Baba Kura Alkali Gazali
University of Maiduguri

Wh-movement in Kanuri: A Minimalist approach

Abstract. The major goal of linguistics study is to explicate the phenomenon known as language. Towards this, Linguistics scholars have originated theories that would help in accounting for the behaviour of languages. OPERATOR MOVEMENT is one of such scholastic views which have been advanced to analyse expressions that contain an OPERATOR of some kind. In this work, attension will be focused on INTERROGATIVE OPERATOR in Kanuri. This work therefore examines the nature of Wh- movement in Kanuri language using MINIMALIST frame work. In conducting the research, the researcher uses his native speaker intuition and other three competent native speakers of the Kanuri language to validate his data. The outcome of the study reveals three types of Wh-movement in Kanuri and postposition stranding constraint in Kanuri. The three types of Wh- movement are the subject preposed to complementizer position through wh- movement, the direct object preposed to the complementizer position throuh wh-movement and the subject of the main clause raises and moved into the subject of relative clause in order to check question feature of comp in Kanuri

Introduction

Greenberg (1966) classifies Kanuri under the Saharan branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum of African Languages. Cyffer (1998:11) observes that Kanuri is the widest spread Language in the Lake Chad region and is spoken in all the countries bordering the Lake (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria). Kanuri is the major language of the people of present Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria. Native speakers of the language are also found in Dutse and Hadeja in Jigawa state,

Azare and Misau in Bauchi State, and Lafiyan, Barebari, and Bukuru in Nasarawa and Plateau

States (Bulakarima 1987).

Constituent Structure of Kanuri Sentences

As in many Languages, noun phrases and verb phrases constitute Kanuri sentence. Nouns

and pronouns are head of NP; any other constituent that comes under the NP is optional these

include modifiers as well as specifiers. Kanuri language provides an example of a language

which strictly maintains its basic and permissible word-order throughout its grammar in main

declarative sentences. This is confirmed by data available from research spanning the last three

centuries (Hutchison 1976). The basic word-order is S.O.V. (Subject-Object-Verb) as illustrated

in examples (1 a and b) below:

> A. *tada- də   bəri   zəwin*
>   Boy –the   food   he is eating
>   S   O   V
>   The boy is eating food
>
> B. *Modu   ayawa   ciwuna*
>   Modu   banana   he bought
>   S   O   V
>   Modu bought (a) banana

The only possible variant of this basic ordering is O.S.V. (Object-Subject-Verb) as illustrated in

examples (2a and b) below:

> A. *bəri- ga   tada - də -ye   zəwin*
>   Food-DOM   boy – the-SM   he is eating
>   O   S   V
>   The boy is eating food
>
> B. *ayawa - ga   Modu – ye   ciwuna*
>   Banana-DOM   Modu- SM   he bought
>   O   S   V
>   Modu bought (a) banana

The above examples show the basic and permissible word-order in main declarative sentences in Kanuri. The verbs are in fixed final position and all the constituents occur before the verb. It is on the basis of this basic word ordering that Kanuri is classified as "rigid" subtype of s.o.v. languages (Greenberg, 1963:79).

Cyffer (1983) identifies active and passive sentences in Kanuri; Cyffer (1989) observes that Wh- question sentences in Kanuri are formed by involving the use of interrogative word *abi* 'what', *ndu* who etc. According to Cyffer (1998) In Wh- question sentence one part of speech is in question. Fannami (2002) discusses NP movement using principle of move – alpha in Kanuri but none of their studies discuss Wh- movement in Kanuri. Thefore, this study will provide how Wh- phrases are preposed into sentence initial positions in Kanuri using the minimalist program.

The Minimalist Program

In the early 1960`s linguists were trying to explain language acquisition and linguistics variation with the "formal frame work" which relied on rules and constructions to explain grammar. By the early 1980`s, linguists were building upon the earlier theories with a new frame work, that sought to eliminate this reliance on rules and constructions in favour of a more generalised explanation of language acquisition. Perhaps the most widely known instance of the principles and parameters frame work was Government and Binding theory, which was primarily concerned with abstract syntactic relations. The research conducted in Government and Binding yielded promising results, and was widely accepted. According to Hornstein (2005) Government and Binding did not explain everything; it was viewed as "absolutely correct, in outline". However, there was still a problem; the system that Government and Binding described was still very complex.

In the early 1990`s, the minimalist program was presented as a solution to this complexity. The minimalist program takes the assumption that language is a "perfect system" and that the faculty of language fits the constraints of this system in the most efficient way possible (Chomsky 1995:1). Within this assumption, the minimalist program attempts to uncover how this optimal system is structured and what its underlying mechanisms are.

The Minimalist program takes into account "two types of economy considerations" (Hornstein 2001:1). The first of the two types is methodological economy. This type of economy considers factors "such as simplicity and parsimony", and attempts to reduce the number of factors, modules and principles present in any given theory. The second type of economy is "substantive economy" which places a value on the available resources: derivations should be as computationally efficient as possible, maximizing resources" (Hornstein 2006:6).

Wh- Movement in Minimilization Program

Chomsky (1995) suggests that Wh- movement is triggered by a strong operator feature of the functional C – head: "the natural assumption is that any C may have an operator feature and this feature is a morphological property of such operators as Wh-. For an appropriate C, the operators raise for feature checking to the checking domain of C:[spec, Cp]" thereby satisfying their scopal properties (Chomsky 1995:199). If the operator feature on C is strong, movement is overt (e.g. English), and, consequently, if the operator feature is weak, Wh- movement is postponed (e.g. Chinese). However, the trigger of movement overt or covert is always located on a target.

In minimalist inquiry Chomsky (2000:44) modifies the proposal, dispensing with LF movement: all movement operations must happen before the point of spell-out. Wh- movement in this frame work has the following mechanism: "the Wh- phrase has an interpretable feature

[wh-] and an interpretable feature [q], which matches the uninterpretable probe [q] on C seeks the goal, a Wh- phrase, and once the probe locates the goal, F [wh]) are checked and deleted. This feature checking is done by means of agree, no movement is involved. According to Chomsky (2000) the uninterpretable [Wh-] feature of a Wh- phrase is "analogous to structural case for nouns". Consequently, it does not have an independent status, but is a reflex of certain properties of Q.

Since uninterpretable features are checked without triggering movement, in order to account for displacement of a Wh- phrase, Chomsky postulates an EPP- feature on a C head. He suggests that the EPP- feature of C is similar to the EPP-feature of T. It requires [Spec. CP] to be filled which results by the displacement of a Wh- phrase.

Question Types n Kanuri

There are two types of questions formation identified in Kanuri (Hutchison 1976, Cyffer 1998 and Fannami 2002). The two types of question formations are:

i. Echo question sentence

ii. Wh- question sentence

Wh- question sentences in Kanuri are formed by involving the use of interogative word *abi* 'what', *ndu* 'who', *ndara* 'where' etc. In Wh- question sentence one part of speech is in question (Cyffer 1998, Fannami 2002). Consider the following examples below:

Modu   abi   cuwu
Modu   what   bought
What did Modu buy

Ndu   zawa   cuwu
Who   cap   bought
Who bought a cap

Modu   zawa   ndara - n cuwu
Modu   cap   where - in bought
Where did Modu buy (the) cap

Structures like those above are some times referred to as Wh- in- situ questions, since the interrogative Wh- operator expression *abi* what is not preposed but rather remains in situ (i.e. in place) in the canonical (i.e. "usual") position associated with its grammatical function i.e., *abi* 'what' in (3) is the complement of the verb cuwu 'bought' and the complements are canonically positioned before their verbs in Kanuri. The direct object and indirect object can be Wh- moved into sentence initial positions. Consider the following examples below:
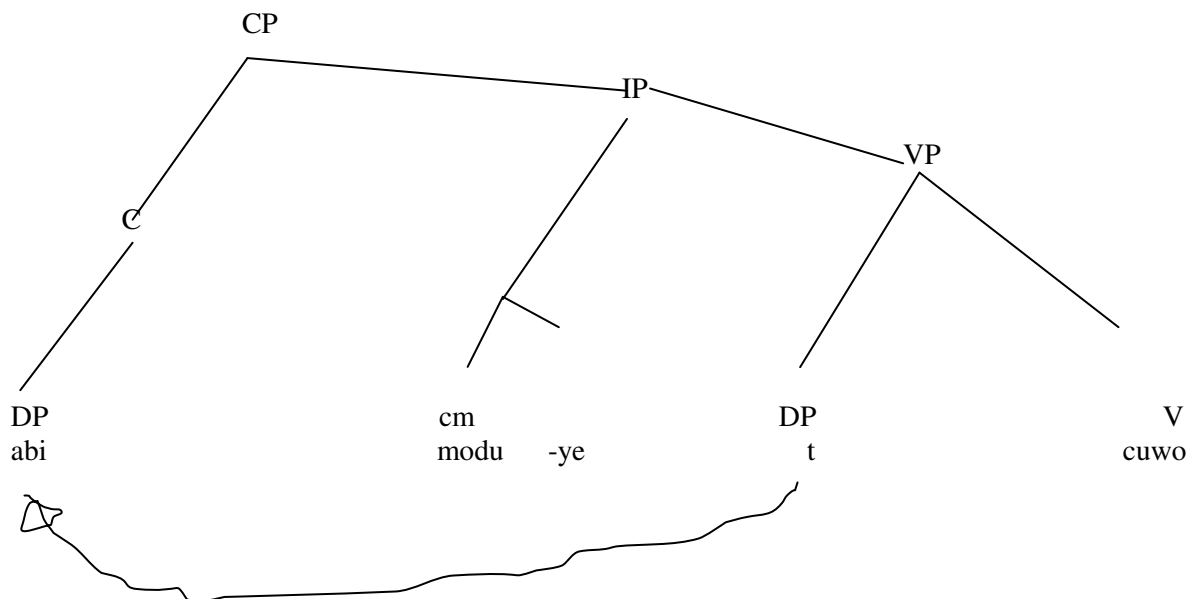
a. *Modu   zawa   cuwu*
  M   cap   bought
Modu bought (a) cap

b. *Abi/$_i$ Modu-ye t/ $_i$ cuwu*
  What   Modu   bought
What did Modu buy

a. *Modu   zawa   Ali-ro   cuwu*
  Modu   cap   Ali-IOM   bought
Modu bought (a) cap for Ali

b. *Modu   zawa   ndu-ro   cuwu*
  Modu   cap   who- IOM bought
Modu bought a cap for who

c. *Ndu-ro /$_i$ modu-ye zawa t/$_i$ cuwu*
  Who-IOM   modu-SM   cap   bought
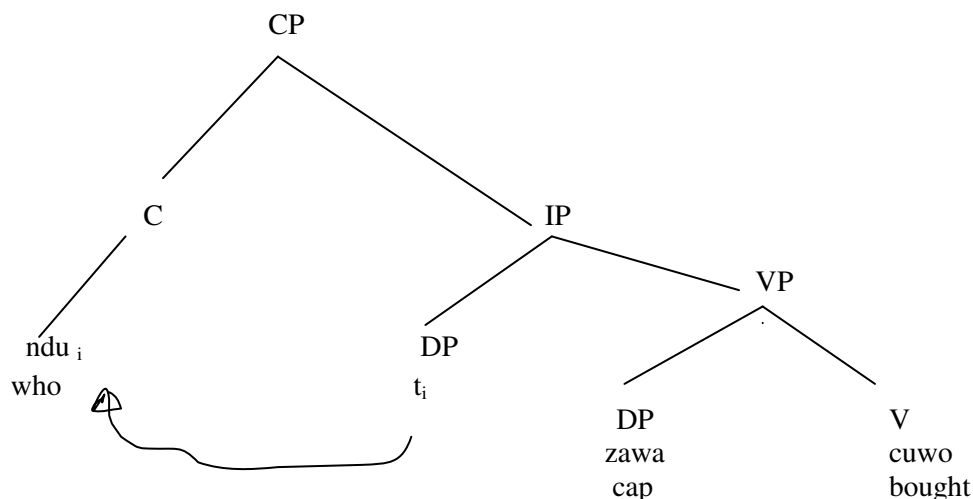Who did Modu buy the cap for

The above example shows that the direct object preposed to the complementiser position through

Wh- movement. The co-indexation shows the extraction site and the landing site of the moved

categories. The subject *Modu* is case-marked with subject marker –*ye* because the object moved

across the subject. Cases are marked to avoid structural ambiguity when there is movement.

Modu in the above structure can be interpreted as the subject of the sentence or direct object if

the subject case is not marked. The ambiguity resulted as a result of movement of the Wh- phrase

abi in VP Specifier position to CP Specifier position and the crossed DP subject complement in

IP Specifier position is marked with subject marker –. Cases are marked to disambiguate

sentences when there is movement.

In subject movement, Interrogative word "ndu" is used in place of the subject. It is non

crossing movement where the subject of the verb in IP Specifier position raised and moves into

CP Specifier position.Consider the conversation between two speakers:

Speaker A: *ndu   zawa   cuwu?*   Speaker B: *Modu*
               Who   cap   bought
               Who bought (the) cap?
The utterance of speaker A has understood subject Modu being replaced with

interrogative word *ndu* who. The subject *Modu* in IP Specifier position moved to CP Specifier

position to form a Wh- question. We will have a simplified derivation below:

```
                        CP
                       /  \
                      /    \
                     /      \
                    C        IP
                   /        /  \
                  /        /    \
                 /        /      VP
                /        /       /\
             ndu_i      DP      /  \
             who       t_i     /    \
                              DP     V
                            zawa    cuwo
                             cap    bought
```

The above example shows that the subject is preposed to the complementiser position through Wh- movement. It appears that no movement has taken place, because it involves movement of an external argument, in contrast with internal arguments, where movement is clear because of the distance of movement. In the case of an external argument, the distance of movement is always very short. The above structure is derived from the understood subject of the conversation between the two speakers. The derived structure is Wh- movement from the IP- Specifier position to CP Specifier position leaving behind trace under IP.

Pied-piping and Wh- Movement in Kanuri

According to Radford (1997) pied-piping is a process by which a moved constituent (or set of features) drags one or more other constituents (or sets of features) along with it when it moves. Pied-piping is allowed in Kanuri. Consider the following example of pied-piping below:

a.   *Modu   zawa   ndara- n   cuwu*
         Modu   cap   where- in   bought
          Where did Modu buy (the) Cap

   b. * *ndara/ $_i$ Modu   zawa   t/$_i$ -n   cuwu*
          where   Modu   cap   in   bought
          Where did Modu buy (the) cap

   c. *ndara-n/$_i$ Modu   zawa   t/$_i$ cuwu*
          where   Modu   cap   bought
          Where did Modu buy (the) cap

The above structure in (a) above shows that the Wh is in-situ question. Since the interrogative Wh- operator expression *ndara* 'where' does not get preposed but rather remains in situ (i.e. place) in the canonical (i.e "usual") position associated with its grammatical function. The example (10b) above is ungrammatical because the wh- operator *ndara* 'where' moves into the specifier position leaving behind his complement the postpositional particle –*n* stranded. Consider first why moving the Wh- determiner without its complement leads to ungrammaticality in Kanuri.

The sentence below is ungrammatical because the postposition –*n* has been stranded or orphaned.
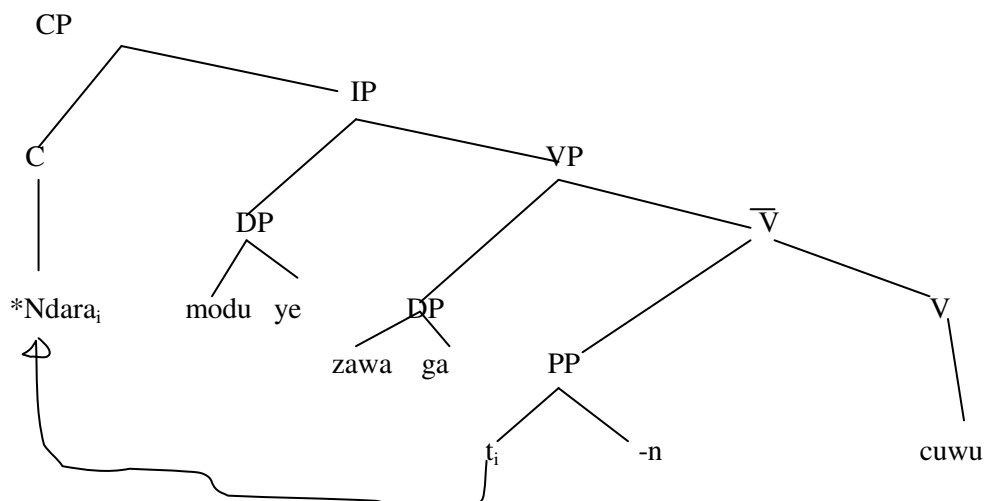
The postposition –n has been separated from its complement *ndara* 'where'. Since example (11) is

ungrammatical suggests that there is a constraint against postposition stranding in Kanuri. The

postposition –n cannot be preposed on its own, since this would result in violation of the chain uniformity

principle which Chomsky (1995) says a chain should be uniform with regard to its phrase structure status.

So the postposition complement *ndara* 'where' is pied-piped along with it, and subsequently the whole

PP *ndaran* 'where in' moves to Spec-CP in order to check the Wh- feature of Comp in Kanuri.

Wh- movement is not only about interrogation, it is also about relative clause in Kanuri. This is

because in both relativizations as well as in interrogation; the landing site for the moved element is the

Comp. Consider the following examples in (12 a, b and c) below:

a. *Kam   isəna-də- ro   [Modu   wotia ruwuzə]*
   Person   came-RC-DIR.   Modu   letter he wrote]
   Modu wrote letter to the person that came

b. *Modu* t/i *kam   isəna-də- ro   [t/i wotia ruwuzə]*
   Modu   person came-RC-DIR.   Letter he wrote
   Modu wrote letter to the person that came

c. *ndu* t/i *kam   isəna-də-ro   [t/i wotia ruwuzə]*
   who   person came-RC-DIR   Letter he wrote
   Who wrote letter to the person that came

The above examples show two clauses in each example. The first clause is relative clause

introduced by the determiner *də* and the main clause in bracketing. The subject of the main clause *Modu*

raised and moved to the subject of the relative clause in (10 b) above. The subject of the main clause is replaced with interrogative word *ndu* who and later moves to the subject of the relative clause as represented in the diagram below:

11   CP

IP

VP

C   DP   I̅

ndu $_i$ kam   V   I   IP

isəna   RC   VP

də   I   DP

-ro   t$_i$ DP   V

wotia   ruwuzə
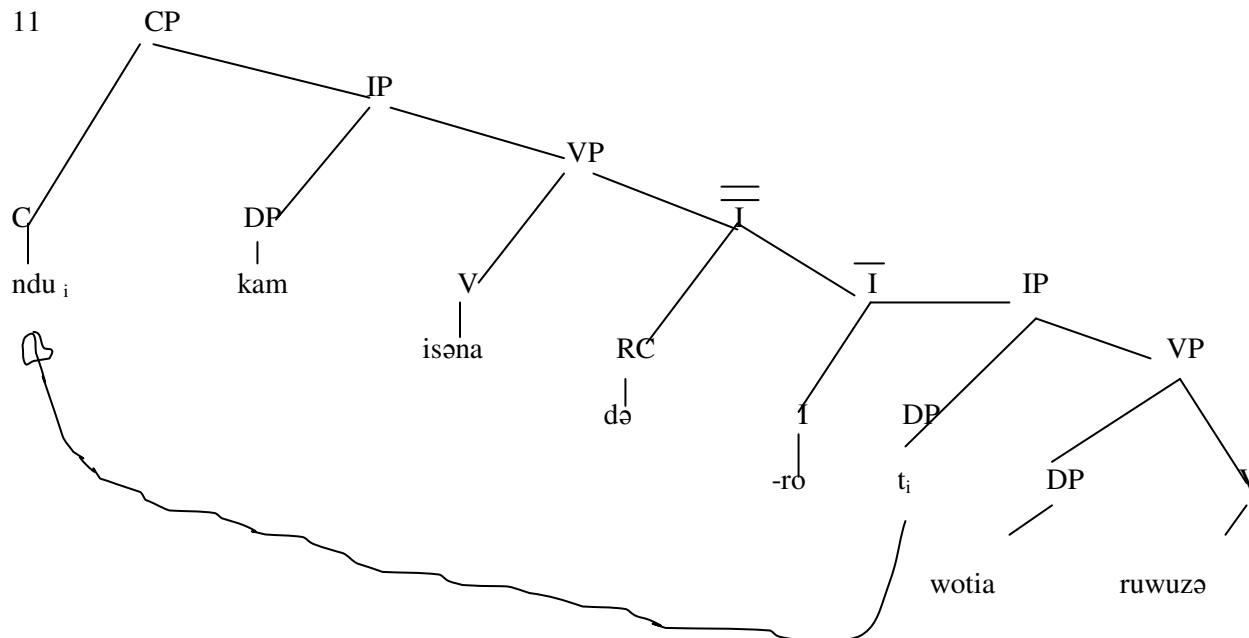
The above example shows that the DP under IP Specifier position in the major clause moves and raises into CP. Spec. position under the relative clause. The subject complement under the relative clause is not case marked because the moved category is an external movement not within the relative clause.

Conclusion

From our analysis of Wh- movement in Kanuri using the minimalist program, we are able to identify three types of Wh- movement and postposition stranding constraint in Kanuri. The three types of Wh- movement identified in the study are:

(i) The direct object preposed to the complementiser position through Wh- movement to check the question feature of comp.

(ii) The subject preposed to the complementiser position through Wh- movement to check the question feature of comp.

(iii) The subject of main clause raises and moved into the subject of relative clause in order to check question feature of comp.

The study further identifies pied-piping and stranding in Wh- question feature.

References

Bulakarima, S.U. (1987) Consonant Variation among the Major Kanuri Dialects

Synchronic Analysis. M.A. Dissertation, Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri.

Chomsky, N. (1995) *The Minimalist Program.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press

Chomsky, N. (2000) Minimalist inquiry: the frame work". In: R. Martin, D. Michaels and J. Uriagereka (eds.), step by step: Essays in Minimalist Syntax in Honour of Howard Lasnik.Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press.

Cyffer, N. (1998) *A Sketch of Kanuri.* Koln. Rudiger. Verlag.

Fannami, M. (2002) Government and Binding approach in Kanuri Syntax, Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri.

Greenberg, J.H. (1963) *Languages of Africa.* Bloomington Indiana University Press.

Hornstein, N. (2001) *Move! A Minimalist Theory of construal.* Maiden MA: Black well.

Hutchison, J.P. (1976) Aspect of Kanuri Syntax. PhD thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Radford, A. (1997) *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English.* Cambridge University press, London.