

Variation in Complement Order in English: Implications for Interlanguage Syntax

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Abstract : Complement ordering principles of natural language phrases (XPs) stipulate that Head terms be consistently placed phrase initially or phrase-finally, yielding two basic theoretical orders - Head - Complement order or Complement - Head order. This paper examines the principles which determine complement ordering in English V- and N-bar structures. The aim is to determine the extent to which complement linearisations in the two phrase types are consistent with the two theoretical orders outlined above given the flexible and varied nature of natural language structures. The objective is to see whether there are variation(s) in the complement linearisations of the XPs studied and the implications which such variations hold for the inter-language syntax of English and Ibibio. A corpus-based approach was employed in obtaining the English data. V- and -N - bar structures containing complement structures were isolated for analysis. Data were examined from the perspective of the X-bar and Government - theories of Chomsky's (1981) Government-Binding format. Findings from the analysis show that in V - bar structures in English, heads are consistently placed phrase - initially yielding a Head - Complement order; however, complement linearisation in the N - bar structures studied exhibited parametric variations. Thus, in some N - bar structures in English the nominal head is ordered to the left whereas in others, the head term occurs to the right. It may therefore be concluded that the principles which determine complement ordering are both Language - Particular and Phrase - specific following insights provided within Phrasal Syntax.

Keywords : complement order, complement-head order, head-complement order, language-particular principles

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