. (2018). On island constraints and violations. *Journal of literature and art studies*.8(10).146-152.
- Mbah, B.M. (2010). *GB syntax: Theory and application to Igbo*. Enugu: Association of Nigerian authors.
- Mmadike, B. I. (2015). Igbo verbs of speaking. *Igbo Language Studies*, 1.151-162.
- Ndimele, O.M..(2004) The parameters of Universal grammar: A Government-Binding Approach, Owerri: African Educational Service.
- Ndiribe, M.O.(2018). A minimalist analysis of complementation in Igbo. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- Ndiribe, M.O.(2020). A minimalist analysis of verbal complementation in Igbo. *Journal of language teaching and research* 11(5) 671-68.
- Nwachukwu, P.A.(1976).Noun phrase sentential complementation in Igbo. Doctoral Thesis University of London.
- Nwenye, G.O.(2019) A feature based analysis of Igbo complementisers. *Journal of the Linguistic association of Nigeria*. JOLAN 22(2) 56-69.
- Onyemaechi, C..B.(2023).Grammaticalisation in the Igbo language. Doctoral dissertation presented at to the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Radford, A.(1981).Transformational syntax. Cambridge.
- Rosenbaun, P.S. (1967). *The grammar of English predicate complement constructions*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Uwalaka, M.A. (1997). The functional category COMP in Igbo. *Africana Humanities Monograph* 5.



Vol 9, Issue 1 | Date of Published: July 2025

[CONSTRAINTS ON IGBO COMPLEMENTISERS](#)

Abia Journal of Humanities

