Complements of Attribution or Secondary Object Complements: Some Thoughts on the Study

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Abstract		Original Research Article

This study examines complements of attribution and secondary object complements, focusing on their syntactic and semantic roles in sentence structures. The research explores the boundaries between these two constructs, often overlooked in linguistic studies, to provide a more refined understanding of their interaction and functionality. The primary objectives include identifying the distinct features of complements of attribution, analyzing their relationship with secondary object complements, and investigating their usage across various linguistic contexts.The study addresses key questions: What differentiates complements of attribution from secondary object complements? How do these complements contribute to sentence meaning? What patterns emerge in their usage across languages? Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from linguistic corpora, and syntactic analyses were performed to identify recurring patterns and anomalies.Key findings reveal that complements of attribution exhibit greater flexibility in contextual interpretation compared to secondary object complements, which are more constrained by grammatical rules. This research contributes to linguistic theory by highlighting the functional diversity of these constructs and proposing a refined classification framework. The findings hold significance for advancing syntactic theory, improving computational linguistic models, and fostering a deeper understanding of language structure. Future research may explore their application in multilingual and psycholinguistic studies.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

Attributive complements and secondary object complements hold a central place in syntactic and semantic studies because they contribute to the structure of sentences and the transfer of meaning. In French grammar, an attributive complement is typically associated with verbs like "donner" (to give), "prêter" (to lend), or "envoyer" (to send), which imply an action directed toward a recipient. For example, in the sentence "Ildonne un livre à Marie" (He gives a book to Marie), "à Marie" is the attributive complement. Similarly, secondary object complements refer to syntactic elements that complete the meaning of an indirect transitive verb by adding an additional dimension.

A thorough understanding of these complements is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, they play a fundamental role in the functioning of complex syntactic structures. Secondly, their study allows for a better understanding of the differences and similarities between languages, as these constructions also exist in other languages, though they manifest differently. Finally, the analysis of attributive complements and secondary object complements helps clarify their interaction with the verb's valency rules and their semantic implications in agent-patient relationships.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite their importance, these constructions are still under-analyzed in the existing literature. Many studies (Ajayi, 2019; Ojo, 2021) focus on broader aspects of French syntax, often neglecting the

nuances of secondary complements. One of the main difficulties is the complexity of identifying them in various contexts. The boundaries between an attributive complement and a secondary object complement can sometimes be blurred, especially in sentences where verb valency is ambiguous.

Research conducted between 2016 and 2024 (Eze, 2018; Ibrahim, 2022) has shown that there is a significant gap in studies of French used in non-native contexts, particularly in Nigeria. Learners and speakers of French as a foreign language often face challenges in analyzing and correctly using these complements. This can lead to syntactic and semantic errors that hinder understanding.

1.3 Objectives and Scope

This study aims to explore the syntactic and semantic characteristics of attributive complements and secondary object complements in the context of French grammar. The main objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the structural differences between the two types of complements.

2. To examine their role in constructing the meaning of sentences.

3. To analyze common errors made by Nigerian learners of French.

The study focuses on linguistic productions from 2016 to 2024, drawing on data from academic writings, oral corpora, and previous studies conducted in Nigeria. This research is limited to syntactic and semantic analysis, excluding sociolinguistic or historical perspectives.

1.4 Research Questions or Hypotheses

The central questions this study seeks to answer are as follows:

1. What are the distinguishing features of attributive complements and secondary object complements in modern French?

2. How do these complements influence the overall meaning of the sentences in which they appear?

3. What difficulties do French learners in Nigeria face in analyzing and using these complements?

2.0 Data Analysis

2.1 Definition and Conceptual Framework

Attributive complements, or secondary object complements, are syntactic structures that appear in sentences where a verb takes two complements: one is the direct object and the other is the indirect object. For example, in a sentence like "He gave a book to his friend,""a book" is the direct object and "to his friend" is the attributive complement. These structures are common in several languages and exhibit specific characteristics in their morphological, syntactic, and semantic functions.

From a conceptual perspective, the study of attributive complements is based on grammatical and linguistic approaches that analyze the rules governing the relationships between the various constituents of the sentence (Obah, 2018). Transformational grammars, as well as functional and cognitive approaches, provide theoretical frameworks to explain the use and variations of these complements in different linguistic contexts (Adeoye, 2021).

2.2 Review of Previous Studies

Previous research has examined attributive complements from various angles. For instance, Adesanya (2017) explored their occurrence in Nigerian languages such as Yoruba and Igbo, highlighting similarities and differences with French. These studies reveal that indirect complements play a crucial role in establishing possession and transfer relationships between participants (Adesanya, 2017).

More recent research has focused on the syntax-semantics interface. Olowu (2020) applied an analysis based on valency theory, showing that variations in the order of complements can influence pragmatic interpretation. However, these studies are often limited by the lack of diverse corpora and the absence of comparative perspectives with other languages, as pointed out by Yakubu (2022).

In terms of methodologies, previous research has primarily used qualitative approaches based on

textual analysis and linguistic surveys. However, quantitative studies measuring the incidence and frequency of these structures remain few (Ibrahim, 2019).

2.3 Identified Gaps and Relevance

Although many studies have explored attributive complements, certain gaps remain. First, most works focus on isolated languages, neglecting cross-linguistic comparisons that could shed light on linguistic universals. Second, few studies consider the sociolinguistic dimensions of these complements, such as their evolution in multilingual contexts.

Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing both the theoretical and practical understanding of linguistic structures (Eze, 2023). In particular, empirical research combining qualitative and quantitative methods could offer new perspectives on the use and variation of attributive complements in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative analysis is preferred due to its ability to explore the complex syntactic and semantic structures of attribution complements in the French language. This choice allows for an in-depth, contextual interpretation of linguistic data, focusing on the functional relationships between syntactic elements.

The justification for this approach is based on recommendations from researchers such as Adesanmi (2018) and Balogun (2020), who emphasize the importance of contextual analysis in linguistic studies. These studies highlight the value of qualitative approaches to explore the nuances of syntactic relationships in languages with complex structures.

3.2 Data Collection

The data primarily comes from three sources:

Linguistic Corpora: A corpus of French texts, including literary, journalistic, and academic works, was used. Representative samples were selected to ensure structural diversity. For example, Lawani's (2019) work established that using diverse sources enriches syntactic analysis.

Case Studies: Sentences from real and simulated dialogues were extracted to observe attribution complements in conversational contexts.

Experiments: Participants were invited to produce sentences containing attribution complements. These experiments allowed for controlling linguistic variables and collecting precise data on the use of these syntactic structures.

For data collection, software like AntConc was used to analyze the frequency and concordance of attribution complements in the corpus. These tools were complemented by observation grids and semi-structured questionnaires to capture rich qualitative data.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis focused on syntactic structures and semantic relationships. A thematic analysis method was employed, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns in the use of attribution complements. Babajide (2021) confirms that this approach is effective for studying syntactic nuances in natural languages.

Software such as NVivo was used to code and organize qualitative data. Textual data extracted from the corpora was imported into NVivo for an in-depth analysis of themes and syntactic relationships. Furthermore, X-bar theory was applied to decompose complex syntactic structures, as recommended by Ojo (2017).

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the frequencies of secondary and attribution complements in the corpora. Qualitative data were triangulated with extended observations to enhance the reliability of the analysis.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Key Findings

The study of attribution complements, also called second object complements (COS), reveals recurring patterns in their use in contemporary French. These

complements frequently appear in verbal structures where two complements coexist: a direct object complement (COD) and an indirect object complement (COI). For example, in the sentence "Je donne un livre à Marie,""un livre" is the COD and "à Marie" is the COI, the latter also identified as the COS.

The data show a trend toward increased use of COS in educational contexts, particularly in teaching French as a foreign language. According to a recent study, 65% of grammar textbooks published between 2016 and 2024 explicitly include the notion of COS in their syntactic explanations (Osekwute&Adigwe, 2023). This integration aims to clarify the distinction between different types of complements and facilitate the learning of complex structures.

Additionally, research conducted in Nigeria has highlighted variations in the use of COS based on local linguistic influences. In some regions, interference from native languages leads to structures where the COS is omitted or replaced by alternative constructions. A case study conducted in 2019 showed that 40% of Nigerian French speakers tend to omit the COS in sentences where it would be expected in standard French (Osekwute&Adigwe, 2023).

4.2 Discussion

The results confirm the hypothesis that attribution complements play a crucial role in the syntactic structure of French. Their presence clarifies the relationships between the different elements of a sentence, thus facilitating understanding and grammatical analysis. This observation aligns with previous work highlighting the importance of COS in the hierarchy of verbal complements (Riegel et al., 2016).

However, the variations observed in the use of COS, particularly in Nigeria, suggest that sociolinguistic factors influence their use. Linguistic interference from speakers' native languages alters the expected structure of sentences in French. These variations require adaptation of pedagogical approaches for teaching French in multilingual contexts. Teaching methods that account for local linguistic specificities could enhance mastery of complex structures, including the appropriate use of COS.

In terms of linguistic theory, these observations support the idea that French syntax is sensitive to external influences and learning contexts. Although attribution complements are specifically structured in French grammar, they are subject to adaptations based on the linguistic environments of speakers. This flexibility underscores the need for a descriptive approach to grammar, acknowledging the diversity of usages and cultural influences.

In conclusion, the study of attribution complements highlights their importance in French grammatical structure and reveals significant variations linked to sociolinguistic contexts. These results call for an adaptation of teaching practices and a greater recognition of linguistic diversity in French language instruction.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the Research

The main objective of this study was to explore and clarify the role of attribution complements, or secondary object complements, in the syntax of languages. This work aimed to study the complex interactions between verbs and their complements in a variety of grammatical constructions, focusing particularly on complements that are not directly involved in the main action of the verb, but provide precision or qualification to it. Through a detailed analysis of syntactic structures, the research highlighted several essential aspects of the functioning of these complements.

The study identified that attribution complements play a central role in the precision of meaning in propositions, particularly in sentence structures where possession or attribution relations are involved. The analysis revealed that these complements can be linked to various types of verbs, including stative verbs, perception verbs, and action verbs involving indirect objects. Furthermore, attribution complements seem to follow syntactic principles similar to those of other object complements, while being distinguished by their function of qualification or specification, rather than

representing an action or a direction towards an object.

The main conclusions of this study include the discovery that attribution complements are often introduced by prepositions or specific verbs that mark a relationship of possession, destination, or identity. These complements not only fulfill a grammatical function but also enrich discourse by providing additional information about the participants or circumstances of the action.

5.2 Recommendations

The results of this study offer interesting implications for the development of linguistic theory, particularly regarding the syntax of complements and their role in constructing meanings. One recommendation would be to reevaluate existing theories on object complements to better integrate attribution complements within broader frameworks. It would be beneficial to develop syntactic models that account for the variation observed in constructions involving attribution complements, especially concerning how these complements interact with syntactic elements such as prepositions and pronouns.

From a pedagogical perspective, it would be wise to explore how the teaching of attribution complements can be improved to facilitate students' understanding of complex language structures. Teachers could incorporate practical exercises that illustrate how these complements function in various contexts, helping students better grasp the syntactic and semantic flexibility of these constructions. Such an approach would not only strengthen students' grammatical skills but also deepen their understanding of the subtleties of language.

For future research, a thorough exploration of the evolution of attribution complements in typologically different languages could offer new perspectives on their role and functional diversity. This would help determine whether the trends observed in Romance languages are universal or specific to certain linguistic groups. Moreover, examining attribution complements in varied sociolinguistic contexts could shed light on usage differences among speakers, depending on the register or situation.

5.3 Future Trends

The study of attribution complements should be accompanied by an exploration of new methodologies in linguistic analysis, particularly with the advent of technological tools that enable finer and more automated analysis of syntactic structures. The use of syntactic analysis software, combined with large and diverse linguistic corpora, will allow for a more precise examination of the frequency and variation of attribution complements across a broader range of texts and discourse contexts. The application of artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques could, in the long term, offer more robust predictive models regarding the use and variation of complements in different languages and their interrelationships.

Additionally, research on attribution complements could shift towards a more pragmatic approach, focusing on discourse interactions in conversational contexts. Such a direction would allow for a better understanding of how these complements are used not only to modify propositions but also to construct social relationships between participants in an exchange. This could include a thorough study of attribution expressions in formal and informal speech, interviews, and dialogues in various registers, to better understand the social and communicative roles of these constructions.

In sum, attribution complements are an essential aspect of syntactic analysis, and future studies should diversify to include innovative methodologies, corpus-linguistic approaches, and pragmatic perspectives. The evolution of analysis tools and new research directions should further illuminate their importance in the linguistic and pedagogical fields.

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