X-Bartheory: Its Pros/Strengths and Cons/Weaknesses in Generative Grammar

Obins Nuhu Isaac  
Department of General Studies, School of Agricultural Technology, Saamaru-Kataf Campus, Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic Zaria, Nigeria

Mary Daniel Nimram  
Department of English, University of Jos, Nigeria

Blessing Saina’an Lagan  
Department of English and Literary Studies, Plateau State University, Bokkos, Nigeria

Daniel Nanlir Nimram  
Department of English, University of Jos, Nigeria

Umeh Ann Ifeoma  
Department of English, University of Jos, Nigeria

Nuhu Joseph Azi  
Department of English and Literary Studies, Plateau State University, Bokkos, Nigeria

Abstract:

The X-bar theory is an interesting field in linguistic investigation. X-bar theory deepens our understanding of grammatical structure, and as a result may help us use the language in question (English language) more effectively. This study is a critical review, primarily aimed at exploring and examining the strengths and limitations of the X-bar theory in the analysis of syntactic structures in the English language. While we do not claim that X-bar syntax is the “best” approach to the analysis of [English] sentences, it has advantages over some other approaches. The study proves that despite the limitations of the X-bar theory like overworking the I-node et.c. It is an important theory that is worth studying by linguists as relevant in the study of syntactic structures of the English language. The analytical frameworks provided by contemporary scholars, Aarts and Radford, which ultimately are based on insights of Chomsky, Jackendoff and other scholars going back to the 1970s, are used and adapted for the analysis of sentences in this study. These two linguists use the Transformational Generative Grammar approach in their analysis of English phrases and sentences. It is therefore hoped that this study will provide, in addition to the already existing data, a current material on the X-bar theory especially for researchers in the field of generative linguistics.

Keywords: generative grammar, syntactic structures, intermediate category, phrase-structure grammar.

Introduction

Generative Grammar itself represents a comparatively new way of thinking about grammar, but, as Chomsky (1957) shows, it also builds upon certain insights found in Traditional Grammar, though in general Traditional Grammar is insufficient. Since the Traditional
Grammar is insufficient in accounting for the different grammatical categories found in various languages in the world, relying on the traditional or earlier models of analysis implies that a lot of data in the structure of phrases and sentences will go ‘unaccounted for’. Carnie, (153) says that the traditional model has ‘some empirical inadequacies’.

X-bar syntax is a theory of Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) which includes two levels of category: word level (N, V, A, P ...) and phrase level (NP, AP, VP, PP ...). However, this is not a satisfactory method of classification because it does not include a description for strings of words that are neither full phrases nor individual words. It does not enable us to state general principles that are valid across different grammatical categories within a language-category that is neutral. Moreover, a grammar with two levels of categories is not adequate to state principles that hold true, universally.

In X-bar syntax, which is an aspect of generative grammar, a distinct category other than phrasal or lexical categories is accounted for in the language structures which does not appear in phrase structure rules for English or other natural languages. This distinct category is the intermediate category called the X-bar category.

**Significance of the X-Bar Syntax**

Aarts (119) defines X-bar syntax as “a theory which stipulates that all the major phrase types are structured in the same way”. He argues that the X-bar is a major improvement on the so-called ‘flat’ structures; that is structures where all elements are on the same level. X-bar theory brings out much clearer, the internal structure of the phrase which accounts for the fact that phrases are hierarchically structured as opposed to the flat structure which the phrase structure seems to suggest. In other words, while the phrase structure rules seems to suggest that every phrase has two levels of structure: XP and X, X-bar theory stipulates that every phrase has three levels of structure: X″, X′, and X. Phrase-Structure Grammar is a generative device containing rules (PS-rules) which are capable of not only generating strings of linguistic elements, but also of providing a constituent analysis of the strings. Flat representations assign the same relationship to the various elements that make up a phrase. In the NP *a man of the people*, for example, we would like to account for the fact that the Determiner *a* bears a relationship to the Head noun and PP taken together. This will fail to be adequately represented by the following flat representation:

```
Adopted from Aarts 119
```

The representation above is ‘faulty’ because it has no internal structure at all. In other words, under the phrase structure rules, we are restricted to only lexical and phrasal categories.

However, X-bar theory identifies intermediate categories and so the analysis of this phrase based on X-bar theory will look like this:

```
The above representation shows satisfactorily the relationships between the various components of the phrase *a man of the people*. The representation has an internal structure and accounts for the hierarchical relationship among constituents of a phrase. X-bar theory is therefore relevant because it identifies categories that are intermediate between the lexical and phrasal categories and it also accounts for the
```
hierarchical relationships among the constituents of a phrase. In the example given above, we see that the NP node dominates the det. And N’ nodes, the N’ node dominates N and PP which are regarded as sisters. In other words, N and PP are daughters of N’ while det. And N’ are daughters of NP.

Another example to illustrate this vital point is example twelve, ‘They have started’:

From the noun phrase above, we see that the complement (in black suit) is much more closely bound to the head (man) than the modifier (fat) is. As illustrated in the diagram, the modifier is a sister to the N’ node while the complement is a sister to the N node which is the head. This implies that there appears to be a stronger bond between the head and the constituent that follows it than there is between it and any other constituent. Consequently, the head and the complement share a node. In addition to this, the fact that the specifier (which is ‘the’ in this case) shares a node with N’ suggests that it relates to the entire structure dominated by N’ rather than any particular constituent. In other words, X-bar theory differentiates between the different functions that may be assigned to determiners such as the, no, some, every and also possessives such as John’s and my mother’s which can precede noun phrases. In recent Transformational grammar, the term “specifier” is not normally used to refer to a type of word or phrase but rather to a structural position provided by X-bar theory. A phrase (usually a full XP, though in bare phrase structure, could in theory be an intermediate category) is said to occupy the Specifier [Spec XP] of a head X. In X-bar syntax, specifier is the sister of X’ and the daughter of XP in the X-bar schema where XP corresponds to X’.

X-bar theory also identifies a more elaborate system of functional relationships among different constituents of a phrase. Consider this example below:

In addition to a head and its projections, X-bar theory recognises another element within a phrase known as “specifier” (Spec). Both the specifier and the complement occur at the second level along with X-bar categories (they occur as sisters of X). In X-bar syntax, specifiers, head words and complements together form phrases. Specifiers differ from complements in the sense that they are not sisters of the head, but rather of the phrase formed by the head and the complement. In English, some specifiers are
different structural categories namely: specifiers, modifiers and complements.

X-bar syntax, as a theory of phrase structure grammar, makes a significant contribution to both the descriptive and the explanatory adequacy of Linguistic Theory. The aim of a theory of language is to describe a speaker’s linguistic competence. Linguists like Chomsky believe that in order for a grammar to be satisfactory, it must satisfy two main conditions: descriptive adequacy and explanatory adequacy. A grammar that satisfies descriptive adequacy “describes the grammatical sentences of a language in such a way as to uncover deeper principles and rules, which capture in a more satisfactory way, the intuitions of the native speaker. A grammar which is formulated in accordance with the principles and conventions of a general i.e., universal linguistic theory with explanatory power is said to meet with explanatory adequacy.” Chomsky’s initial Phrase Structure Grammar introduces us to a set of phrase structure rules which includes for a grammar with two levels of categories: word-level (N, V, A, P, etc.) and phrase-level (NP, AP, VP, PP, etc.). However, the fact that it does not include a description for a string of words that is neither a full phrase nor a word (and, therefore, failing to satisfy descriptive adequacy) means that the theory is not a satisfactory method of classification. Furthermore, it does not satisfy the condition of explanatory adequacy because it does not enable us to state general principles that are valid across different grammatical categories within a language, i.e., category neutral. Moreover, a grammar with two levels of categories is not powerful enough to state principles that hold true universally. In this essay, attempts are made to demonstrate how the X-bar theory of syntax contributes significantly to both the descriptive adequacy and explanatory adequacy of Linguistic Theory using examples from English. This will show the significance of X-bar syntax to the analysis of English sentences.

Let us examine why it is necessary to add a third intermediate grammatical category which is neither a full phrase nor a word. Evidence for this is found in the following phrase: the king of Spain. Firstly, we can prove that this phrase is a constituent by performing the following tests:

1. Coordination — the king of Spain and ruler of the nation.
2) Substituting the pro-form one — This king of Spain is more handsome than the last one.

Both of these tests prove that the constituent is king of Spain. It is smaller than a full phrase because in coordination and in substituting the pro-form one, the Determiner the, is not included. In other words, it is not correct to substitute the pro-form one and have, *This king of Spain is more handsome than the last this king of Spain. Thus we see the need for an intermediate category and the bar notation helps with this. An intermediate-level category captures the commonality in the categorial status by using the same category symbol. It also captures the difference in complexity between categories by the number of bars that accompany the symbol. This is a good example of how X-bar theory of grammar is able to capture descriptive adequacy more sufficiently than a two-category level PSG.

In order to prove that the X-bar theory makes a contribution to explanatory adequacy in the analysis of English (and other languages), we would need to show that it is possible to apply the same phrasal analysis to the other major grammatical categories, i.e., VP, AP, PP, and ADVP and then to other languages.

Before extending the phrasal analysis of the NP to the VP, let us begin by recognising the need for a third intermediate category for VPs, in the example: eating a chocolate. This is shown by the fact that:

1. Only this unit can be proposed:
   a) He might have been eating a chocolate.
   b) Eating a chocolate he might have been.
   c) *Been eating a chocolate he might have.
   d) *Have been eating a chocolate he might.

2. Some main verbs can only be combined with a verbal unit that consists of the verb and what follows it. As in: I saw Mary close the curtains, but not *I saw Mary be closing the curtains.
Verbs are similar to NPs as they can combine with complements and adjuncts. This is shown in the example below:

*Carve the turkey at my house on Christmas Day.*

*Carve* is the V and also the head, the NP *the turkey* is the complement, and it is closest to the head. The PP *at my house* is an adjunct and the PP *on Christmas Day* is an adjunct as well. The distinction between complement and adjunct helps to capture structural ambiguity in VPs, just as it does in NPs. In the following example, the PP *on the boat* can either be a complement or an adjunct:

(1) They decided on the boat.

(2) They decided on the boat.

In (1), the decision took place on the boat, whereas in (2), they decided to purchase the boat. The PP *on the boat* is a complement in the second example and an adjunct in the first. This is because in (2), the PP is necessary to complete the meaning of the entire sentence unlike in (1) where the PP only gives an additional information and is optional. In addition, the distinction between complement and adjunct explains a number of distributional phenomena, and therefore achieves better descriptive adequacy. For example:

*He plays football in Manchester* is an acceptable sentence, but *He plays in Liverpool football* is not acceptable. This is because complements normally precede adjuncts. It is clear from our analysis of the VP that introducing a third intermediate phrasal category as well as bar notation accounts for better descriptive adequacy. Furthermore, we have seen that the system of phrasal analysis that applies for NPs can be extended to VPs, which shows that the system has better explanatory adequacy. It is possible to go through all the phrasal categories and show that the X-bar theory holds true for all of them.

Another advantage of X-bar theory is that it enables us to capture formally a distinction between complements and adjuncts. This is advantageous because it can account for certain ambiguities. For example, in PSG there is no satisfactory way of capturing the ambiguity in, for example, the following: *a teacher of high moral principles.* X-bar syntax enables us to capture the ambiguity very clearly in the following way: *a teacher of high moral principles vs. a teacher of high moral principles.* Firstly, the meaning of the sentence could be that the teacher teaches high moral principles and secondly, that the teacher is a person who has high moral principles. Thus, the complement is closest to the head noun, that is, it is a sister of the N, and the adjunct is sister of the N’. Adjuncts include adjectives and VP adverbs which are among the sub-categorised categories in PS rules. Radford differentiates between complements (which normally appear to the right of their head in English) and adjectives (which are not) which makes them viable as Specifiers of NP and VP. Specifiers on the other hand according to Carnie (172) will always be the left-most element as the daughter of XP and a sister to X-bar This means that specifiers will always appear to the left of the category they specify.

Radford also differentiates specifiers from adjectives in two ways namely: “that Det. and an NP subject cannot co-occur in the pre-N domain” (117). This is because both are specifiers and as such, they occupy the specifier position of NP. On the other hand, adjectives can co-occur with either of the categories mentioned above. The second issue relates to the fact that specifiers tend to be unique in that each category can only have one specifier. Adjectives on the other hand can be ‘stacked’, as Radford (118) puts it, so as to accommodate many adjectives in a single NP. He therefore concludes by making a distinction between specifiers and adjectives. X-bar syntax therefore provides that “the order of adjectives, with respect to the specifier and the head N suggests that they occupy a position intervening between Spec and N” irrespective of the number of adjectives in a structure. Radford formally calls this “adjunction structure or extension where adjectives are said to be adjoined to a given category” (118).

The two diagrams below describe the two differences between adjectives and specifiers:
On the second diagram above, there is an extension of N' which denotes the ambiguous relation of AP with N'. Here, AP is both the sister and daughter of N'. This property of adjuncts, though strange, differentiates structurally, complements and specifiers because they do not have “ambiguous relationships” (118).

VP adverbs are, according to Radford (119) “more likely to be adjoined to a projection of the verb, on a par with adjectives in relation to nouns. Nevertheless, they could parallel adjectives in function. The VP adverbs, therefore, modifies the VP while the adjective modifies the noun. Radford also parallels adjectives with adverbs where he says “adverbs can also be ‘stacked’ although to a lesser degree than adjectives” (119).

X-bar syntax in this case, provides an adjunction for adverbs (though they do not occupy a unique (spec) position as wit adjectives). They are added or adjoined to an existing projection of V. It also suggests that “VP-adverbs in relation to aux elements can be adjoined either to V’ or to VP. Here, VP adverbs are adjoined to V rather than VP. VP adverbs could either be “left adjoined” or “right adjoined” to V’.

The lecturers completely completely locked the classes.
X-bar syntax provides a clarification in relative clauses either as a complement or an adjunct “with an adjective-like function” according to Radford (120).

The news that Joy is pregnant spread across the city.

Thus, our justification is that X-Bar theory explains the hierarchical organisation of sentences by giving a very different perspective on embedded sentential structures.

X-bar syntax accounts for the negator ‘not’ as a specifier of the head and the complement. This can be seen illustrated in sentence 3 of the data. This is because this negator, just like other elements, ‘an’, ‘in’, ‘quite’ and ‘much’ relate not only to the head but to the head and complement together. In the VP ‘not destroy the garden’, the negator ‘not’ changes the imperative positive form of the sentence which is ‘destroy the garden’ into the negative form ‘not destroy the garden’. It also adds meaning to not only ‘destroy’ which is the head of the phrase but to the entire phrase, ‘destroy the garden’. Based on this, generativists like Aarts refer to the negator ‘not’ and other elements listed above as specifier elements, specifying both heads and complements. The diagram below illustrates this clearer:

Specifiers appear only when the meaning of the phrase requires them and so ‘not’ is regarded as one since in order to express a negative VP. Specifiers of NP most of the time are determinatives like the, this, those and many. Those of VPs are the negative elements like not and
The specifiers of APs are degree adverbs like *how*, *so*, *too*, while those of PPs are adverbs like *right*, *quite* and *just*. Specifiers are by definition strictly not recursive unlike adjuncts. This implies that we cannot have phrases like *those red bags* and so on. The negator ‘not’ functions in this way and could also be attached either to the preceding node (it should have *not* been this bad) or succeeding node (it should *not* have been this bad) in phrases or sentences.

The negative ‘not’ has in the past years been placed after the verb (I know *not* what to do next) but contemporarily, it is placed after the auxiliary (I do *not* know what to do next) as a specifier of the VP.

The negative ‘not’ can also be placed under the I-node as a daughter of S:

```
+-------+   +-------+
|   S   |   |   I   |
|-------|   |-------|
|   NP  | + |   VP  |
```

Radford (145) argues that the negator ‘not’ can be placed either inside the VP node as a daughter of VP and a sister to the V-bar where the modal or aspectual auxiliary appears to the left of the negator element. This implies that under this analysis, the modal is positioned under the I-node where it originates. For example, He will *not* have broken the mirror.

Analysing the negative ‘not’ is problematic. Scholars like Aarts, Brown and Miller almost always recognise it as a specifier but the concept of specifier is vague or nebulous. This negative in my opinion can best be analysed as an auxiliary modifying the VP and a sister to the V-bar. This implies that ‘not’ and ‘never’ are recognised as VP modifiers rather than specifiers. Ouhalla (27) says “the category Neg(ation) also belongs under Aux, irrespective of whether it has the full form ‘not’ or the contracted form ‘n’t’...tense is an obligatory constituent present in all sentences, and modal and Neg are optional”.

The diagram below illustrates that:

```
+-------+   +-------+
|   Aux |   | (Modal) |
|-------|   | (Neg)   |
|   Tense   |
```

Chomsky in his lecture in Radford (1995) introduces the concept of inflection abbreviated as ‘INFL’ and as ‘I’ in more recent works. Aux is replaced with ‘INFL’ or ‘I’ to avoid confusion created by the term ‘Aux’. Inflections are morphological suffixes added to the form of the verb or lexeme to show agreement between NPs and a verb.

Radford (122) is of the view that since NP and VP are phrasal categories, they are not likely to be the head of the sentence(S) but are likely to be specifier and complement of the head of S respectively. Aux is not a phrasal category and it occurs between the subject and predicate (VP), Radford suggests it is probably the head of S. For example:

```
I smile       You smile       He/She smiles
are acceptable not

*I smile       *You smiles    *He/She smile
```

Note that the morpheme ‘s’ does not appear with any member of the present tense paradigm but is restricted to the third person singular member (appears when the subject is third person singular). The ‘subject’ and ‘s’ are said to agree in the features of person, gender and
number known as ‘agreement features’, just as the past tense morpheme ‘ed’ is said to belong to the inflectional category, ‘tense’. Radford (123) says ‘tense, subject marker –s are inflectional members of Aux’. The diagram below illustrates this:

(Adapted from Radford 124)

Here, ‘I’ is the head, ‘IP’ is the maximal projection, ‘VP’ is the complement of ‘I’, ‘NP subject’ is the specifier of ‘IP’.

This vital point can be illustrated below, using sentence 2 of the data. Here, ‘I’ is the head of the ‘IP’ which is the maximal projection, ‘VP’ is the complement of ‘I’, and ‘NP subject’ is the specifier of ‘IP’.

The feature can either be positive or negative value [+Agr] or [-Agr]. The verb is placed under the V-node in its base form that is, in an uninflected form. The agreement feature is lowered from the I-node onto the verb inside the VP (a process called affix hopping) and they are spelled out as an inflectional ending on the verb. Clauses which include Tense and Agreement are called finite clauses while those which do not are non-finite. In non-finite clauses, the I-node is marker [-Tense], [-Agr]. Non-finite clauses are said to be ‘agreementless and tenseless’. This can be illustrated in a diagram as follows:

X-bar theory argues that a sentence has inflection as its head category. In Aart’s account, the placing of the tensed verbs under the V-node is unattractive and the lexicon does not contain inflected forms or variant of verbs which makes it constrained, therefore containing only what is called the lexeme. The I-node is responsible for making sure the verbs acquire tense and secondly, takes care of the agreement that obtains between subject and verbs as shown below:
The combinations mostly found under the I-node are:

[+Tense + present] [+Agr]
[+Tense - Present] [+Agr]
[-Tense] [-Agr]

The concept of transformation is an importance of the X-bar theory. Radford (401) describes transformation as the technical name of the movement rules that describe the relationship between the two levels of structure, (D-structure and S-structure). He presents a number of transformational rules to include V movement, I movement, NP movement and extraposition. Aarts (89) proposes four different ways in which elements or strings of elements can be moved in a sentence. They are:

Verb movement (aspectual auxiliaries have and be)
NP movement (in passive sentences)
Movement in interrogative sentences (subj-Aux inversion) and
Wh movement.
Examples of movement operations can be seen in sentences 6 and 8.

Anomalies/Limitations of the X-Bar Theory

Despite the relevance of the X-bar theory, there are also significant limitations of this theory. Some of these limitations are:

Although X-bar Theory tries to establish a more elaborate system of functional relationship among constituents of a phrase, it has not been able to clearly establish how we can explicitly identify whether a pre-head element is a specifier or modifier in every case. From the noun phrase that big bag for example, we can clearly say that the pre-head element that is the specifier because it has a specifying function. In other phrases like very happy to see you however, becomes a bit difficult to conclude on whether the pre-head element, very, is specifying or modifying the head. Also in example thirteen, the pre-head element ‘quite’ in the phrase ‘quite a number of slogans’ is a bit difficult to decipher if it is performing a specifying or modifying function. This implies that one is compelled to identify a specifier in every phrase type when it may even be difficult to find one. This is a weakness of X-bar Theory.

The placement of Tense, Agreement, Modals and negatives under the I-node ‘overworks’ the I-node. Also the infinitival particle ‘to’ which is also placed under the I-node is by its nature tenseless and agreement less (carries no tense or agreement properties and is thus, uninflected in form). The tense and agreement features are related so could go together but the placement of the Aux and the infinitival ‘to’ under the I-node does not give a reasonable analysis. Thus, the I-node serves as a ‘dumping ground’ for unaccounted elements in Generative Grammar. We can see that clearly from the below diagram:

Another limitation of the X-bar syntax is that because of its recursiveness, one could have a highly layered tree as diagrams of sentences 11 and 20. Theories of syntax that build on the X-bar schema end to posit a large amount of sentence structure. The constituency-based, binary branching structures of the X-bar schema increases the number of nodes in the parse tree to the upper limits of what is possible. This results in the creation of ‘tall’ trees that acknowledge as many syntactic constituents as possible. The number of potential discontinuities increases, which increases the
role of movement up the tree. The analysis of such phenomena as inversion or shifting becomes more complex because it will necessarily involve discontinuities and necessitate movement or feature passing. It is still a matter of debate if the large amount of sentence structure associated with the X-bar schema is necessary or beneficial.

The theory expressed by X-bar syntax is found to be more relevant to analysis of languages with the SVO structure than those with the VSO structure or otherwise. The X-bar syntax provides far reaching and more elaborate analysis of the NP as against the VP and very little on the ADV. Thus, it can be concluded that X-bar syntax is not equally “relevant” to all phrase structures in the same way.

According to Carnie (219), a significant problem with X-bar syntax which is also a well-known flaw in all facets of generative grammar is that it generates sentences that are not grammatical or acceptable. This is because X-bar syntax says that complements are optional. This implies that direct objects which are complements should always be optional for example *Rosemary hates is accepted instead of Rosemary hates New York. However, the lexicon will determine whether a complement is obligatory or not for example, after ‘hate’ a complement is obligatory.

On the other hand, since X-bar theory optionally allows a complement, a direct object in the sentence *Jennie smiled the breadbox should also be accepted. There are other instances or sentences where both the direct and indirect objects are obligatory for example:

Traci gave the whale a jawbreaker and not
*Traci gave the whale or
*Traci gave a jawbreaker

Summary

This study provides evidence for the necessity of adding a third category (intermediate category) which is neither a full phrase nor a word. This is achieved by substituting such categories with the proform “one” and also by coordination. X-bar syntax enables us to formally capture a distinction between complements and adjuncts which equally helps in accounting for certain ambiguities.

It has further explained how X-bar syntax simplifies grammar by adopting binary branching which makes the learning of languages easier. X-bar syntax also introduces prime or bar notation which allows us to capture the distinction between categories formally.

Additionally, this study establishes that the X-bar syntax has certain limitations like recursive layered tree which could be confusing to learners. The theory also weakly accounts for specifiers. This is because linguists have not yet found a clear distinction between specifiers and modifiers in all instances. It will also be a difficult task, experimenting all phrase types in all languages to see if they fit into the schema.

Conclusion

In this study, we tried to discuss the X-bar as a significant improvement on the traditional Phrase Structure rules. It is obvious that proponents of this theory try to limit the set of possible Phrase Structure rules by proposing an alternative schema into which all phrase types supposedly fit. This is a remarkable improvement in the study of syntax. The role of the phrase structure rules seems redundant because they duplicate information included in the lexical entries of the lexical categories. The following conclusions are also drawn from this study:

1. X-bar syntax can be used in bigger-unit analyses.
2. X-bar correctly represents constituents smaller than XP but bigger than X. This implies that the intermediate categories are accounted for.
3. Syntactically, X-bar helps to distinguish between complements from specifiers and adjuncts. This implies that using the X-bar theory, we can account for the distinction between adjuncts, complements and specifiers (Carnie, 219).
4. It makes or captures cross-categorial generalizations by allowing all kinds of phrases to have the same basic properties.
5. It can be used for many different languages. This is because it allows us to draw trees for most of the sentences of any language.
6. The X-bar theory also throws more light on the hierarchical organisation of the phrase instead of the linear order of the constituents.
7. The X-bar schema can also be extended to “embrace” the constituents of the clause as a whole.
8. When we use X-bar, we can easily account for ambiguity, for example, in the case of complements and adjuncts.
9. It accounts for the negator ‘not’ and ‘never’ as VP modifiers.
10. It provides for the creation of an infinite number of structures drawn from a finite structure.
11. Because of its recursiveness, one could have a highly layered tree which could look confusing
12. It weakly accounts for specifiers. We are also yet to find a clear distinction between specifiers and modifiers in all instances.
13. It will be difficult to experiment all phrase types in all languages to see if they fit into the schema.
14. In X-bar syntax, complements are optional but some complements are not optional but obligatory (Carnie, 219)
15. It is also observed that generative (including X-bar) theory, for all its sophistication, cannot easily handle many phenomena of everyday language use. This can be seen in sentences where the presence of the emphatic pronoun (yourself) complicates the structure for example ‘do you need to buy the medicines yourself mama?’

However, as elaborate as X-bar theory is both in terms of accounting for the fact that phrases are hierarchically structured as well as identifying an elaborate system of functional relationships among constituents of a phrase and its possibility of being applied to different fields of endeavours, it still has certain limitations. Consequently, we still look forward to a less cumbersome but more precise theory.

References


