THE VERB PHRASE IN ITS SENTENTIAL ASPECT AND ITS IMPACT ON A SUCCESSFUL THEME-RHEME RELATION: A STUDY OF SOME EXCERPTS FROM GIWA AND KAMAL'S PROSE WRITING

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Abstract

Many scholars have dwelt extensively on the concept of verb in English and its complementation (i.e. VP), which is considered as rheme in discourse. Such complementation may constitute a simple or a complex rhemic structure. It is against this notion that this paper studies some descriptive sentences in Giwa's I'd Rather Die and Kamal's Someone Somewhere, explore and analyse the various syntactic properties/ structures used in them and account on how best they constitute the rhemes of their respective themes. The researcher uses purposive sampling technique to select some sentences, which the novelists use to describe some characters in the novels under study. The paper theorises the Brown and Miller's categorisation of verbs and analyses the way they have been manipulated by the novelists in the sampled sentences. The findings have revealed that both the two novels use intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, transitive locative and ditransitive locative at different degrees with similar or different VP structures. Copular verb is only used in Giwa's novel. The paper has also discovered that the two novelists almost use transitive verbs at the same syntactic maturity level. They equally use ditranstive at the same rate, even though Giwa's usage is ditransitive locative. Finally, the paper has also found that intransitive locative is used in the sampled sentences, despite the fact that Brown and Miller do not categorise it. The paper, therefore, recommends that intransitive locative should be recognised as another category of verb since it manifests practically, as contained in some of the sampled sentences analysed. Hence, Brown and Miller's categorisation of verbs should be considered as a guide.

Key Words: Verb(s), Verb Phrase, Rheme, Theme, Sentence(s), Verb Categories

Introduction

Writing plays an important role in our professional and personal lives. By definition, it is an act of communication, a purposeful means of addressing an audience. However, writing is currently viewed in academic circles as more than just a tool for communication (Adamu, 2015). Therefore, the ability to convey meaning perfectly in written text is a crucial skill for academics and professional success.

Writing is one of the most authentic and interactive ways of transferring thoughts and ideas to others (Hossein & Samira 2011:65). Halliday (1989) refers writing as 'a negotiate and explanatory act requiring great judgment: the ability to express one's ideas in writing especially in second language coherently and   accurately is a major achievement that even many native speakers of English never truly master it. Writing is the act of putting down ideas on paper, as well as one's feeling and emotions are presented graphically using graphic symbols. In other words, writing is a way of communication and it involves using words to form sentences in paragraphs on a particular topic. This implies that writing has to do with arrangement of sentences into paragraphs, which form a body of writing.

The problem in this research concerns with how do written texts, in this case novels, use different verb phrases to exhibit successful rhemes, which give new information about the themes that the sentences carry along? One point that proves the justification of the research is that in the field of discourse analysis, whatever comes after the theme is the rheme, irrespective of the nature of the complexity of the syntactic elements that make up the rheme. So, this paper aims at exploring the various syntactic properties that are found in Aliyu Kamal's *Someone Somewhere* and Audee T. Giwa's *I'd Rather Die* and account for the various verb phrases used to describe some characters in the novels, which shows the degree of their rhemic success. That is to say, the paper studies some excerpts from the novels and analyses different verbal phrase structures that manifest in them and accounts on how best they constitute the rhemes of their respective themes.

The Verb Phrase

The verb phrase, according to Omorodion (2007: 86), is a group of words with a verb as head-word. The group of words can be made up of a main verb, and one or more auxiliary verbs. The verb phrase consists of all the verb forms that can occur between the noun phrase and the complement. The verb phrase, as maintained by Quirk and Greenbaum (2000:38- 39) and Omorodion (ibid) among other scholars, can be a finite or non-finite verb. For example

        1, (a) He writes stories (finite)

          (b) To write stories is an added advantage (non-finite)

       2. (a) She is working (finite)

          (b) I found her working (non-finite)

It should be noted that the syntactic form of the verb phrase is represented by the Phrase Structure Rule (Chomsky 2002:26) as something that consists of a verb and a noun phrase (i.e. VP   V+ NP). It is also necessary to note that where the verb phrase in a sentence contains more structures than the properties explained above, the VP constituent accommodates other optional properties like a prepositional phrase and/or an adverbial phrase. This may be reflected on the rule as VP   V+NP+(PP)+(AdvP).

Many scholars like Martin (2000), Quirk et al. (1972 & 1985), Thompson (1996), Quirk and Greenbaum (2000), Oluikpe (1991), Morley (2000), Huddleston (1981), Halliday (1990), Greenbaum (1996), Bloor and Bloor (2000), Boadi, Grieve and Nwanko (1968), Brown and Miller (1991), Cobuiilds (1990), Lyons (1968), Omorodion (2007), Radford (1997), Azar (1999) and Murthy (2007) among others, have dwelt extensively on the concept of verb in English and its complementation (i.e. VP) which is considered as rheme in discourse. Such complementation may constitute a simple or a complex rhemic structure.

Sentential Aspect
In this context, sentential aspect refers to the situation in which the verb phrase manifests in the sentence that it is used. Therefore, a sentence, especially in a written form, is easily identifiable by its terminal punctuation mark; that is the punctuation mark that comes at the end of the stretch of an utterance. It is imperative to state that the terminal punctuation marks that are normally used in English are the full stop (.); the question mark (?); and the exclamation mark (!). It follows therefore that a correctly punctuated written piece that ends with one of these marks is a sentence (Olu Tomori 2004:50).

According to Oluikpe (1981: 70-75), there are three main sentence types from which good writers choose. The sentences are simple, complex and compound. A simple sentence is a sentence containing only one verb irrespective of its length. For example:
       3. They responded.
       4. One of the students went to the Dean's office.

A compound sentence is a type of sentence that combines either two or more simple sentences joined together by coordinating conjunctions. For example:
       5. Did he assist or neglect you?
       6. She bought a scratch card and applied on line.

A complex sentence is a type of sentence that is having a main clause and one or more subordinate clause(s). For example:
       7. When the crisis began, shots were fired in the air.
       8. My sister lives with the woman whose daughter is my classmate.

Meanwhile, when we talk about aspect, it may be referring to the two sets of aspectual contrasts in English: perfective/non-perfective and progressive/non-progressive (Quirk et al. 1972:90). Alternatively, Quirk and Greenbaum (2000:40) describe aspect as something that concerns the manner in which the verbal action is experienced or regarded (for example as completed or in progress).

Theme - Rheme Relation
In this regard, it could be asserted that there is a strong relation between theme and rheme of different sentence structures in English. According to Brown and Yule (1983:126), theme is referred to as a formal category which stands as the left-most constituent of the sentence (i.e. the starting point of the sentence).

Nevertheless, it is important to say that while Berry (1989), Fries (1983), Martin (1986), Hassan (1989), Matthiessen (1995a, 1995b), Eggins (1994), and Shibatani and Thompson (1996) believe that theme provides a sort of framework for the interpretation of a message, rheme plays a greater role in such interpretation. This is because it is the rheme that supplies most relevant information for the interpretation to be coherent. In other words, rheme, according to Brown and Yule (1983, as quoted from Mathesius 1942) stands for everything that follows theme in the sentence which consists of 'what the speaker (writer) states about, or in regard to, the starting point of the utterance'. Such rheme is, therefore, realised through verb phrase.

This means that in order to realize different structural rhemes, it is agreed that one has the discretion of manipulating syntax to make their point (Brown and Yule, 1983). For example in the following structures, same propositional content is expressed:
9 (a) John kissed Mary.
    (b) Mary was kissed by John.
    (c) It was John who kissed Mary.
    (d) It was Mary who was kissed by John.
    (e) What John did was kiss Mary.
    (f) What John kissed was Mary.
    (g) Mary, John kissed her.

Even though, in the above sentences, the common assertion is that of kissing and that John did the kissing and that Mary was the one who was kissed, the syntactic manipulation of the sentences yield different rhemes which are realized by different Vps.

Synopsis of the Aliyu Kamal's Someone Somewhere
The novel, *Someone Somewhere*, is the thirteenth novel of the author and is set in the fictional village of Himma (seven kilometers away from Kano City). It recounts the life of Sa'idu, whose Uncle and guardian, Mallam Adamu, sponsored his education up to the

University level. In the University, he becomes a man of himself. He joins Restafarianism-an association formed by students like Sa'idu in order to enjoy their life by smoking excessively and having illicit love with their girlfriends. He completely neglects his religion and parents. He solely concentrates on the frivolities of life. After his graduation from the City University, he is employed as a Custom Officer and eventually elevated to the position of Comptroller of Customs. He plots the murder of his superior and secretary, who dared to cross paths with him. The death of Mary (Sa'idu's Secretary) necessitates his exile after he is declared wanted by the police. Some of the touching issues presented in the novel include: moral decay in contemporary Hausa Muslim Society, the University life, forced marriage, the dilemma of the female child in the process of seeking knowledge, corruption, poverty, filial ingratitude etc. (Babura and Mahmud, 2021:41).

Synopsis of the Audee T. Giwa's *I'd Rather Die*
I'd Rather Die is the first published novel of this novelist and is set in Zaria, Kaduna State. It narrates the romantic story of Fatimah Umar, who is dearly in love with Mohammed Lawal, who is presented as a young handsome man. At the peak of their mutual love life, Alhaji Maikudi, a fabulously boastful rich man, falls for Fatimah but she rejects him outright. Alhaji showers his enormous wealth on Mallam Umar, Fatimah's father in order to make him blackmail her to marry him but to no avail. At the end, Fatimah commits suicide because she was told that Mohammed died not knowing that it was a 'fake death' meant to fool Alhaji Maikudi. Abject poverty, love, friendship, forced monetary marriage, polygamy, divorce, partriarchy, girl- child hawking and its attendant repercussion, female education, drug and substance abuse, conflict between tradition versus modernity and prostitution are the touching issues dexterously treated in the novel (Babura and Mahmud 2021:41).

Methodology
The researcher used purposive sampling technique to select a total of twenty-four sentences from the two novels under study, which describe some characters to enable the reader to visualise them. So, twelve sentences were selected from each of the two novels for analysis. The researcher critically studied and scrutinised the selected excerpts clause by clause and identified the verb phrase (rheme) of each sentence that is all other elements that follow the NP of the sentence.

Theoretical Framework
The paper, then, chose to use Brown and Miller's (1996:68) classification of verbs as an approach to analysing the verb phrases used in the selected excerpts in order to find out the types of verb phrases used by the two novelists to successfully give new information (rheme) about the subject (theme) in each of the selected sentences. According to Brown and Miller (ibid), there are six categories of verbs that can begin and operate different verb phrases. They can be seen as follows:

VP   V (⬚Pred   (⬚PP⬚))⬚)
         (NP)   NP

This means that items curly-bracketed together are alternatives and items in ordinary parentheses are optional. Therefore, from the above illustration, we can generate the following strings: V; V+Pred; V+NP; V+PP; V+NP+NP; V+NP+PP. That is to say, we may have a verb phrase that operates with a verb, which is either intransitive, copular, transitive, ditransitive, transitive locative or ditransitive locative.

Data Presentation and Analysis
This section presents the sampled data obtained from the two novels under study. Some sentences were chosen that contain descriptive information in the novel. Each sentence has been analysed. As such, the paper identifies the type of verb each of the sentences manifests and accounts on its corresponding verb phrase structure, as used in the novels.

Excerpts from _I'd Rather Die_
1. The only furniture in the room, his unmade bed and table aside, was an old wooden chair that needed the attention of an experienced carpenter (page 20).
2. Mohammed Lawal, a tall and handsome young man of about twenty years old, was standing under the shade of a nearby tree, watching her with acute anxiety (page 15).
3. Her long-pointed nose and the well- formed, full lips would make one wonder whether nature had allowed her to choose their shapes (page 14).
4. Her mother the only person who could understand her had chosen the wrong moment to be sick (page 93).
5. She (Fatima) began to doubt whether he was truly her father (page 93).
6. He smiled a mirthless smile and put his hand back in his pocket (page 33)
7. Alhaji estimated her age to be between eighteen and nineteen (page 69)
8. …Mohammed extended his hand for a shake with them (page 33).
9. Her eyes were whiter than white… (page 35).
10. I sank so deep into his shoulders (page 63).
11. …Mohammed had made a wall- paper with his stuff (page 20).
12. He walked into the house (page 8).

The following table presents the analysis of the above sentences, regarding the type of verb that operates the verb phrase of each sentence and the structure of the phrase.

Table 1: Analysis of the sentences in *I'd Rather Die*

Excerpt	Subject (theme)	Verb Phrase (rheme)	Type of Verb	Structure of the VP
1	The only furniture in the room, his unmade bed and table aside,	was an old wooden chair that needed the attentio n of an experienced carpenter	copular	**VP** V+NP
2	Mohammed Lawal, a tall and handsome young man of about twenty years old,	was standing under the shade of a nearby tree ...	Intransitive	**VP** V+PP+PP
3	Her long - pointed nose and the well - formed, full lips	would make one wonder…	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+AdvP
4	Her mother the only person who could understand her	had chosen the wrong moment…	Transitive	**VP** V+NP
5	She	began to doubt whether he was truly her father	Intransitive	**VP** V+PP
6	He	smiled a mirthless smile and put his hand back in his pocket	Transitive (smiled) and Ditransitive (put)	**VP** V+NP & **VP** V+NP+NP+PP
7	Alhaji	estimated her age to be between eighteen and nineteen	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+ VP+PP
8	Mohammed	extended his hand for a shake with them	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+PP+PP
9	Her eyes	were whiter than white…	Copular	**VP** V+AP

10	I	sank so deep into his shoulders	Intransitive	**VP** V+AP+PP
11	Mohammed	had made a wall- paper with his stuff	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+PP
12	He	walked into the house	Intransitive	**VP** V+PP

Excerpts from *Someone Somewhere*
1.   He didn't blame himself for becoming abjectly poor (page 11).
2.   …She saw someone lying flat on the ground with a loaf of bread stuck in his mouth (page 28).
3.   They passed on silently like cattle with bowed heads (page 28).
4.   Shehu tried to give him his license to keep but he refused to budge (page 56).
5.   Barau had never worn a wrist- watch in his life (page57).
6.   He drove deep into the night (page 58).
7.   He emerged more than an hour later (page 58).
8.   Alhaji Sabo asked Barau to drive to the nearest Police Station (page 58).
9.   …The businessman entered an office (page 58).
10.   At the office, Binta met a kind and married thirty- year- old Secretary (page 99).
11.   She found a large well- appointed office (page 100).
12.   ……his messenger led a light- skinned girl into the court (page 127).

The following table also presents the analysis of the above sentences, regarding the type of verb that operates the verb phrase of each sentence and the structure of the phrase.

Table 2: Analysis of the sentences in *Someone Somewhere*

Excerpt	Subject (theme)	Verb Phrase (rheme)	Type of Verb	Structure of the VP
1	He	didn't blame himself for becoming abjectly poor	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+PP+NP
2	She	saw someone lying flat on the ground with a loaf of bread stuck in his mouth	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+NP+PP+PP+PP+PP
3	They	passed on silently like cattle with bowed heads	Intransitive	**VP** V+AdvP+AdvP+PP
4	Shehu	tried to give him his license..	Ditransitive	**VP** V+NP+NP
5	Barau	had never worn a wrist-watch in his life	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+PP
6	He	drove deep into the night	Intransitive	**VP** V+AdvP+PP
7	He	emerged more than an hour later	Intransitive	**VP** V+NP+AdvP

8	Alhaji Sabo	asked Barau to drive to the nearest Police Station	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+VP+PP
9	The businessman	entered an office	Transitive	**VP** V+NP
10	…Binta	met a kind and married thirty- year-old Secretary	Transitive	**VP** V+NP
11	She	found a large well-appointed office	Transitive	**VP** V+NP
12	His messenger	led a light - skinned girl into the court	Transitive	**VP** V+NP+PP

Findings

Analysis of the above sentences reveals different findings. Giwa uses copular verb in two (2) sentences while Kamal does not. The copular verbs used attract AP and NP as subject complement in the affected sentences. This evidently signifies that Brown and Miller's V+Pred is realizsd. Whereas Kamal uses three (3) intransitive verbs in three of the sentences, Giwa uses four (4) in four of the sentences analysed. Moreover, on the one hand, the intransitive verbs used in Giwa's *I'd Rather Die* attract single PP in two of the sentences and double PP in one sentence as well as AP and PP in the other. On the other hand, an AdvP+AdvP+PP follow one of the intransitive verbs used in the selected sentences from Kamal's *Someone Somewhere*. Another one is followed by AdvP+PP and the third one is complemented by an NP+AdvP. This clearly shows that Kamal's use of intransitive verb is more complex than that of Giwa's. The structures of the verb phrases used in the two novels conform to Brown and Miller's V+PP structure, though an addition of AdvP, AP and NP is found in some of the structures. With regard to the use of transitive verb in the excerpts selected, Kamal, on the one hand, uses it in eight instances. Out of these instances, NPs complement the verb in three sentences and NPs and PPs follow the verbs in the remaining sentences. It is, however, observed that multiple PPs follow the verb in sentence 2, and the verb in sentence 1 is followed by an NP, PP and another NP. A very striking structure is the one that features in sentence 8, where the structure has an NP , a VP and a PP complementing the verb. Giwa, on the other hand, uses transitive verb in six instances. Out of these, the verb in two of the sentences is followed by an NP, one sentence has an NP and

PP following the verb and an NP and AdvP follow the verb in sentence 3. Nevertheless, Giwa also uses transitive verb, in a similar instance like that of Kamal, which attracts an NP, a VP and a PP (**VP** V+NP+ VP+PP) in sentences 7 and 8 respectively. The VP after the NP is used as a merger to the main verb that heads the phrase because the verb requires another verb. So, the two novelists almost use transitive verbs at the same syntactic maturity level. They equally use ditranstive at the same rate in sentences 6 and 4 respectively, even though Giwa's usage is ditransitive locative. Finally, the paper has discovered that it is possible to have intransitive locative as well, despite the fact that Brown and Miller (ibid) do not categorise it.

Conclusion

This paper has studied the use of verb phrase in its sentential aspect, as used in Giwa's *I'd Rather Die* and Kamal's *Someone Somewhere* to depict a successful rheme in the selected descriptive sentences from the two novels. The paper has discovered that both the two novels use intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, transitive locative and ditransitive locative at different degrees with similar or different VP structures. Copular verb is only used in Giwa's novel. Moreover, it has also noticed that intransitive locative too could be manipulated in prose writing. The paper, therefore, recommends that intransitive locative should be recognised as another category of verb since it manifests practically, as contained in some of the sampled sentences analysed. Hence, Brown and Miller's categorisation of verbs should be considered as a guide.

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