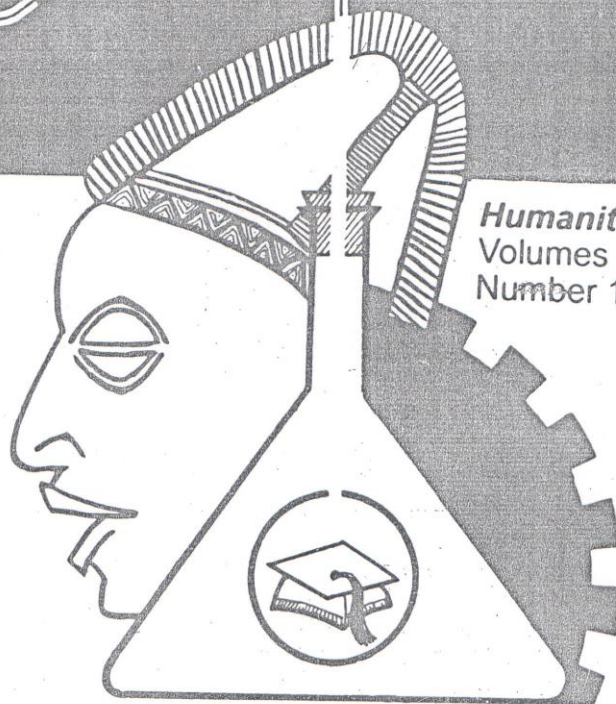


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## Emphatic-Case Assignment In Focus Constructions: Evidence From Owé.

by

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### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the status of the focused Noun Phrase in Owé. It aims at accounting for the different Case Features on the trace and the antecedent in focus constructions. The hypothesis formulated is that the focus marker, being the head of the focus phrase, functions as a Case assigner. This paper concludes by proposing that the Case assigned to the focused Noun Phrase is Emphatic Case.*

### **Introduction**

Owé is a dialect of Yorùbá, a member of the Niger-Congo language family. Owé refers to both the dialect and its speakers who are found within the Kabba district in the present Kabba-Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State. This study examines the status of the focused Noun Phrases in Owé. Efforts will be made to account for the fact that the focused Noun Phrase and its trace are assigned different Case features. We will also try to examine why this is so and what assigns that Case feature to the focused Noun Phrase.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework assumed for this research is the Government and Binding Theory otherwise known as Principles and Parameters Theory. This theory refers to the generative work initiated by Chomsky's (1981) *Lectures on Government and Binding* (Haegeman, 1991:3). It is a theory of Universal Grammar.

Chomsky (1986b:7) sees Universal Grammar 'as some systems of principles, common to the species and available to each individual prior to experience'. According to Haegeman (1991:13) 'Universal Grammar is a system of all the principles that are common to all human languages'. It is the basis for acquiring language; it is seen as underlying all human languages. It is a study of the conditions that must be satisfied by the grammar of all human languages. There is an embedding principle that holds for all languages and this is

regarded as Universal Principle. This embedding principle, according to Haegeman (1991:12) tries to render explicit part of the tacit knowledge of the native speaker.

According to Cook (1988:1) 'Universal Grammar Theory holds that speaker knows a set of principles that apply to all languages, and parameters that vary within clearly defined limits from one language to another'. It is a system of components and sub-theories, each with certain parameters of variation. These sub-theories also referred to as modules of grammar, form an interlocking network that interact with each other. The Case Theory accounts for some of the formal properties of overt NPs while the Binding Theory regulates NP interaction and recognizes Three NP-types.

GB-Theory has two levels of syntactic structure, the d-structure and the s-structure. At the d-structure, all elements are in their original location while at s-structure, the elements have been moved. These two levels of representation are mapped through the rule, Move Alpha (move-a).

#### Case in GB Theory

Blake (1994:1) sees case as "a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads". Onions on his own part (1904/1971:80) says that Case means

a form or modification of a declinable  
word used to express certain meaning or  
to denote a certain relation to another word  
or words in a clause or sentence.

(Onions, 1904/1971:80).

Case could be traced to the Greeks and Romans of the medieval period and the traditional model for describing Case systems is based on ancient Greek and Latin (Blake, 1994:29). The nouns of Greek and Latin were classified according to particular paradigms of declension for the inflexional categories of Case and Number. According to Lyons (1968:289), the Stoics gave the word 'Case' the more particular sense it has borne in grammatical terminology. Case is to Nouns what Tense is to Verbs. Traditional Grammar attaches great importance to Case in the definition and classification of nouns.

Right from the beginning of enquiry into the nature of language till this moment, the concept of Case has been very relevant. In fact, the universality of Case as a grammatical category is affirmed and 'in every language Case served different purposes' (Jespersen, 1924:179). Case Theory accounts for some of the formal properties of Noun Phrases.



Case theory, according to Haegeman (1991:180) is the module of grammar that is concerned with the distribution of NPs within grammatical sentences. Case is a property of Noun Phrases. It is one of the modules of Government and Binding Theory that interacts with other sub-theories to determine grammaticality or ungrammaticality.

Case Theory deals with how Case is assigned and in the Government and Binding Theory, Cases are assigned under government. According to Chomsky (1986b:187) if a category has a Case to assign, it may assign it to an element that it governs. Therefore,

Nominative is assigned by Tensed INFL

Accusative is assigned by Verb and Preposition

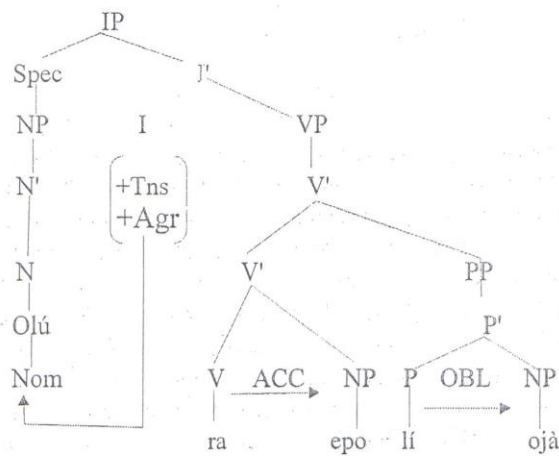
Oblique is assigned by Preposition.

The assertion made above can be illustrated as in (1) in below:

- (1)
- Olú ra epo lí jà  
 Olu buy oil at market  
 'Olu bought palm oil at the market'

The diagram in (2) below shows the direction of Case assignment:

(2)



According to the Case Filter, all overt Noun Phrases must be Case marked or else must be filtered out as they are considered ill-formed. This fact can be exemplified with the structure in (3) below:

(3) Case Filter:

\*        NP  
          +Lexical  
          -CASE

Lasnik and Uriagereka (1988:12).

#### Defining Focus Construction.

Jackendoff (1972:230) observes that focus denotes the information in the sentence that is assumed by the speaker not to be shared by him and the hearer. Baker (1995) defines focus as 'a construction that is specifically designed to serve an identificational function'. Focusing is a way of rendering a constituent of a sentence emphatic.

Lambrecht (1994:206) defines focus as the 'new knowledge hitched to the topic post' i.e. the new information conveyed about a topic. He goes on to say that the focus is

that portion of a proposition which cannot be taken  
for granted at the time of speech. It is the  
UNPREDICTABLE or pragmatically  
NON-RECOVERABLE element in an utterance.

The focus is what makes an utterance into an assertion.

(Lambrecht, 1994:206).

Following Nwachukwu (1988:7) and Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:408) it is believed that focus has to do with new information and that it indicates where the new information lies and the unit carrying this information. Halliday (1967:204) remarks that:

Information focus is one kind of emphasis,  
that whereby the speaker marks out a part  
(which may be the whole) of a message  
block as that which he wishes to be  
interpreted as informative.

(Halliday, 1967:204)

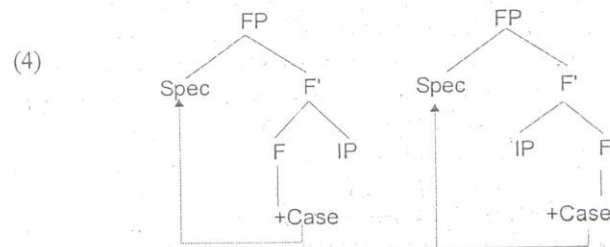
It is a fact that focus has to do with the speaker passing information that he feels is new to the hearer or trying to make a particular constituent important or emphatic.

The newness of the information does not mean that it has not been mentioned before but that the speaker presents it in a special way of calling attention to it by laying emphasis on that particular constituent.

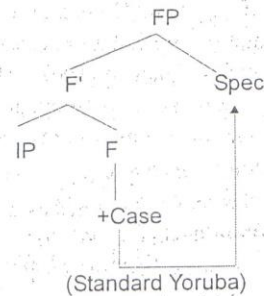
The focus Phrase like the Complementizer Phrase and Inflectional Phrase is a functional projection and is headed by a functional head- the *Focus Marker*. The Focus Marker in Owé is 'ki'. The focused constituent is housed in the Specifier of an FP position. Awoyale (1990: 9) says 'we want to add that Focus be treated as a separate projection of a functional category into the Specifier of FP position'.

When a constituent is focused in Owé, it is moved from its original position to the

The diagram in (4) below illustrates this:



(Standard Yoruba)(Ondo Yoruba)



(Standard Yoruba)

(Adapted from Awoyale, 1995)

When the Subject NP is focused i.e. when the Subject NP is moved to the Spec of FP, it leaves behind a resumptive pronoun which heads the cleft sentence, but when the Object NP of the Verb Phrase or Prepositional Phrase is focused, it leaves behind an empty category (i.e. a trace).

Focusing is an example of movement transformation, alias 'Move-á'. The constituent to be rendered emphatic is preposed, that is, moved to the Spec of FP. Following G-B account of D-Structure and S-Structure, it is assumed that in the derivation of Focus Constructions, the D-Structure is mapped onto the S-Structure by Move-á.

The question now is what happens to the Cases assigned to NPs before movement, why is it that focused NPs in the Spec of FP have different Case forms and what role does the focus marker play in all this? When the Object NP is moved to the Spec of FP, it is assigned a different Case while the trace retains its Accusative Case assigned to it originally. Baiyere (1999:129) says this has not conformed to the rule of Case Theory of Universal Grammar.

#### **The Focus Marker**

The particle that serves as Focus Marker in Owé is '*ki*'. It heads the Focus Phrase. The status of the Yoruba focus marker has been a case of so much controversy among linguistics scholars. Sometimes, it is regarded as a copula verb, a mere expletive or a focus marker (Awobuluyi 1978a, 1987, Owolabi 1987, Yusuf 1990). Yoruba and Owé Focus Constructions are very similar except for the difference in their focus markers. The focus marker in Yoruba is '*ni*'. According to Awobuluyi (1992:71), Yusuf (1990) represents something of a cross between those who hold that the element in question is some kind of marker, particle or expletive and those who believe that it is a verb.

Awoyale (1990:10) treats focus as a Case feature because there is a distinct marker for it. He says the Focus Marker assigns Focus Case to the Specifier of FP position and that this conditions alpha movement either in the syntax or at the Logical Form Component of Focus Constructions. The focus marker primarily foregrounds information.

Awobuluyi (1992:69) on his own part says that the standard Yoruba element '*ni*' does not function as a copula verb but as a focus marker. Awobuluyi however disagrees with Awoyale that the focus marker is a Case assigner. He sees the whole structure of focus as a Noun Phrase. According to him Focus Constructions pattern with Noun Phrases rather than sentences, so the issue of it assigning Case does not arise.



### Focus Constructions in Owé

The constituents of focus are units that can be focused in Owé. This is the unit that houses the new information. It is the constituent that is emphasized and brought into focus, moved to the Specifier of FP position. Noun Phrases are the most easily focused constituent in Owé. The Noun Phrases could be Subject NP, Object NP or Object of Preposition. When the Object NP of Preposition is focused, the preposition which is the head of the

an adjunct, the preposition disappears totally. Adjectival and Verb Phrases can also be focused. In the case of Verb Phrases, the verb is nominalized at the landing site while a

use of only Noun Phrases since we are trying to examine Case Theory which is a feature of the Noun Phrase.

### Noun Phrase Focusing.

The Noun Phrase is the category that codes the participants in the event or state described by the verb (Yusuf, 1998:8). NP focus is a situation whereby a Noun Phrase is moved from its logical position to the SPEC of FP.

The most easily focused constituents are the Noun Phrases and Prepositional Phrases and these are phrases that share [-v] feature. Jackendoff (1977a:17) observes that only NPs and PPs can appear in the focus position of cleft sentences. Radford (2002:148) also says that 'only phrases headed by a [-v] constituent can be focused in cleft sentences.

The Noun Phrase to be focused could be the subject NP in which case it is the *External Argument* of the Verb Phrase and is Theta-marked by it and assigned Case by the tensed INFL. The Noun Phrase could be Object of The Verb Phrase, subcategorized for by the verb, Theta-marked and Case-marked by the verb. The object of Preposition NP could also be focused. This NP is Theta-marked and Case-marked by the Preposition, the head of the phrase. This Noun Phrase could be *Internal Argument*. The genitive NP could also be the object of focus.

As mentioned earlier, the Binding Theory recognizes three NP-types; *Anaphor*, *Pronominal* and *Referring Expressions*. For better exemplification and clarity of purpose, we will make use of '*Pronominals*' and in few instances '*R-expression*'. The reason for this is that instances of changes in Case forms are noticed through *Pronominal forms* in Owé.



The Owé pronominals are as outlined in (5) below. They are inflected for *Number*, *Person* and *Case*. According to Awobuluyi (1978:12) 'they function as Subject and Object'. A major distinction is made between the weak and the strong pronouns. The weak pronouns which are also called the un-emphatic pronouns function as either subject or object in a construction. They however have different forms at the subject-position and at the object-position. The reason for this is that they are inflected for different grammatical categories like Case, Number and Person as mentioned earlier. (5) below illustrates the weak pronominals attested in Owé:

(5)	<b>Singular</b>	Subject Object	
	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	mò	mì
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	wọ	wọ
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	ó	i
	<b>Plural</b>	Subject      Object	
	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	à	gha
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	ẹ	ghin
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	ọ	ghon

From the examples in (5) above, we can see that the forms of the subject are different from those of the objects. The weak pronouns in Owé cannot be focused. (6) below gives some data to illustrate this observation:

- (6) ia    mo ri w  
           I    see you  
           'I saw you'
- ib    w ri mì  
           you see me  
           'You saw me'
- iiia    à ri ghon  
           we see them  
           'We saw them'
- iiib    ó ri gha  
           they see us  
           'They saw us'

- iii. \*wó kí ó rí mi  
you FM you see me  
'It is you that saw me'
- v. \*■ kí ó b ghà  
you FM you beg us  
'You begged us'

The strong pronominals otherwise called the 'emphatic pronouns' by Awobuluyi (1978:12) have all the trappings of a noun. These types of pronominals take the place of the weak pronominals when there is a need to focus or to lay emphasis. In Owé, strong pronominals do not appear in object-position. They sometimes appear in subject-position and always in a focused position. The data in (7) are examples of strong pronominals in Owé:

(7)		Singular	Plural
	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	èmi	àgha
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	iwo	ẹghin
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	òun	óghon

The sub-class of pronominals in (7) above can be used in different constructions as seen in (8) below.

- (8)
- i. èmi kí Olú ri  
I FM Olú see  
'It is me that Olu saw.'
- ii. ìw kí ó jẹ un  
you FM you eat  
'It is you that ate.'
- iii. àgha kí ó ni  
we FM we have  
'It is our own.'

#### Subject-NP Focus.

In the logical position, the Subject-NP is assigned Nominative by the INFL and assigned the role of AGENT by the Verb Phrase. The INFL is the only non-lexical category i.e. functional category that assigns Case. The sentences in (9) below will illustrate this:

- (9) ia. Tope àti Solá ti dé  
Tope and Sola has come  
'Tope and Sola have come.'
- ib. [Tope àti Solá<sub>i</sub>] kí [ó<sub>i</sub>]dé  
Tope and Sola FM they come  
'It is Tope and Sola that arrived.'
- iiia. Baba mi re sọ si  
father my go church  
'My father went to church.'
- iiib. [Baba mi<sub>i</sub>] kí [ó<sub>i</sub>]re sọ si  
father my FM he go church  
'It is my father that went to church.'
- iiia. Mò je isu àti ẹghin  
I eat yam and egg  
'I ate yam and egg.'
- iiib. [Èmi<sub>i</sub>] kí [ó<sub>i</sub>]j isu àti ẹghin  
I FM I eat yam and egg.  
'It is me that eat yam and egg.'

The Subject NP is moved from its argument position to the SPEC of FP and a resumptive pronoun that is co-indexed with the moved element is left at the extraction site. The resumptive pronoun however, is insensitive to change as regards number. For example, the following sentence is ungrammatical in Owé:

- a. Tope àti Solá ti dé  
Tope and Sola has come  
'Tope and Sola have come.'
- b. \*[Tope àti Solá<sub>i</sub>] kí [<sub>i</sub>]dé  
Tope and Sola FM they come  
'It is Tope and Sola that arrived.'

From the examples given above, it is discovered that it is 'ó' that serves as resumptive pronoun both for singular and plural Subject-NP.

The Case form of the moved element is different from that of the trace. In the data above, the Subject NPs in i a, ii a, iii a, iv a, v a, are assigned Nominative Case by the tensed INFL while their 'b' counterparts have another Case form.



**Object-NP Focus.**

The Object-NP is the subcategorized position of the Verb. The Object-NP is assigned Accusative Case by the verb. The sentences in (10) below are examples of object-NP focus in Owé:

- (10) i a. Títí ra apọ lí ọjà  
Titi buy pepper at market  
'Titi bought pepper at the market.'
- i b. [ ọ<sub>i</sub> ]<sub>kí</sub> Títí ra [t<sub>i</sub>] lí ọjà  
pepper FM Titi buy at market  
'It is pepper that Titi bought at the market.'
- ii a. Baba mi re sọ sì  
father my go church  
'My father went to church.'
- ii b. [sọ sì<sub>i</sub>] kí Baba mi re [t<sub>i</sub>]  
church FM father my go  
'It is church that my father went.'

When the Object-NP is moved, it loses its Accusative Case. At the extraction site is a trace co-indexed with the antecedent at the SPEC of FP but with different case forms.

**Object of Preposition Focus**

The complement of the preposition is preposed to the SPEC of FP. The Object NP of preposition is Case marked Accusative by the preposition which governs it. The data below exemplifies this:

- (11) a. Olú gbé omi hí owo tébù  
Olu carry water on top table  
'Olu put water on the table.'
- b. ówo tébù<sub>i</sub> kí Olú gbé omi hí (t<sub>i</sub>)  
head table FM Olu carry water on  
'It is on the table that Olu put the water.'

When the object NP is moved, the preposition is left behind as seen above. This is a case of preposition stranding. Preposition stranding is a situation whereby object of a preposition is fronted on its own without the preposition.

The other type of movement is the one that involves un-subcategorized Prepositional Phrases. Sometimes it is a case of *pied piping* i.e. the preposition is moved along with the object-NP to the landing site but most often the preposition gets deleted entirely as it is neither *orphaned* nor *pied piped*. It is discovered that the preposition which heads the phrase gets deleted when it functions as an adjunct i.e. it is not subcategorized for.

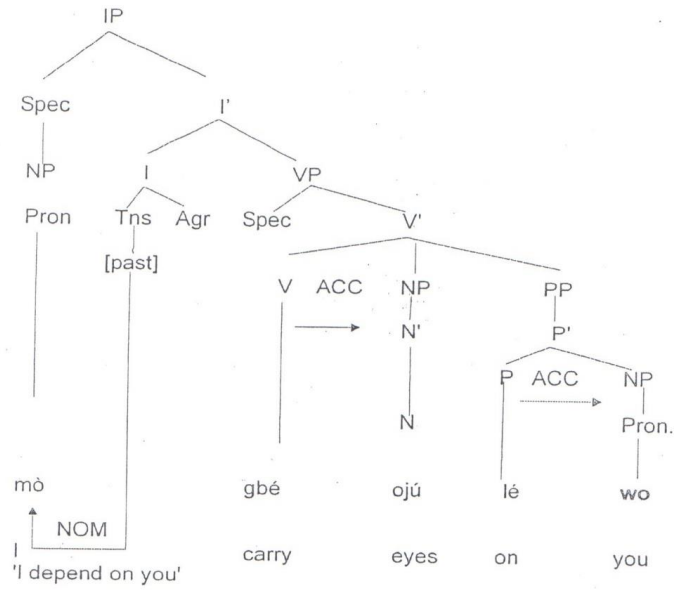
- a. Títí ra apo lí ọjà  
Titi buy pepper at market  
'Titi bought pepper at the market.'
- b. ọjà, kí Titi tí ra apọ t<sub>i</sub>  
market FM Titi has buy pepper  
'It is at market that Titi bought pepper.'

#### The Focused Phrase.

From the examples of the focused NPs given above, it is clear that the focused NPs are assigned Case at the SPEC of FP. This is because the form of the trace and the antecedent that should share same Case features are different. The structures below exemplify this:

- (13a) mò gbé ọjú lé wọ  
I carry eyes on you  
'I depend on you.'

(13b)

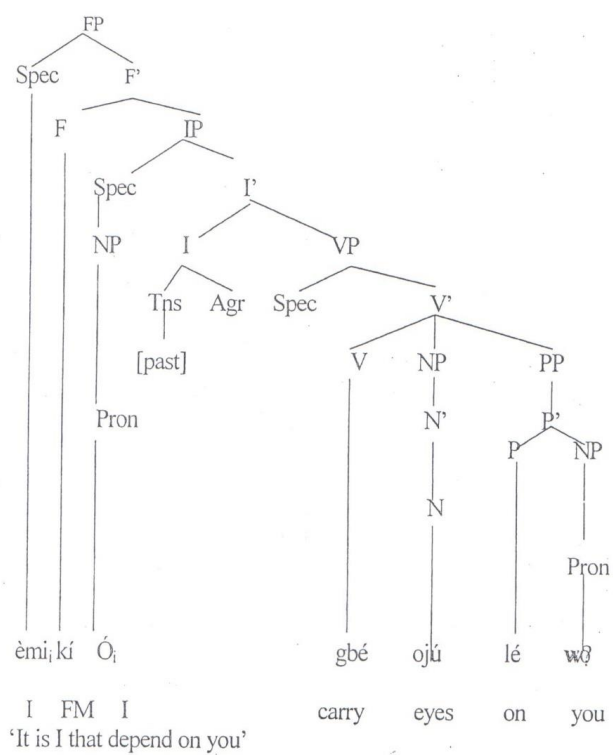


(13c)

èmi<sub>i</sub> kí Ó<sub>i</sub> gbé ojú lé wo  
 I FM I carry eyes on you  
 'It is I that depend on you.'

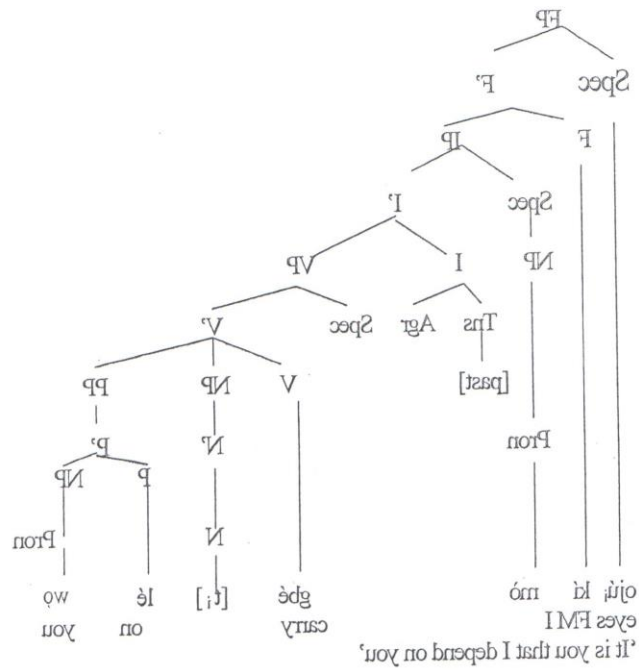


(13d)



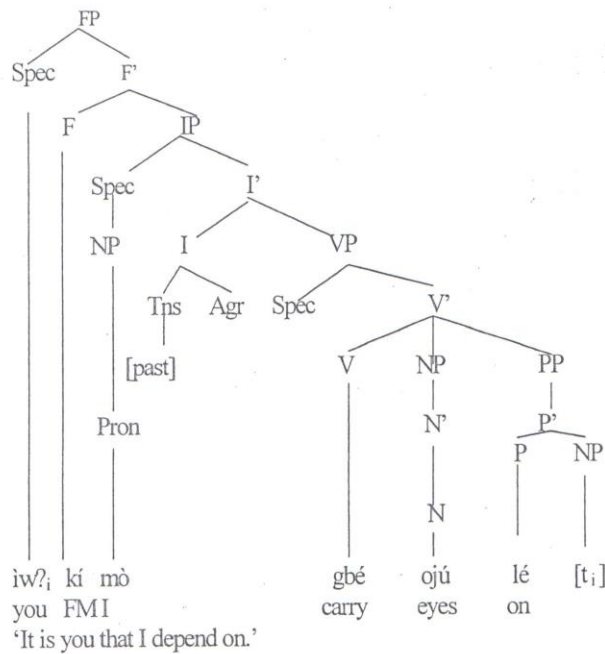
- (14a) ojú<sub>i</sub> kí mò gbé [t<sub>i</sub>] lé wọ  
 eyes FM I carry on you  
 'It is you that I depend on you.'

(14b)



- (14c) iwọ s kí mò gbé ojú lé  
 you FM I carry eyes on  
 'It is you that I depend on.'

(14d)



Looking at the data given above, we want to agree that the Case assigned to the Traces is quite different from those of the antecedents at the SPEC of FP. The position occupied by the SPEC of FP is a *non-argument* position, that is, a position that cannot receive Case neither is the *head* of the FP known to be a Case assigner. But the Case of the NP at the SPEC of FP is different which means that something has definitely happened to the NP at the landing site.

Awoyale (1990:10) adopted Chomsky's (1986:5) suggestion that provision for substitution be made in the Specifier of XP position. This specifier dominates an empty category that is marked [ $\pm$ N] for Yoruba. According to him, the choice of [+N] is made when there is a need to move a nominal category into the specifier of FP position. We like to agree with Awoyale's (1990:11) setting of [+N] feature for the SPEC of XP, in this



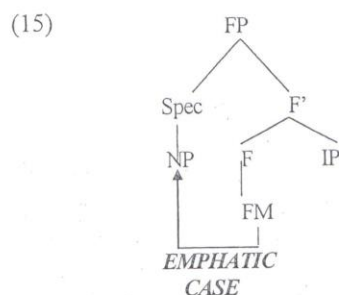
case, Focus Phrase. This is simply because the condition at the landing sites dictates the conditions for receiving any incoming category. Awoyale (1995:116) further classifies the *focus marker* as a governor and a Case assigner with the capability of assigning the Focus Case to the focused NPs.

When the focused constituent, NP, is moved to the SPEC of FP, it is assigned *Structural Case* by 'ki' the focus marker which governs it. The Case form of the focused NP is however not *Nominative* even though it appears at *word initial position*. As stated earlier it is tensed INFL that assigns *Nominative Case*.

### The EMPHATIC Case

The Case system of Latin and Greek was accepted as the framework for classifying Case forms and types. But Fillmore (1968:5) says that "looking for one man's Case system in another man's language is not of course a good example of the study of Case". It is accepted that Case is a universal feature but a designated set of Case categories peculiar to a language should be provided for such a language rather than holding on rigidly to the six Case forms identified in grammar.

The Case being proposed here is *Emphatic Case*. This Case is assigned by the focus marker to the focused NP in the SPEC of FP. This means that the *focus marker* like the tensed INFL also assigns abstract Case. The *focus marker* governs the SPEC of FP. The diagram in (16) below illustrates this:

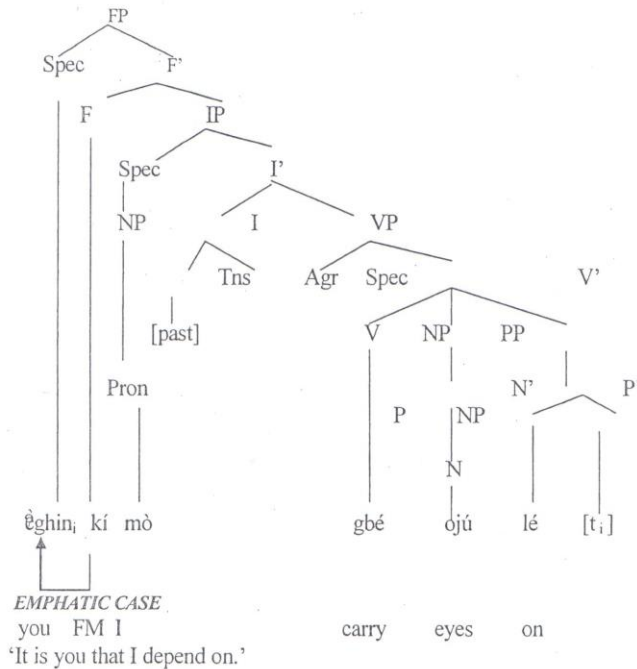


The structure in (16) above can be exemplified as in (17) below.

- (16) i. ẹghin<sub>i</sub> kí mò gbé ojú lé t<sub>i</sub>  
 you (pl) FM I carry eyes on  
 'It is you (pl) that I depend on.'
- ii. èmi<sub>i</sub> kí ó jẹ isu àti ẹghin  
 I FM I eat yam and egg  
 'It is I that ate yam and egg.'

The assignment of *Emphatic Case* can be represented schematically with the following tree diagram:

(17)



### The *EMPHATIC CASE* in Standard Yorùbá

Just as the *Emphatic Case* is assigned to the focused phrase in Owé so is it assigned in Yorùbá language and other dialects of Yorùbá. All the positions that can be focused in Owé can also be focused in Yorùbá i.e. the subject-NP, the object-NP, and the object of preposition NP can all be focused in Yorùbá and are all assigned the *Emphatic Case*. The data in (19) below illustrate this.

- (18)
- a. Tọpẹ àti Sọlá ti dé  
Tope and Sola has come  
'Tope and Sola have come.'
  - b. Tọpẹ àti Sọlá ni ó<sub>i</sub> dé  
Tope and Sola FM they come  
'It is Tope and Sola that arrived.'
  - a. Bàbá mi l sí sọ sì  
father my go to church  
'My father went to church.'
  - b. Bàbá mi<sub>i</sub> ni ó<sub>i</sub> l sí sọ sì  
father my FM he go to church  
'It is my father that went to church.'

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to examine the status of the focused Noun Phrases with a view to determining the type of abstract Case that such focused NPs receive using Owé as a case study. The Government and Binding Theory is the theoretical framework for the analysis of our data.

From the data examined, we discovered that the Case of the *focused Noun Phrase* is different from that of its trace. With the use of pronominals which is the only NP-type that is morphologically marked, we discovered the difference in Case marking between an antecedent and its trace.

In this study, we have proposed a new Case form (i.e., The *Emphatic Case*) which is assigned to *focused Noun Phrases*. The proposal is carried out within the framework of the Principles and Parameters Theory. This proposal is true not only for Owé but also for Standard Yorùbá and other dialects of Yorùbá.



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