Functional verbs in Gungbe: the case of inherent complement verbs[*]

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ABSTRACT. Traditional linguistics assumes that verbs are lexical categories that typically merge in the predicate domain of a sentence: VP. This study shows that, in Gungbe (Kwa), a significantly large class of items functioning as verbs heading a VP in a sentence may also serve as functional elements that merge within the functional skeleton of the clause. The discussion builds on the analysis of Inherent Complement Verbs (ICVs). In the Kwa literature, ICVs are defined as verbs which require a complement in their citation form (e.g., *dó wèzùn* lit. plant race; 'to run'). This paper argues that these verbs can first merge in two syntactic positions: little v and V. When merged in v, such verbs select for a VP-complement involving an abstract empty V which necessarily takes a bare NP as complement (Hale & Keyser 1993). When merged in V, however, these verbs pattern like other Gungbe lexical verbs in selecting a DP argument. The paper concludes that Gungbe, (and possibly Kwa languages in general) involve a class of verbal roots that can merge in the predicate head or in the functional domain. This finding supports Kayne's (2009) recent antisymmetric approach to the lexicon.

KEY-WORDS. Gungbe, functional verb, inherent complement, incorporation, bare noun phrase

1. Introduction

Linguistic studies generally suggest that languages involve parts of speech such as noun, adjectives, and verbs (N, A, V) that can be distinguished from functional items such as Tense, Mood, and Aspect (TMA) markers. It is customary in generative syntax to assume that major categories merge in the predicate domain while TMA markers merge in the functional sequence. This categorical classification is believed to correlate with the observation

that major categories form an open class while functional categories belong to a closed class.

Given this description, the Gungbe facts discussed below present us with a paradox: in this language a significant class of elements that would fall in the category of verbs can also merge within the functional sequence (e.g., in v, Asp).[1] This is illustrated by the following examples in which the items *wá* and *nɔ̀* are used as predicates or aspect markers in (1a) and (1b), respectively. Example (1c) shows that the functional elements and their lexical cognates can co-occur in the same clause (see also Aboh 2009: 30 for similar examples).

(1) a. *Félé   ná   wá   nɔ̀   xɔ̀gbónù.*   [Gungbe]
        Fele   FUT   EVENT   stay   Porto-Novo
        'Fele will eventually stay in Porto-Novo.'

    b. *Félé   ná   nɔ̀   wá   xɔ̀gbónù.*
        Fele   FUT   HAB   come   Porto-Novo
        'Fele will habitually come to Porto-Novo.'

    c. *Félé   ná   wá   nɔ̀   nɔ̀   xɔ̀gbónù.*
        Fele   FUT   EVENT   HAB   stay   Porto-Novo
        'Fele will eventually come to stay in Porto-Novo habitually.'

Aboh (2009) discusses similar functional vs. lexical behaviour of verbs in the context of serial verb constructions and the general debate of the formal distinctions between light verbs and lexical verbs. In this paper, I turn to another construction in which one finds the same pattern: Inherent Complement Verbs (ICVs). There have been several studies on ICVs in Kwa (e.g., Nwachukwu 1987, Manfredi 1991, Ihionu 1992, Avolonto 1995, Essegbey 1999, 2003, 2010, Anyanwu 2012). ICVs can be described as verbs which require a complement in their citation form, as illustrated by the verbs under (2a-b) in Gungbe. In this paper, I gloss the verbal part of ICVs as 'Vx' in which x encodes an approximate meaning.

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[1] Gungbe belongs to the Gbe languages, a subfamily of the Kwa branch of the Niger Congo languages spoken in West Africa. The variety of Gungbe discussed in this paper is the author's native tongue spoken in Porto-Novo, in the republic of Benin.

(2) a. *Félé* [*tún*   **(tán)*]   [Gungbe]
          Fele   V~RELEASE~   saliva
          'Fele spat.'

     b. *Félé* [*nyìn*   **(cìn)*]
          Fele   V~THROW~   atishoo
          'Fele sneezed.'

As can be seen from these examples, the meaning of an ICV does not seem to be fully compositional and it is not obvious which part of the complex contributes most to the meaning. The sentence in (3) further indicates that, though ICVs have an inherent complement, some ICV constructions can involve an additional complement, in a way similarly to double object constructions. I return to this construction in section 4.2.2.

(3) *Súrù*   *dó*   *wìnyán*   *Félé*   [Gungbe]
      Suru   V~PLANT~   shame   Fele
      Lit. Suru planted shame in Fele
      'Suru made Fele feel ashamed.'

Similar data in Ewegbe led Essegbey (1999, 2003, 2010) to conclude that verbs in ICVs should be analysed as obligatory complement taking lexical verbs. This is because ICV constructions show the same range of (in) transitivity variation observed in purely lexical verbs. In addition, most verbs occurring in ICVs also function independently as lexical verbs and select for a DP internal argument to which they assign a thematic role. This is shown by examples (4a) and (4b) in which the verbs in (2a) and (2b) are used lexically. No ICV meaning arises here. Example (4c) further shows that, in their lexical usage, these verbs behave like common Gungbe lexical verbs. They combine with various kinds of complements and allow serialization.

(4) a. *Yé*   *tún*   *kàn*.   [Gungbe]
      3PL   VUNTIE   rope
      'They untied a rope/*they untied.'

   b. *Yé*   *nyìn*   *àgán*.
      3PL   VTHROW   stone
      'They threw a stone/*they threw.'

   c. *Yé*   *nyìn*   *àgán*   *bíɔ́*   *xɔ̀*   *mɛ̀*.
      3PL   VTHROW   stone   enter   room   in
      'They threw a stone into the room.'

These examples also indicate that Gungbe (and Kwa languages in general) allow bare nouns (i.e., noun phrases lacking overt determiners) in argument positions. Though the bare internal arguments in (4a-b) are interpreted as indefinite DPs, Aboh (2004) and Aboh and DeGraff (2014) show that such bare nouns in argument positions can also correspond to definite, plural, or generic readings depending on context. This would mean that the complements in (4) are full DPs, as opposed to those of the ICVs in (2) and (3), which are structurally bare (and therefore non-referential) NPs. I return to this discussion in section 3. Aside their specific semantics, therefore, no surface difference immediately sets the ICVs in (2) apart from the lexical usages in (4a-b). In both situations, the verbs combine with a noun phrase complement, though the subtle interpretive differences in (2), (3) and (4) suggest that these noun phrases may involve distinct structural make-up.

I take these facts to suggest that many verbs in Gungbe have ambivalent properties: they can be used lexically in which case they take various complements including a referential DP internal argument (4) or they can be used in ICVs in which the V and N form a complex unit with a non-transparent meaning. In the latter situation, the inherent complement represents a structurally bare NP (i.e., it lacks a D layer). I further argue that this ambivalent behaviour of Gungbe verbs results from the fact that a significant class of verbs are roots that can first merge in v (thus generating ICVs) or in V (thus yielding lexical VPs). Likewise, the non-transparent semantics of ICV constructions derives from the fact that the

inherent complement is a structurally bare NP whose head N merges or incorporates into V, while the complement of lexical verbs is a DP of which the intervening D blocks N-to-V movement. Sections 2 and 3 focus on the morphosyntactic properties of ICVs, that is, restrictions that apply to the verb and its complement, respectively. Section 4 presents my account for ICVs, based on Aboh and Dyakonova (2009), and its consequences for the analysis of the lexicon in Gungbe and beyond. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. ICVs and lexical verbs in Gungbe

As already shown by Essegbey (1999, 2003, 2010), ICV constructions are hardly distinguishable from simple VPs in Gbe. The ICV in (5a), the intransitive VP in (5b), and the transitive VP in (5c) all involve the same set of TMA markers.

(5) a. Àsé   *má*   *sígán*   *nɔ̀*   *lὲ*   *tɔ̀.*   [Gungbe]
        cat   NEG   ABLE   HAB   VBATHE river
        'A cat cannot usually swim.'

    b. Àsé   *lɔ́*   *má*   *sígán*   *nɔ̀*   *lɔ́n.*
        cat   DET   NEG   ABLE   HAB   jump
        'The cat cannot usually jump.'

    c. Àsé   *lɔ́*   *má*   *sígán*   *nɔ̀*   *xέ*   *àtín*   *lɔ́*   *jĭ.*
        cat   DET   NEG   ABLE   HAB   climb   tree   DET   on
        'The cat cannot usually climb in the tree.'

There are two contexts in which ICV verbs (VICV) behave differently from lexical verbs (VLEX): predicate focus with doubling, and event relativization with doubling. Gungbe verb focus constructions involve predicate doubling structures in which a bare VLEX is fronted sentence-initially and a copy is found in the extraction site within the IP (6a) (Aboh 2004, Aboh & Dyakonova 2009). Some speakers (including the author) disallow the focus marker *wὲ* in such constructions, hence the percentage diacritics and parentheses in (6a). I ignore such speaker variation in this paper.

(6) **Kùn**   (%**wὲ**)   *Félé*   **kùn**   *mótò*   *cὲ.*   [Gungbe]

    drive   FOC   Fele   drive   car   1SG.POSS

    'Fele DROVE my car.'

A V$_{ICV}$ cannot front or double in verb focus construction (7).

(7) .*Tún   (%**wὲ**)   *Félé*   *tún*   *tán.*

    release   FOC   Fele   release   saliva

    'Fele RELEASED saliva.'

Instead, the complement of V$_{ICV}$ must front to a position left-adjacent to the focus marker and there is no doubling, as exemplified in (8a). This derivation has the meaning of verb focus similarly to example (6) even though its syntax is comparable to that of the argument focus construction in (8b), in which the internal argument is fronted left-adjacent to the focus marker and is interpreted as (contrastive) focus.

(8) a. **Tán**   *wὲ*   *Félé*   *tún.*   [Gungbe]

        saliva   FOC   Fele   V$_{RELEASE}$

        'Félé SPAT'

        #Fele released SALIVA'

    b. *Mótò*   *cὲ*   **wὲ**   *Félé*   *kùn.*

        drive   1SG.POSS   FOC   Fele   drive

        'Fele drove MY CAR (e.g., not yours).'

Note also that while the focus marker *wὲ* is required when focus movement targets the complement of a V$_{ICV}$ or an internal argument (8a-b), this is not necessarily the case when focus movement involves a V$_{LEX}$, and we observe speaker variation, as I remarked with regard to example (6).

A similar asymmetry between V$_{ICV}$ and V$_{LEX}$ is found in the context of event relativization which also involves V$_{LEX}$-doubling. In Gungbe, the verb can be relativized, yielding the so-called factive constructions (cf. Aboh 2005, 2010). Factive constructions involving the verb require doubling of the lexical verb (9a). V$_{ICV}$'s cannot form factive constructions. Instead, the

complement must front and no doubling arises (9b):

(9) a. **Kùn** *ɖĕ* *Félé* **kùn** *mótò* *cè*   *vɛ́* *ná* *mì*.   [Gungbe]
         drive REL Fele drive car   1SG.POSS hurt PREP 1SG
         'The fact that Fele drove my car annoyed me.'

   b. **Tán**   *ɖĕ*   *Félé* *tún*   *vɛ́*   *ná*   *mì*.
         saliva   REL   Fele V<small>RELEASE</small> hurt   PREP   1SG
   ' The fact that Fele spat annoyed me.'

Summarizing, V<small>ICV</small>'s display similar distribution as V<small>LEX</small>'s except in the context of verb focus and event relativization. The generalization is that V<small>ICV</small>'s cannot enter doubling structures (unlike V<small>LEX</small>'s). As already argued by Aboh and Dyakonova (2009), this suggests that V<small>ICV</small> is not available for certain syntactic operations (e.g., it cannot be probed by the focus head). Likewise, that the complement of a V<small>ICV</small> must front in verb focus constructions, where it attaches to a focus marker as in argument focus constructions, suggests that the displaced constituent has both verbal and nominal properties.[2] I return to this discussion in section 4, but let us first consider the restrictions that apply to the complement of a V<small>ICV</small> unlike the complement of a V<small>LEX</small>.

3. The complement of an ICV: an NP or a DP?

In addition to showing the differences between a V<small>ICV</small> and a V<small>LEX</small>, the data from (6) to (9) inform us on some differences between the categories of their complements as well. For instance, complements of V<small>ICV</small>'s cannot receive an individual focus reading, since the fronting operation yields the semantics of verb focus rather than argument focus as indicated by the contrast in (7) and (8). The same holds true of event relativization in (9). These facts suggest that what undergoes movement in these constructions is not just the bare NP but rather the VP whose head has been lexicalized by N. I conclude from this that the bare NP complement of a V<small>ICV</small> cannot stand alone: it cannot be targeted by syntactic or semantic operations individually. Any syntactic operation that applies to V or N applies to the VP as a whole.

This intricate relation between a V<small>ICV</small> and its inherent complement is

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  [2] I think Vadim Kimmelman for drawing my attention to this.

further shown in contexts of pronominalization. In Gungbe, the internal argument of a V<small>LEX</small> can be pronominalized, as shown by (10a-b).

(10) a. *Àsé*   *lɔ*   *má*   *ɖù*   *hwèví.*   [Gungbe]
         cat   DET   NEG   eat   fish
         'The cat did not eat the fish.'
     b. *Àsé*   *lɔ*   *má*   *ɖù*   *ì.*
   cat   DET   NEG   eat   3SG
         'The cat did not eat it.'

Returning to the ICV *nyìn-cìn* 'to sneeze' in (2b), repeated here as example (11a), we observe that the complement of a V<small>ICV</small> cannot be pronominalized. While the resulting sentence is not ungrammatical, the ICV meaning 'to sneeze' in (2b) is lost. Instead, the pronoun is understood as being bound by an antecedent (assumed to be present in text or in discourse).

(11) a. *Félé*   *nyìn*   **(cìn).*   [Gungbe]
         V<small>THROW</small>   atishoo
         'Fele sneezed.'
     b. *Félé*   *nyìn*   *ì.*
         Fele   throw   3SG
         '*Fele sneezed/*Fele sneezed it.'
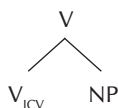   'Fele threw it.'

These examples show that the inherent complement of a V<small>ICV</small> is not referential. Accordingly, when this complement undergoes a syntactic operation, either the ICV meaning is retained and the operation appears to affect the VP as a whole, or the ICV meaning is blocked and the complement is interpreted referentially, that is, independently of the verb which takes on its lexical meaning. I conclude that situations in which the ICV meaning is lost involve a V<small>LEX</small> which takes a referential DP as complement. On the other hand, ICV constructions correspond to contexts in which a V<small>ICV</small> takes a structurally bare NP as complement. The two configurations are represented in (12a) and (12b), respectively.
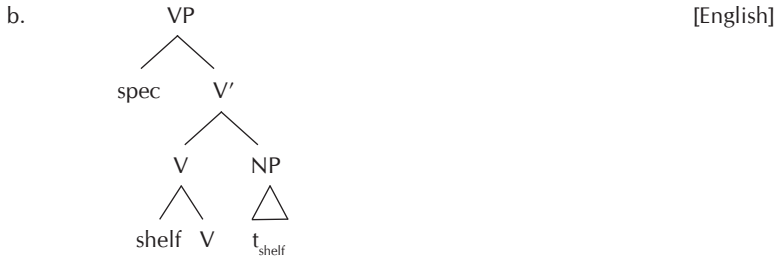
(12) a.   V$_{LEX}$ V
                                        /\
                                   V$_{LEX}$ DP
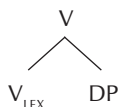
     b.   V$_{ICV}$ V
                                        /\
                                   V$_{ICV}$ NP

The structures in (12) suggest that a major distinction between a V$_{ICV}$ and a V$_{LEX}$ is the type of complement they take: NP versus DP. As I argue below, this suggests that a V$_{ICV}$ does not assign any internal theta-role, while a V$_{LEX}$ does. This latter difference, I claim, correlates with another difference between V$_{ICV}$'s and V$_{LEX}$'s: their respective merge sites.

4. The merge site of V$_{ICV}$ and V$_{LEX}$

The structure in (12b) represents a classical context of incorporation in which the head of the NP complement incorporates into V (Baker 1988). This is the view adopted by Ihionu (1992: 168), who proposes that ICVs are comparable to denominal verbs (Hale & Keyser 1993). According to this author, the only difference between a V$_{ICV}$ and a V$_{LEX}$ resides in their selectional properties. Though a V$_{ICV}$ takes an NP as complement this complement is not a thematic argument: it does not receive any theta-role from the lexical head V. Ihionu (1992) further argues that the so-called inherent complement is aspectually licensed because it delimits the event expressed by the lexical verb (Tenny 1992). Ihionu (1992) concludes that Igbo V$_{ICV}$'s and English denominals involve comparable structures even though the two languages differ because English exhibits morphological incorporation (i.e., N-to-V movement in surface syntax), whereas Igbo displays abstract incorporation (i.e., N-to-V movement at LF). This contrast is illustrated by the representation of the Igbo verb 'to kick' in (13a) and the structure of the English verb *to shelve* in (13b) (but see Hale & Keyser 1993 for a detailed analysis of English denominal verbs).

(13) a.   V′   [Igbo, Kwa]

      V   NP

     gbá   ụ́kwú

  b.   VP   [English]

    spec   V′

      V   NP

    shelf V t$_{shelf}$

Ihionu's (1992) analysis of Igbo in terms of abstract incorporation is compatible with the double object ICV construction in (14), which I adapted from Manfredi (1991: 153). In this example, an additional object, Úgwu, occurs between the V$_{ICV}$ and its inherent complement.

(14) *Ádhà* **tù-rụ** *Úgwu* *(nnukwu)* **ùjó** [Igbo, Kwa]
   Adha V-ASP Ugwu great   fear
   'Adha feared Ugwu (greatly)'

This led Ihionu (1992) to propose that the surface order observed in Igbo ICV's such as *gbá ụ́kwú* 'to kick' does not reflect structural adjacency. Accordingly, N-to-V movement at LF (or abstract incorporation in his terms) accounts for example (14) while capturing the semantic dependency between a V$_{ICV}$ and its inherent complement in Igbo. The following data from Gungbe show that the view that V$_{ICV}$ merges in V as in (12b) and (13a) must be revised.

4.1 V$_{ICV}$ merges in v as a functional verb

In Gungbe, unlike in Igbo, the inherent complement must be structurally adjacent to V$_{ICV}$. This explains the ungrammaticality of (15a), the Gungbe translation of the Igbo sentence in (14). The Gungbe grammatical example (15b) shows that the additional complement must be introduced by a

preposition in this case. Note, however, from the apparent double object ICV example (15c), that it displays the order theme＞goal/recipient, as in (15b).

(15) a. *Súrù*   *ɖì*   *Séná*   *bú*.   [Gungbe]

       Suru   V<small>RESEMBLE</small>   Sena   fear

   b. *Súrù ɖì*   *bú*   *ná*   *Séná*.

       Suru V<small>RESEMBLE</small> fear   PREP   Sena

       'Suru feared Sena.'

   c. *Súrù dó*   *nú*   *Séná*.

       Suru V<small>PLANT</small>   thing   Sena

       'Suru hit Sena.'

Linear adjacency between the verb and the inherent complement in Gungbe (and more generally in Gbe, Essegbey 2010) favours an analysis in which V takes a structurally bare NP as complement. This configuration would allow N-to-V incorporation (i.e., N-to-V movement in surface syntax, Baker 1988). The complex V<small>ICV</small>-N would further raise to little v as in (16), a representation of the Gungbe verb *dó wèzùn* 'to run'.
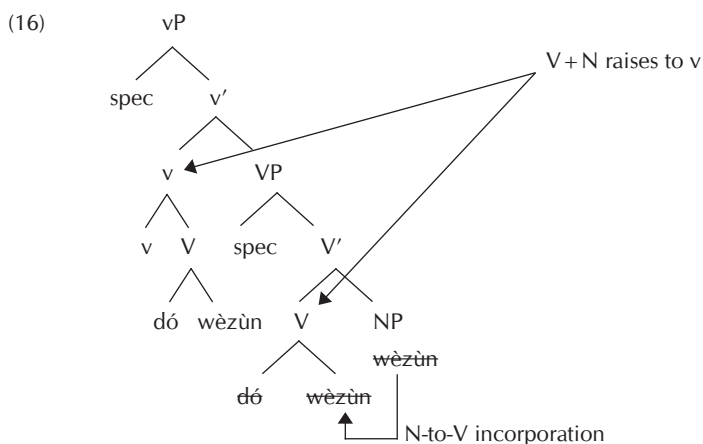
Unless we assume excorporation, this analysis incorrectly rules out cases of extraction in which the complement is displaced, as in verb focus

constructions or event relativization (cf. 8a, 9b). Likewise, representation (16) excludes the following facts from Gengbe in which the verb moves away from the inherent complement for the purpose of aspect licensing. In example (17a) the ICV construction is interpreted as perfective. In (17b) however, a habitual aspect marker attaches to the verb. Aboh (2004a, 2009) and Aboh and Dyakonova (2009) analyse this as an instance of V-to-Asp movement for aspect licensing. Further recall from example (8a) and (9b) again that in cases of verb focus, the complement fronts to the clausal left periphery. Therefore, the verb and the noun phrase complement appear to be individually mobile.

(17) a. *Kwèsí*   *pu*   *du*.   [Gengbe]
        Kwesi   V<small>HIT</small>   race
        'Kwesi ran.'
     b. *Kwèsí*   *pu-**na***   *du*.
        Kwesi   V<small>HIT-HAB</small>   race
        'Kofi habitually runs/ran.'

This type of data is unexpected if the inherent complement had incorporated into V<small>ICV</small> forming a morphologically complex V<small>ICV</small>-N unit that moved to v (16). We therefore need an analysis that accounts for the linear adjacency between the verb and the inherent NP complement, while preserving the possibility of extraction of both elements, when necessary. The V<small>ICV</small> and its inherent complement are syntactically independent though semantically fused.

In order to account for this paradox, I propose that the Gbe-type V<small>ICV</small>'s belong to the class of *functional* verbs that first merge in relevant functional heads.[3] In ICV constructions, V<small>ICV</small> first merges in little v and selects for a VP whose head is an empty or abstract transitive V. This abstract verb has certain semantic properties, but it has no morphophonological shape and no s-selectional requirement on the complement (cf. Hale & Keyser 1993).

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[3]   The term functional verb is meant to indicate that these verbs can merge in a functional position where they mostly play the same role as typical functional items such as aspect, tense, causative markers, etc. See Cinque (2004), Aboh (2009) and references therein.

The abstract verb has a categorial selectional requirement (i.e., c-selection) only: it must take a structurally bare NP complement. As a consequence, the V+NP complex does not denote an event in which a referential DP object is affected. This explains why such combinations are often translated by intransitive verbs in Romance or Germanic languages. Indeed, the noun heading the NP inherent complement must merge into the abstract V which it lexicalizes, as suggested by the representation in (18) for the verb *dó wèzùn* 'to run'.

(18)

No V-to-v raising because v is filled

N-to-V movement
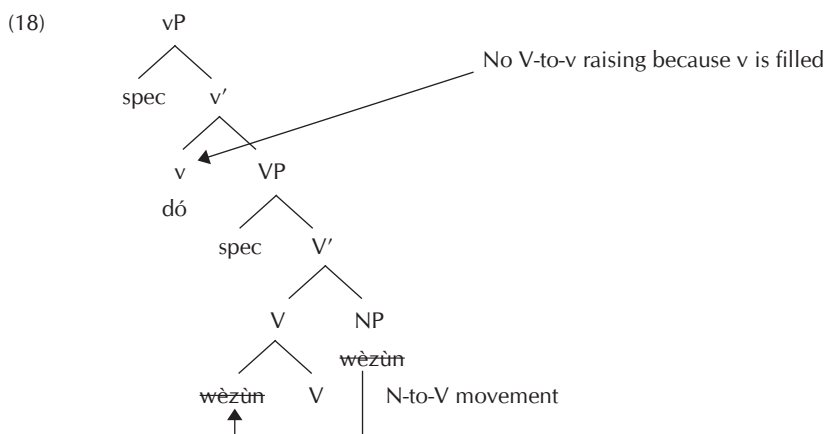
The proposed analysis suggests that elements that express V$_{ICV}$'s are categorially ambiguous: they are bare roots. These roots can first merge in v, which takes a VP headed by an abstract V as complement, or they can function as predicate and merge in V (which subsequently moves to v). In the latter case, V imposes both semantic and categorial restrictions on its internal argument and therefore exhibits all properties of simple transitive verbs. The two situations are represented in (19).

(19)   Functional verb in v   Lexical verb in V

a.   vP   b.   vP
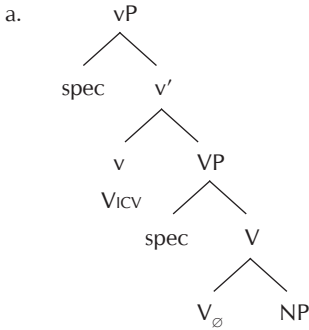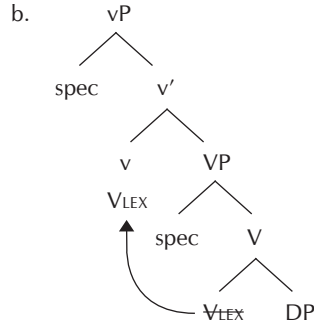
These representations indicate that the lexicon of Gungbe includes a significant part of bare roots that can be used in different structural contexts, and whose meanings only emerge from structure, that is, depending on their merge site and the type of complement they combine with.

The Gungbe facts remind us of the discussion in the context of serial verb constructions and restructuring structures in Romance and Germanic, where it has been proposed that certain lexical elements have the property of merging directly in a functional position (e.g., Wurmbrand 2001, Cinque 2004, Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004, Aboh 2009). Put together, these facts may ultimately relate to Kayne's (2009: 9) claim that "all verbs are light verbs". Under the present discussion, this would mean that English (and other Germanic or Romance languages) have ICVs of the Gbe type even though these languages may differ as to how they spell out the functional and lexical nodes. Indeed, if nothing else is said, the representations under (19) are neutral as to how the category V is lexicalized cross-linguistically (whether via N-to-V-to-v movement in the lines of Hale & Keyser (1993) or by merging a functional verb in v and subsequent N-to-V incorporation as in Gbe).

4.2 Implications of the analysis

Let us now take this analysis to task with regard to some of the properties of ICVs that were poorly understood until now. With regard to the absence of s-selectional requirements on the noun complement, the structure in

(19a) indicates that there is no strict adjacency between v realized by V꜀ᴠ and the head of the NP complement that merges into V.

4.2.1 The ICV verb has no internal theta-role

Being an expression of v, V꜀ᴠ is understood as introducing the external argument (Hale & Keyser 1993, Chomsky 1995). Keeping to this logic, we expect the following facts in which there does not seem to be any s-selection between the verbal part of an ICV (i.e., the functional verb) and its putative complement. Let us consider the verb *ɖù* in various usages in Gungbe.

(20) a. *Kòfí*   *ɖù*   **nú**.   [Gungbe]
      Kofi   eat   thing
      'Kofi ate'

   b. *Kòfí*   *ɖù*   **làn**.
      Kofi   eat   meat
      'Kofi ate meat'

   c. *Kòfí   *ɖù*   ...
      Kofi   eat

These examples suggest that *ɖù* is transitive in Gungbe and has the basic meaning of '*ingest/consume X*' somehow subsumed by the English verb 'to eat'. Accordingly, it selects for eatable entities. This reasoning is hard to maintain, though, for the cases in (21), where *ɖù* is combined with different noun phrase objects, none of which is literally eatable or consumable and the resulting meaning is that of an ICV construction.

(21)   Verb + Noun-complement = ICV meaning
      ɖù   àxɔ́ 'debt'   to have debts or to go bankrupt
               gbè **'**life'   to enjoy
               xwè 'year'   to celebrate
               àɖì 'poison'   to get/angry
               wìnyán 'shame'   to be ashamed
               gán 'chief'   to be appointed or become chief
               yà 'pain'   to suffer

These examples indicate that the functional verb in v has no s-selectional requirements on the complement, even though there is a sense in all these sequences that the external argument experiences something. In a way, the element *ɖù* tells us more about the external argument than the NP complement (apparently functioning as its internal argument). This observation would follow if *ɖù* first merges in little v, where it introduces the external argument, and selects a VP whose abstract head V takes an NP complement. This indicates that the intransitive flavour of ICVs derives from the fact that the functional verb in little v introduces the external argument only and the abstract V does not have any theta-role to assign, though it c-selects for a structurally bare NP as complement.

With regard to verb movement and verb focusing, this analysis suggests that Gungbe ICVs differ from lexical verbs in vP because they do not involve V-to-v movement, since v is already filled by Vɪᴄᴠ and further movement of [V-N]-to-v is precluded. This in turn would mean that any probe on V would either target Vɪᴄᴠ in v or the VP lexicalized by N. Both v and its VP-complement are therefore independent syntactic entities that are subject to different syntactic operations. I claim that this is what happens in the Gengbe example (22a). In this example, Vɪᴄᴠ merged in little v is probed over by the ʜᴀʙɪᴛᴜᴀʟ aspect head to which it adjoins, while the VP lexicalized by the incorporated noun is attracted to the focus position under the probe of the focus head, as illustrated in (22b), ignoring irrelevant projections (see Aboh & Dyakonova 2009 for discussion).

(22) a. Sà   yé   Àfiá   dì-nà

     promenade   FOC   Afia   V- HAB

     'Afia usually WANDERS around'

b.
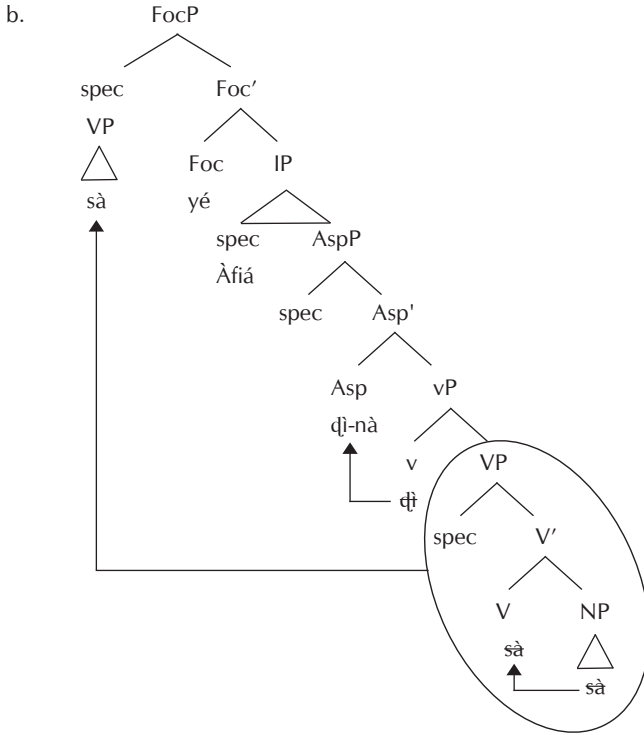
In addition to deriving the right order, this analysis accounts for the impossibility to front Vicv's for the purpose of focus, though they can be moved to relevant heads within the TMA sequence. Being the expression of little v, such verbs belong to the class of functional items (e.g., TMA markers) that are licensed within the IP domain. Unlike lexical verbs, however, these elements do not encode an event by themselves and cannot feed discourse-related movement operations involving TOPIC or FOCUS (Aboh 2004, Aboh & Dyakonova 2009).

4.2.2 ICVs with double objects

Example (15c), as well as sentence (3), repeated here as (24a), suggest that certain ICV constructions involve an additional complement in a way comparable to the double object construction in (24b).

(24) a. *Súrù*   *dó*   *wìnyán*   *Félé.*   [Gungbe]
Suru   Vᴘʟᴀɴᴛ   shame   Fele
Lit. Suru planted shame in Fele
'Suru made Fele feel ashamed.'

b. *Súrù*   *ná*   *kwɛ̀*   *Félé.*
Suru   give   money   Fele
'Suru gave Fele some money.'

Essegbey (2010) provides an extensive comparison of ICVs with two objects (24a) and double object constructions (24b), showing that the two behave alike in many contexts. These constructions, however, differ in a major aspect. Double object constructions in most Gbe languages freely allow the orders theme > goal/recipient in (24b) as well as the alternative order goal/recipient > theme in (25). There is to my knowledge no discernible change of meaning between these alternatives (e.g., there is no contrast between new vs. old information or specific vs. non-specific referents).

(25) *Súrù*   *ná*   *Félé*   *kwɛ̀.*   [Gungbe]
Suru   give   Fele   money
'Suru gave Fele some money.'

ICVs with apparent double objects, however, exclude the goal/recipient > theme order, hence the ungrammatical example (26).

(26) **Súrù*   *dó*   *Félé*   *wìnyán.*   [Gungbe]
Suru   Vᴘʟᴀɴᴛ   Fele   shame

As already shown by the contrast in (15b-c) further illustrated here by example (27), ICVs with double objects display the same order as preposition datives: compare (24a) to (27).

(27) *Félé   nyìn   àgán   dó   Súrù.*
       Fele   throw   stone   PREP   Suru
       'Fele threw a stone at Suru.'

I take this similarity between ICV constructions with two apparent objects
and preposition datives as indication that they involve the same underlying
structure in (28): In apparent ICV double object constructions, the goal is
introduced by a silent preposition (cf. Kayne 2005 and much related work).
The bare noun functioning as the inherent complement merges into the
empty lexical verb.

(28)
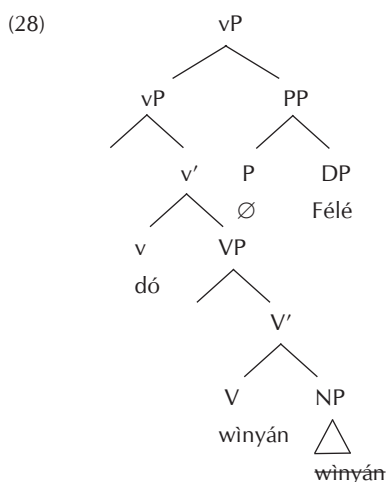
I conclude that double object constructions (24b-25) and ICV
constructions with two objects (24a) involve two different structures, hence
their different behaviour with regard to argument alternation.

5. Conclusion

This paper shows that ICV constructions must be treated as normal verbal
phrases with the only difference that they involve a functional verb that first
merges in little v. The latter takes a VP complement whose abstract head
V can combine with a structurally bare NP complement only. This allows
N-to-V movement, but there is no further movement of this lexicalized V into

v, since the latter is already filled by the functional verb. While accounting for various syntactic properties of a V$_{ICV}$, this analysis shows that ICVs with double objects are better understood as constructions in which the goal is introduced by a silent preposition.

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