

## Verb phrase structure of Sinama using Chomskyan approach

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### ABSTRACT

Few studies are done on languages in Mindanao, Philippines. Sinama is one of the languages in Southern Philippines spoken by Sama Deya, one of the sub-groups of Bajau. This study aimed to analyze the verb phrase structure of Sinama using Noam Chomsky's approach namely the X-Bar theory and the Minimalist Program. Using qualitative research, the interviews, fables, and songs gathered from the Sinama speakers in Isla Verde, Boulevard, Davao City, Philippines were analyzed. Sinama speakers were consulted for data accuracy. The analyses went through expert validation by professors in Linguistics. Findings revealed that Sinama verb phrase has an equative property, which means that the verb phrase appears at initial or final syntactic position. The verb phrase structures in Sinama are composed of the verb, verb and noun phrase, verb and pronoun, verb and adverbial phrase, verb and prepositional phrase. Hence, this paper contributes to the development of discourse on Sinama language.

**Keywords:** *Chomskyan, Minimalist, Sinama, Verb Phrase, X-bar Theory.*

### INTRODUCTION

The ability of human beings to communicate through the use of words or symbols that represent objects, actions, qualities, feelings and ideas separates them from other living creatures. According to Dobrovolsky, et al. (1993), a fundamental fact about words in all human languages is that they can be grouped together into relatively small classes, called syntactic categories. Of all syntactic categories, only nouns and verbs are found in all human languages. A verb is a major lexical category whose members designate actions, sensations, and states.

The most common approach in studying verb phrase is the Transformational Grammar or TG. TG divides the sentence into Noun Phrase and Verb Phrase which in traditional grammar are equivalent to Subject and Predicate. The Verb Phrase or the VP being one of the two main components of a sentence is further subdivided at least into two more elements, the verb and its complement which are usually realized by a Noun Phrase, an Adjectival Phrase, or an Adverbial Phrase. According to the Linguistic Theory, among all the languages' phrasal categories, they share certain structural similarities. Chomsky, who belongs to those who use the constituency-based grammar, provides an analysis of a sentence as consisting of an X-Phrase (which may either be any phrase, such as, Noun or a Verb Phrase. An X-Phrase as a Verb Phrase is said to consist of an optional specifier and an X-Bar. X-Bar for Chomsky is said to be the component which is the feature not common to all language. An X-Bar, like in the Transformational Grammar, considers a head of the phrase, adjuncts and complements, sometimes none (Rodriguez-Navarro, n.d.). This representation of the syntactic structure of the Verb Phrase is what has become known as the Chomsky's X-Bar Theory. As already mentioned, the X-Bar Theory provides a way to determine the components of a sentence which may not be found in other languages. Chomsky in his work over the years has made the requirement to minimize the theoretical and descriptive apparatus used to describe language (in work dating back to Chomsky 1993, 1995). Chomsky re-examined the real nature of various linguistic operations and rejected them as non real. This is the beginning of the Minimalist Program; it moves from specific

language rules that describe particular syntactic constructions to general principles that interact to explain syntactic phenomena (Weibeluth, 1995). It is a program that grew out of the efforts of Chomsky's Government Binding Theory, and assumes to simplify the theory of syntax of any natural language to the greatest possible extent Matthews (1997). The Minimalist program tries to incorporate concepts such as simplicity, economy, symmetry and non-redundancy within its framework.

Kroeger (1998) conducted a study on Filipino language which focused on the verb phrase which he referred to as the 'Second Position'. Kroeger states that most languages have second element other than the main verb which is either auxiliary verbs or finite verbs. The language, with such verb structure, is referred to as a verb second language or a V2 language. The Filipino language, Tagalog, he provides, is not among these types of languages. He explains that the Tagalog's main verbs are followed by clitics in the form of pronouns and articles which he refers to as the Second Position. Noteworthy information that Kroeger provides about the Tagalog language is that it is verb-initial because the pre-verbal position is not obligatory and it is only filled in to give pragmatic focus to an oblique element of the clause.

There are several languages spoken in various locations in the Southern Philippines that have not been fully explored specially on its syntactic structure (Walton, 1986). It is for this reason that the researchers find it necessary to study the syntactic structure of Sinama, a language spoken by Sama Deya, one of the sub-groups of Bajau. This paper aims to determine the syntactical description of the verb phrase and its syntactic properties.

## METHODS

This paper is a qualitative research using syntactic analysis. It made use of Noam Chomsky's approach namely the X-bar theory and the Minimalist Program in describing and analyzing the verb phrase structure of Sinama. The informants of this study are five native speakers of Sinama, ages 10-45 years old, and residing at Isla Verde Boulevard, Davao City, Philippines. They are called Sama Deya - those building homes along the shore.

To solicit data on verb phrases, the researchers formulated questions for interview with the guidance of the Bajau experts. The researchers collected also two fables: *Si kalbaw maka Si Kallo* and *Maglomba' si Rabit maka si Bokko*, and four Mother Tongue-Based Children songs in Sinama: *Sung kita*, *Sumping Alingkat*, *Aniya' Tanganku*, and *Sangpū' Ambak*. The Sinama speakers were consulted for data accuracy. Analyses were validated by a Linguistics professor in the University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City, Philippines, and a Language and Linguistics Consultant in University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ***Verb Phrase Structure of Sinama in Davao City***

The phrases below show the syntactic position of the verb phrases of Sinama based on the direct interview with the Sama Deya natives in Davao City, two fables and four Mother-Tongue based children songs in Sinama. Out of 59 verb phrases, there are 13 verb phrases with verb and noun phrase as constituents. The researchers provide examples below employing the theory of Noam Chomsky's X-bar and Minimalist Program.

(1) *Aniya tangan ku*

**Sinama:** Aniya' tangan ku  
 | | |  
 have hands I  
**Word for word Translation:** have hands I  
**Translation:** I have hands

Sample 1

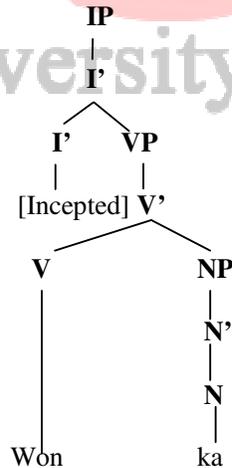
The first sample shows that the verb *Aniya* 'have' is located on the initial position before the Noun *tangan* 'hands'. The verb *Aniya* 'have' is located on the left side of the sentence which means that the verb is the focus, the sentence manifests focalization. According to Heath and McPherson (2013), focalization is a morphosyntactic process whereby a VP is pragmatically highlighted, while the remainder of the clause is treated as background. This is also true in the finding of the study of Ingilan (2015) that the Bahasa Sug verb phrase is located on the initial part of the sentence showing focalization, which means that the verb is the focus followed by its constituents. Bahasa Sug is a language spoken by the Tausugs in Sulu, Zamboanga, Palawan, and even in the Malaysian state of Sabah. It could also be noticed that in the Sinama sentence, *Aniya* precedes the noun phrase subject, which is contrary to English in which the verb follows the subject.

(2) *Amowa maglomba' si Kallo'*

**Sinama:** Amowa maglomba' si Kallo'  
 challenge race art. White Heron  
**Word-for-Word Translation:** challenge race art. White Heron

Sample 2

The second sample is another manifestation that the verb *Amowa* 'Challenge' is located in the initial position before the Noun Phrase *maglomba* 'race'. It shows focalization, which means that the verb is the locus in the sentence. This is similar with the finding of Dubios and Dubios (2005). They conducted a study about the Philippine Languages, specifically on Tagabawa. Tagabawa belongs to the South Manobo subgroup of Manobo language of Southern Philippines and spoken by approximately 30,000 speakers on the eastern and southern slopes of Mt.Apo. Dubios and Dubios (2005) provide that Tagabawa is a verb-initial language and displays typical Philippine-type morphosyntactic.



Anganda'ug ka (Sinama in Davao)  
 Won You (Word-for-Word Trans.)  
 You won (Translation)

Fig.1 Syntactic structure of Sinama

Figure 1 shows the syntactic position of Sinama verb phrase using Chomsky's X-bar theory. As shown, the verb phrase *Anganda'ug* 'Won' is located on the initial syntactic position of the sentence

before the Noun phrase *ka* 'You'. This is contrary to the English syntax, in which the verb follows the subject. Thus, it follows the structure VP+ NP.

The functionalist school of grammar maintains that Philippine languages verbs have no tense but rather contains an aspect. Linguists like Dr. Jessie Grace Rubrico and Dr. John Wolff analyze and try to formulate theories about Philippine languages grammar.

Sinama is one of the Philippine languages belonging to the Hesperonesian subgroup of Austronesian languages (Pallesen, 1985). The researchers theorized that Sinama verbs have no tense but have aspect instead. This is based on the theories of Dr. John Wolff, an authority on Austronesian languages. The theory as a tool in the study further strengthens and confirms the researchers, the native speakers and Bajau expert's observation. In Figure 1, the IP has the aspect of inception, it means whether the action has been initiated or not. Incepted aspect form for the verb *Anganda'ug* 'won/win' means that the action has already been delivered but it does not tell whether it has been delivered before or just recently, which means it could pertain to past or present tense in English language.

**(4) Akuy anabangan 'mma ko**

**Sinama:**

Akuy	anabangan	'mma	ko
I	help	Father	my

**Word for word Translation:**

**Translation:** *I help my father*

Sample 4

**(5) Iya anganda'ug**

**Sinama:**

Iya	anganda'ug
He	won

**Word for word Translation:**

**Translation:** *He won*

Sample 5

The verb phrases in the Samples 4 and 5 are located after the Pronouns *Akuy* 'I' and *iya* 'He' at the beginning of the sentence and followed by the verb phrase *anabangan* 'help' and *anganda'ug* 'won'. The subject *Akuy* and *Iya* are emphasized. The sentences show topicalization. This is manifested also in the study of Johnson (2001) that defines NP-topicalization as the Topic and Focus is assumed to be located in the left periphery of the nominal domain. The emphasis placed on the topic or focus of a sentence by preposing it to the beginning of the sentence. Therefore, they follow the structure PRN + VP.

A few important points are made evident from the judgments of the native speakers on the grammaticality of Sinama. The verb phrase in Sinama whether on its initial or final syntactic position, is still comprehensible.

Another verb phrase structure seen is verb and pronoun. There are 21 verb phrases structure of V+PRN out of 59 verb phrases found based on the corpora gathered by the researchers. The researchers provide examples below employing the theory of Noam Chomsky's Minimalist Program.

**(6) Pagbati ku subo**

**Sinama:**

Pagbati	ku	subo
awake	I	morning

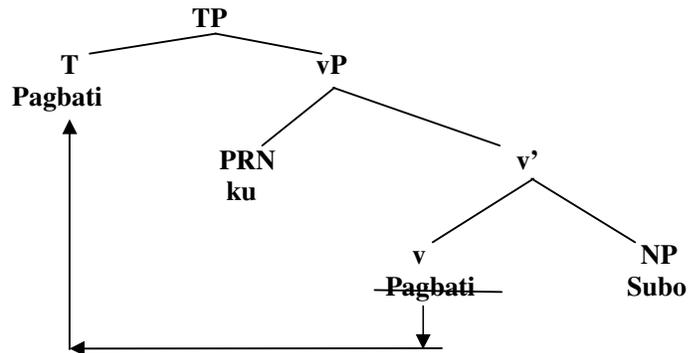
**Word for word Translation:**

**Translation:** *I wake up in the morning*

Sample 6

The sentence *Pagbati ku subo* 'I wake up in the morning' shows that the verb phrase *Pagbati* 'wake up' is on the initial syntactic position followed by the pronoun (PRN) *ku*. It is then obvious that the sentence shows focalization, the verb *Pagbati* is located on the left side which is the locus in the

sentence. Figure 2 illustrates the syntactic position of the Sinama verb phrase using Chomsky's Minimalist Program. It reveals a more complex rule of VP. This time, the VP contains a Pronoun (PRN) and a head verb.



**Fig.2** Syntactic structure of Sinama using Noam Chomsky's minimalist program

Figure 2 shows that TP template makes use Tense Phrase (TP) which rewrites as – Tense Aspect/Inflection – VP. This TP is headed by the functional head T which is the locus for all temporal properties of the structural description (Carnie, 2007). In Figure 2, the word *Pagbati* which is in the incepted aspect is under the functional head T; the locus. The incepted aspect means that the action is delivered but it does not specify whether it has been delivered before or just recently, it could mean a past or present tense in English language. The small *v* is the shorthand for the light verb which functions as the head of the vP-shell. Technically, the VP shell is composed of a higher VP which is headed by a null V to which the lexical verb moves or adjoins to and a lower VP containing the lexical verb and its complement (Larson, 1988). The current reading is that the VP shell has the vP which is the locus of the external and internal arguments (Boeckx, 2008). A strikethrough represents the copy of a lexical item left behind by the moved element in the computation.

It manifests that in Sinama with the use of Chomsky's Minimalist Program, the lexical category Pronoun (PRN) is no longer under the Noun Phrase (NP) unlike in the X-bar theory (Radford, 2004). The words that belong in the lexical category pronoun (PRN) are now labeled as (PRN). Thus, it follows the structure V+PRN.

(7) *Tara'ug aku, kallo*

**Sinama:**

**Tara'ug**

**aku**

**kallo**

**Word for word Translation:**

**lose**

**I**

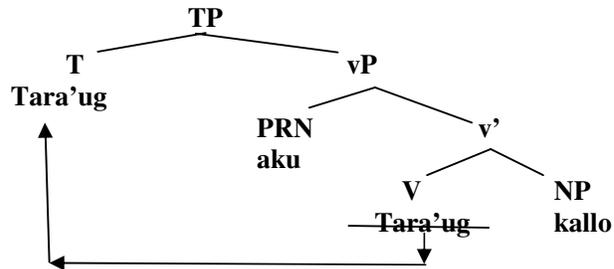
**White Heron**

**Translation:**

**White Heron, I lose**

Sample 7

The Sample 7 *Tara'ug aku 'lose I'* is an example of the verb phrase on its initial syntactic position. It is headed by the verb *Tara'ug* 'lose', followed by the subject *aku* 'I'. Figure 3.2 illustrates the syntactic position of Sinama in Davao City with the use of Chomsky's Minimalist Program.



**Fig.3** Syntactic structure of Sinama using Noam Chomsky’s minimalist program

Figure 3 illustrates the syntactic position of Sinama verb phrase using Chomsky’s Minimalist Program. It shows that the lexical category Pronoun (PRN) is no longer under the Noun Phrase (NP) unlike in the X-bar theory. The words that belong in the lexical category pronoun (PRN) are now labeled as (PRN); it shows focalization; it means that the verb is the focus and it is located before the pronoun (PRN) which appears on the left side of the sentence.

**Table 1** V+PRN of Sinama

Verb Phrase	Word-For-Word English Translation
Pahali-hali iya	took he
Patapuk iya	hides he
Palangi iya	swims he

The corpora reveal that Sinama verb phrase is in the initial syntactic position followed by a pronoun as its constituent. The sentences reveal focalization that they have the verb as their focus.

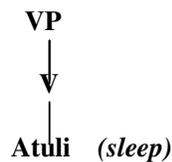
It is worthy to note that the majority of the verb phrases in Sinama in Davao City phrases are located on the initial syntactic position. Even though it is still comprehensible, if the verb phrases are located on the final syntactic position. According to the native speakers and experts of Sinama, the verb phrase on the initial syntactic position is commonly used in everyday conversation. This is also stated in the study of Kaufman (2009) that an over-arching descriptive generalization concerning syntactic structure in Philippine languages is that these languages possess a “predicate initial” word order.

Another verb phrase constituent of Sinama is verb. There are 20 verb phrases structure of VP=V out of 59 verb phrases found based on the corpora gathered by the researcher. The researchers provide examples employing the theory of Noam Chomsky’s Minimalist Program.

**Table 2.** Verbs as Head-Word of Sinama

Verb Phrase	English Translation
Atuli	Sleep
Angandagang	Sell
Amangan	Ate
Angongka	Played
Angungka	Play
Amalla	Cook

Table 2 presents the verb as a head word of Sinama verb phrase based on the corpora gathered by the researcher.



**Fig.4** Syntactic Structure of Sinama in Davao City (VP=V)

Figure 4 shows the Sinama verb phrase which only contains a verb. We see, then, that a single-word verb like *Atuli* 'sleep' functions as a verb phrase since the verb is the only obligatory component of verb phrase. Other single-word verbs which are part of the verb phrases are *angongka* 'play', *Palanggan* 'Go' and many others.

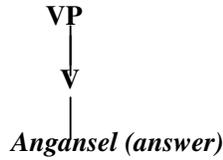


Fig.5 Syntactic structure of Sinama in Davao City (VP=V)

Figure 5 is another manifestation of the Verb Phrase of Sinama which only contains of the verb. It shows that a single-word *Angansel* 'Answer' functions as a verb phrase since the verb is the only obligatory component of verb phrase. It also revealed that the verb phrase *Anganse* 'Answer' is in itself a complete sentence, much like the English verbs 'play', 'run', and 'sit', when an imperative form, are themselves express complete thought. This gives us the basic rule VP → V.

Another verb phrase structure is verb and prepositional phrase. There are two verb phrases with structure of V+PP out of 59 verb phrases found based on the corpora gathered by the researchers. The researchers provide examples in the phrases employing the theory of Noam Chomsky's X-bar and Minimalist Program.

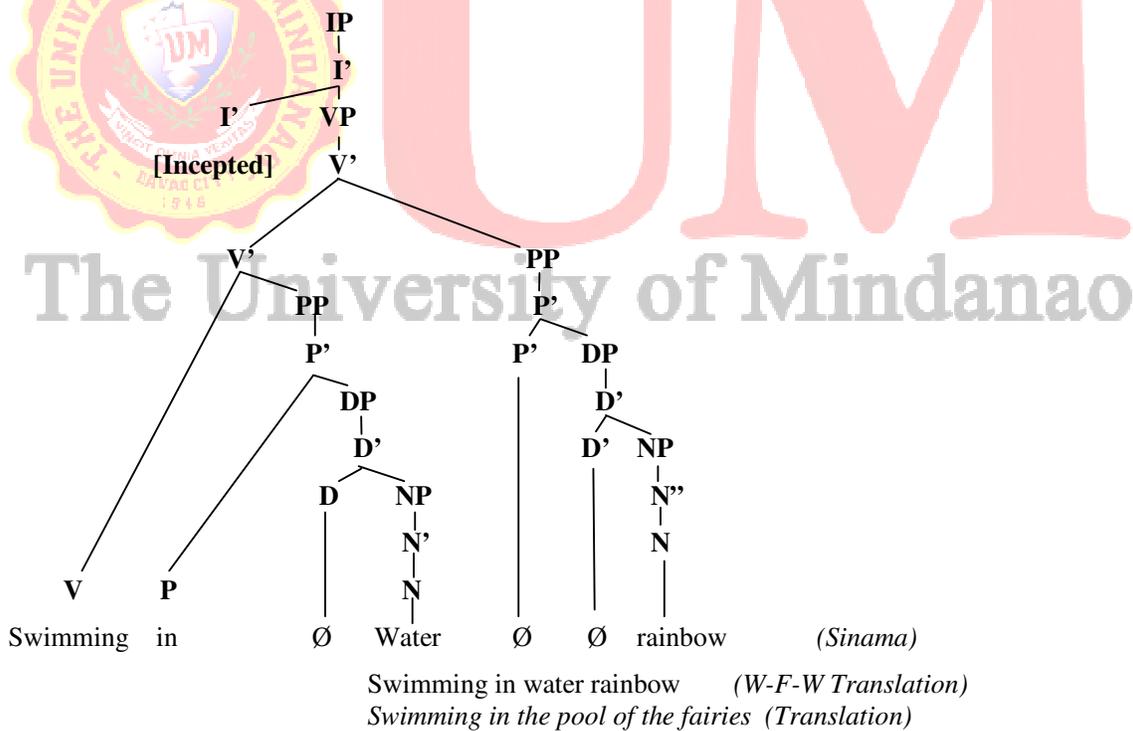
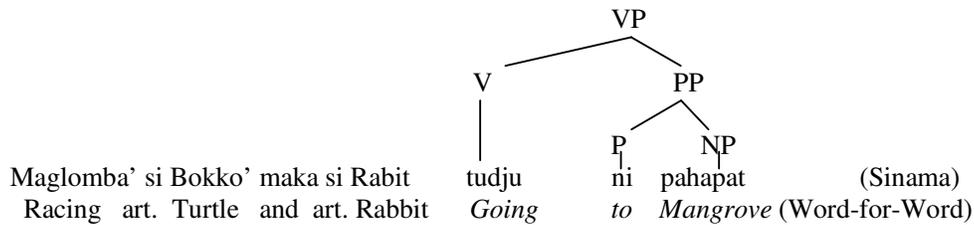


Fig.6 Syntactic Structure of Sinama employing the Theory of Noam Chomsky's X-Bar VP (V+PP)

Figure 6 reveals that the verb and another kind of constituent of Sinama. Figure 6 illustrates the syntactic position of Sinama verb phrase using Chomsky's X-bar theory. The verb *Amandi* 'swimming' is situated in the initial syntactic position followed by the prepositional phrase. The sentence shows focalization, the verb is located on the left side which the focus.



**Fig.7** Syntactic structure of Sinama VP (V+PP)

Figure 7 illustrates the syntactic structure of verb phrase *tudju ni pahapat* 'going to mangrove'. It shows that the VP is on its final syntactic position. The VP has taken as its components the verb *tudju* 'going' and prepositional phrase (PP) which composed of preposition *ni* 'to' and the Noun *pahapat* 'Mangroves'. This verb phrase shows Topicalization.

Another verb phrase structure is verb and adverbial phrase. There are three out of 59 verb phrases found based on the corpora gathered by the researcher. The researcher provides examples in the phrases employing the theory of Noam Chomsky's Minimalist Program.

**(8) Amille sad akuy**

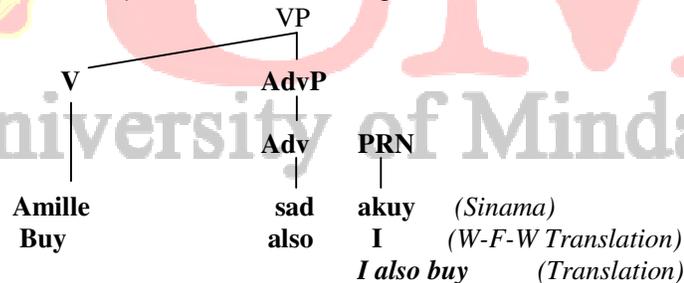
**Sinama:** *Amille sad akuy*

**Word-For-Word Translation:** Buy also I

**Translation:** I also buy

Sample 8

The sample above shows that the verb phrase of Sinama has verb + Adverbial Phrase as its constituents. Fig.8 represents the structure of the verb phrase *Amille sad* using Chomsky's Minimalist Program. It reveals another constituent of verb in Sinama. The verb *Amille* 'buy' is located on initial position, followed by an Adverbial Phrase (AdvP) which is composed of adverb *sad* 'also' and followed by the Pronoun (PRN) *akuy* 'I' as the External Argument of the verb.



**Fig. 8** Syntactic structure of Sinama VP (V+AdvP)

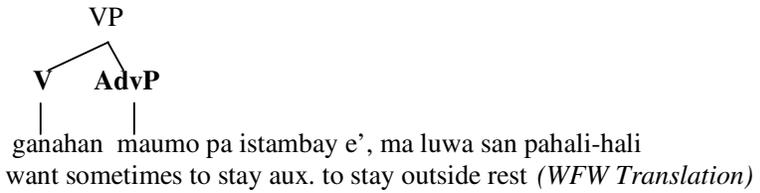
**(9) ganahan maumo pa istambay e', ma luwa san pahali-hali.**

**Sinama in Davao:** *ganahan maumo paistambay e', ma luwa san pahali-hali.*

**Word for word Translation:** want sometimes stay aux. to outside rest

Sample 9

The Sample 9 shows that the Sinama in Davao City verb phrase has verb + adverbial phrase as its constituent. Figure 9 represents the structure of the verb phrase *ganahan maumo* 'want sometimes' reveals that the VP is on its initial syntactic position. It is then clear that the sentence shows focalization. The verb is located on the left side of the sentence which is followed by the Adverbial Phrase.



**Fig.9** Syntactic structure of Sinama VP (V+AdvP)

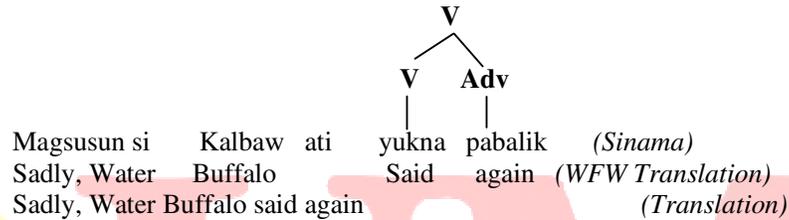
**(10) Magsusun si Kalbaw ati yukna pabalik**

**Sinama:** Magsusun si Kalbaw ati yukn pabalik

**Translation:** Sadly, Water Buffalo said again

*Sample 10*

The Verb Phrase *yukna pabalik* 'said again' in Sample 10 and illustrated in figure 10 illustrates that the VP was on its final syntactic position. The VP has taken as its components the verb *yukna* 'said' and Adverbial phrase (AdvP) which is composed of adverb *pabalik* 'again'.



**Fig. 10** Syntactic structure of Sinama VP (V+AdvP)

**Verb Structure Rules in Sinama**

**Table 3 Verb Structure Rules in Sinama**

Verb Phrase	Word-for-Word Translation	Verb Phrase Rule
Atuli	Sleep	V
Aniya' tangan ku	have hands I	V+NP
Anganda'ug aku	Win I	V+PRN
Amandi ni bohe' biradali	swimming in water rainbow	V+PP
Amille sad akuy	Buy also I	V+AdvP

Findings revealed that Sinama Verb Phrases are composed of the Verb, Verb and Noun Phrase, Verb and Pronoun, Verb and Adverbial Phrase, Verb and Prepositional Phrase.

In Sinama, the Phrase Structure Rule (PSR) for the Verb Phrase (VP) category has been identified its structure as follows:

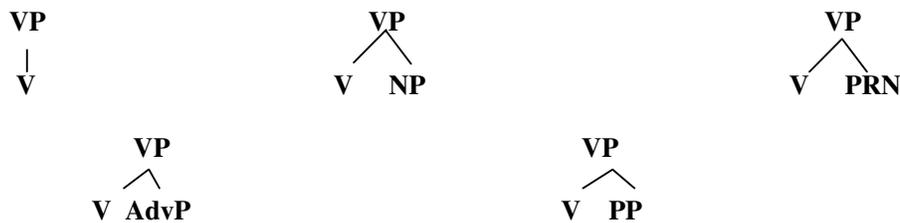


Table 3 above revealed that there are general principles of constituent structure as expounded in the theory of Universal Grammar. Looking closely at the relevant structures, it shows that they obey the following two putatively universal constituent structure principles: Headedness Principle, which means every syntactic structure is a projection of a head word, and Binarity Principle which means that every syntactic structure is binary-branching.

The examples given in Table 3 obey the Headedness Principle in that the VP *Aniya' tangan ku* is headed by the V *Aniya*, the VP *Anganda'ug aku* is headed by the V *Anganda'ug*, the VP *Amille sad akuy* is headed by the V *Amille*, the VP *Amandi ni bohe' biradali* is headed by the V *Amandi*. The given sentences also obey the Binarity Principle in that the VP *Aniya' tangan ku* branches into immediate constituents (in the sense that it has constituents beneath it, namely the V *Aniya* and the NP *tangan*), the VP *Anganda'ug aku* branches into two immediate constituents (in the sense that it has two constituents immediately beneath it, namely the V *Anganda'ug* and the PRN *aku*), the VP *Amille sad akuy* branches into two immediate constituents (the V *Amille* and the AdvP *sad*), and the VP *Amandi ni bohe* likewise branches into two immediate constituents (the V *Amandi* and the PP *ni* and Noun *bohe*). This discussion thus leads towards a principled account of constituent structure – based on a set of principles of Universal Grammar.

Under an extensive examination, it was found out that Sinama Verb Phrase usually occurs on its initial syntactic position. However, it could be seen that the Verb Phrase taking the final syntactic position could also be possible in Sinama. Below could be the example in Sinama.

- a) **Anganda'ug** ka - **Won You**  
 VP taking its initial syntactic position
- b) Iya **anganda'ug** - **He won**  
 VP taking its final syntactic position

The Verb Phrase of Sinama shows the duality of its syntactic position as presented by the sentences above. Both sentences are comprehensible. The two syntactic positions exemplify that the Verb Phrase of Sinama has an equative property, pertaining to the appearance of the verb phrase at initial or final syntactic position. However, according to the native speakers and the experts of Sinama, the verb phrase on the initial syntactic position is commonly used in everyday conversation.

### CONCLUSION

Linguists have been tackling the task of analyzing Philippine languages including Sinama, a language spoken by the Sama Deya, one of the sub-groups of badjau in Southern Philippines. This study revealed that majority of the verb phrases in Sinama are on their initial syntactic position but they are interchangeable. The verb phrase in Sinama sentence could be found on its initial or final position. The presence of the two syntactic positions exemplify that Sinama verb phrase has an equative property, which means that the verb phrase appears at initial or final syntactic position. The verb phrases are composed of: verb, verb and noun phrase, verb and pronoun, verb and adverbial phrase, verb and prepositional phrase. Hence, this paper can be a good reference to teachers and scholars who are into developing literacy materials in Sinama. More importantly, this paper contributes to the development and preservation of Sinama language.

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