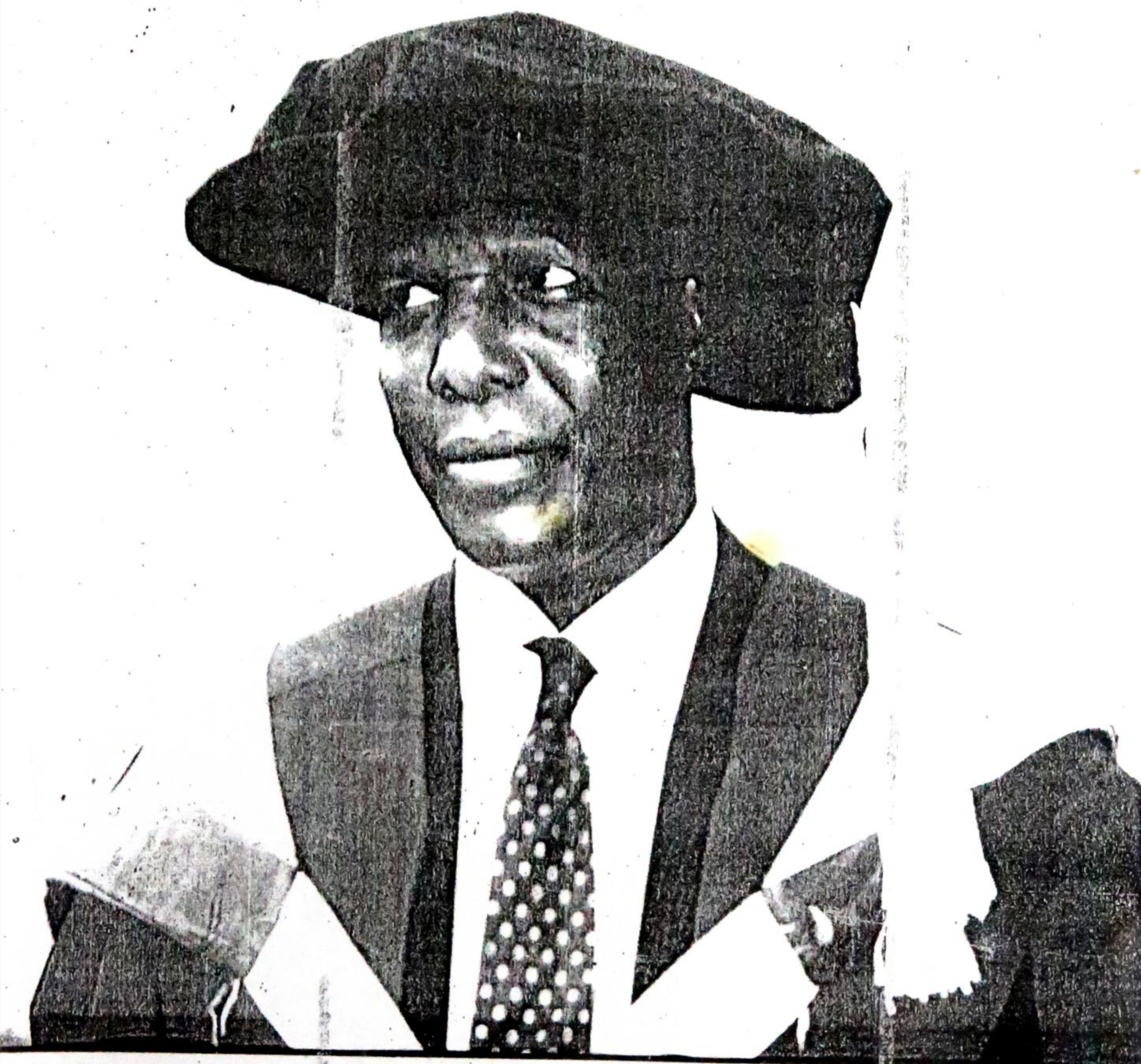


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Multi-disciplinary Approaches to the Study of AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

A Festschrift for Ahmed Halliru Amfani

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the ever-lingering memory of our teacher, mentor and colleague –

Professor Emmanuel Nwanolue Emenanjo

– who bade us farewell at the Awka Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) to join the Immortal on the 9th of February, 2016. His last work on grammar is an invaluable legacy.

Preface

At the Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) which was held at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, **Professor Ahmed Halliru Amfani** was celebrated as the **Linguist of the Year 2015**. The reasons for this honour are numerous, including serving as the longest executive council member of LAN and attending virtually all annual conferences since he joined as a member. Professor Amfani has served as the pioneer Vice-President of LAN under the leadership of Professor Alex Iwara, two-tenure Vice-President under the leadership of Professor Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, two-tenure National President of LAN and now he is completing another two-tenure Ex-officio member of LAN Executive Council. No other member of LAN - dead or living - equals this impressive record of dedication, commitment and meritorious service to the Association.

As a way to celebrate the spectacular achievements of Professor Amfani, in our own peculiar way, LAN decided to do a festschrift devoted to him, and therefore mandated the Editor to call for papers from far and near to form this massive volume. The response to the call for papers was impressive, which shows how Professor Amfani is appreciated and loved by his friends, his students (past and present) and his colleagues from across the globe.

From the huge assemblage of papers received, only fifty-five (55) of them were selected after rigorous reviews by experts in the various genres of linguistics and related disciplines. I hasten to add, however, that the majority of the papers that could not make this volume are excellent papers indeed, but time and space could not permit us to accommodate them. A couple of other papers were also dropped because they address subject-matters that are not immediately relevant to the main focus of this current book project.

About a quarter of the papers here cover formal linguistics, comprising phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. The balance of the papers are in secular areas of linguistics, ranging from sociology of language, discourse analysis, stylistics, ethnolinguistics, translation studies, language engineering, to language teaching and learning, and much more.

Even though we did not separate the paper into sections, we deliberately clustered papers that address similar themes together. This arrangement makes it easier for readers to locate papers that are of immediate interest to them at a particular point in their research.

This is yet another important reference material for scholars and researchers in African linguistics, literature, culture and related areas.

Professor Ozo-mekuri Ndimele
Founding Editor

November 2016

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its historical and environmental experiences is a dialect of Yoruba language. Owé despite its affinity to Igala is also seen to be a dialect of Yoruba.

We conclude that the presence of [z] in Olukumi is as a result of their interaction with Igbo which attest the consonant. It is discovered that [g^w] in Olukumi and Igala also arise as a result of language contact. The presence of [p] and [tʃ] and the systematic changes in the vowels of Igala mark the major differences between it and the Yoruba language. It should be noted that Igala attests both the voiceless bilabial [p] and the voiceless labio-velar stops [kp]. We conclude that [ɣ] is originally present in Yoruba but lost due to oversimplification.

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Re-visitation of Symmetrical Verb Constructions and Abstract Case Marking in Selected Benue-Congo Languages

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This paper discusses the phenomenon of symmetrical verbs in selected Benue-Congo languages. It argues that the pairs of clauses involving symmetrical verbs are derived independently, and that the derivation is in no way similar to passive constructions in English as claimed by Ilori and Olaogun (2013), but rather, the order of the subject and object arguments in the clauses are brought about in order to satisfy the requirements of both the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) and the Case theory. And that for the second clause in the pair, the AgrOP has blocked the movement of the Experiencer subject from moving to the specifier position of the Tense Phrase (i.e. Spec-TP) by assigning it the accusative Case, and thus the object argument is the only DP left to satisfy the EPP at Spec-TP. The Theme (object-DP) automatically becomes the subject-DP in the second clause. Given the notion of movement transformation, the paper explains that symmetrical verb constructions may appear to be syntactically similar to passivization in English, in terms of movement by substitution, but structurally and semantically different from passivization. This paper, therefore, concludes that, rather than being considered to be similar to passivization in English, symmetrical verb constructions are not only syntactic features of Benue-Congo languages, but also productive in the selected languages.

Keywords: Symmetrical verbs, Benue-Congo languages, Case, EPP, DP movement, Theta roles

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of symmetrical verbs is found in Benue-Congo¹ languages. The following sentences contain symmetrical verbs.

(Igbo)

(1) i. (a) Àdá wèrè íwé.
Ada angryPST anger
'Ada was angry.'

(b) Íwé wèrè Àdá.
anger angryPST Ada
'Ada was angry.'

ii. (a) Òbí nà-àkwá úkwàrà
Obi PROG-ICV cough
'Obi is coughing.'

(b) Úkwàrà nà-àkwá Òbí.
cough PROG-ICV Obi
'Obi is coughing.'

iii. (a) Úchè nà-émé íhére.
Uche PROG-do shyness
'Uche is a shy person.'

(b) Íhére nà-émé Úchè.
shyness PROG-do Uche
'Uche is a shy person.'

(Yoruba)

(2) i. (a) Adé jẹ̀ ìyà.
Ade eat suffering
'Ade suffered.'

(b) Ìyà jẹ̀ Adé.
suffering eat Ade
'Ade suffered.'

ii. (a) Olú ñ bí inú.
Olu PROG cause stomach
'Olu is angry.'

(b) Inú ñ bí Olú.
stomach PROG cause Olu
'Olu is angry.'

iii. (a) Akin kán ojú.
Akin be quick eye
'Akin was in a hurry.'

(b) Ojú kán Akin.
eye be quick Akin
'Akin was in a hurry.'

(3) i. (a) Wàṅ² ǫ yár jín.
child PRES PROG-afflict hunger
'The child is hungry.'

(b) Jín ǫ yár wán.
hunger PRES PROG-afflict child
'The child is hungry.'

ii. (a) Kila ǫ kíisì kighiisì.
Kila PRES PROG-cough cough
'Kila is coughing.'

(b) Kighiisì ki ǫ kíisì Kila.
cough SM PRES PROG-cough Kila
'Kila is coughing.'

iii. (a) Audu ǫ shwíy kilon.
Audu PRES PROG-inflame neck
'Audu is angry.'

(b) Kilon ki shwíy Audu.
neck SM PROG-inflame Audu
'Audu is angry.'

(Lamnso')

(4) i. (a) Míé sún dan.
I grip fear
'I was afraid.'

(b) Edane sún mín.
fear grip me
'I was afraid.'

ii. (a) Míá kpàkpà.
I cough
'I coughed.'

(b) ékpàkpà mí.
cough me
'I coughed.'

iii. (a) Míá zhe wun.
I suffer from anger
'I was angry.'

(b) Ewun ézhè mín.
anger suffer from me
'I was angry.'

Studies on symmetrical verbs have shown that examples (1-4) are bona fide constructions involving symmetrical verbs (Awobuluyi, 1978; Nwachukwu, 1987; Uwalaka, 1988). In these kinds of clauses, the subject and object are freely interchangeable without any apparent change in meaning. This interchangeability of the subject and object made

Uwalaka (1988 p. 43) refer to the phenomenon as *subject-object switching*. It is the case that the subject-object switch does not indicate any notion of focus or emphasis. If the focus meaning were intended, then, the element to be focused is moved to the left periphery position and some focus elements would be introduced as in (5) and (6) below:

- (5) Ó -bù Ádá wèrè íwé.
 3SG be Ada angryPST anger
 'It is Ada that is angry.' (Igbo)

- (6) Adé ni o jẹ ìyà.
 Ade FOC 3SG eat suffering
 'It was Ade that suffered.' (Yoruba)

The phenomenon of symmetrical predication is common with most experiential verbs. Usually the verbs depict involuntary actions or psychological state such as to be angry, to be afraid, to be suffering, to cough, to yawn, to be hungry, etc. Usually the subject arguments are animate as in (1-4) above, but sometimes they may not be animate but they are conceived as a force capable of altering a change in the state of affairs (Yuka and Agbo, 2013).

There are certain clauses that appear like symmetrical verb clause but which are not.

- (7) (a) Ádá nùrù ùdà.
 Ada hearPST sound
 'Ada heard a sound.'

- (b) *Ùdà nùrù Ádá.
 sound hearPST Ada (Igbo)

- (8) (a) Audu u yén Kila.
 Audu PST non-PROG-see Kila
 'Audu saw Kila.'

- (b) Kila u yén Audu.
 Kila PST non-PROG-see Audu
 'Kila saw Audu.' (Lamnso')

- (9) (a) Òjó lu Akin.
 Ojo beat Akin
 'Ojo beat Akin.'

- (b) Akin lu Òjó.
 Akin beat Ojo
 'Akin beat Ojo.' (Yoruba)

The verbs in examples (7-8) are experiential verbs, but while *nùrù* is not sensitive to subject-object switch in (7), the verb in (8) which actually permits this kind of switch does not preserve the meaning of the (a) clause, a different meaning was intended. In (9), while *Ọjó* carried out the action of *beating* in (a), Akin did the *beating* in (b).

1.1 Defining symmetrical verbs

From the perspective of mathematics, Miller (1998 p.1) symbolically defines symmetrical verbs as follows: "Symmetrical verbs encode a relationship *r* between two entities such that *XrY* entails *YrX*."

Based on the symmetrical verbs attested in Yoruba, Awobuluyi (1978 p.61) explains that "the subject and object of each of the verbs in this class are freely interchangeable, without difference (if any at all) in meaning. It is for this reason that the verbs are said to be symmetrical."

2. Thematic roles of arguments in symmetrical verbs

The argument structure of clauses is reflected in the internal syntactic structure of VPs. Both the subject and object are said to be generated within the VP. The subject, being the external argument, is generated at Spec-VP (i.e. the VP-internal Subject Hypothesis) and the internal argument is complement to V. Not only this, an account of argument structure also provides a description of the semantic role which each argument plays in relation to their predicates (Radford, 2004).

Iloene and Iloene (2013) argue that the verbs in the symmetrical predicates are dynamic verbs. And as dynamic verbs, it can also be seen that they do not express any conscious activity of any participant. This means that the subject in each sentence cannot be regarded as an Agent, neither does the complement DP in each sentence have any action performed on it, hence it is not a patient. Considering the pair of sentences in example (1-4), the subjects in (1i.-iii.a, 2i.-iii.a, 3i.-iii.a & 4i.-iii.a) have the thematic role of Experiencer, while the objects have the thematic role of Theme. Experiencers, according to Carnie (2007), are arguments that feel or perceive events. They can appear in a number of argument positions including subject and object. Themes are entities that undergo actions. Therefore, they are moved, experienced or perceived. The argument alternation in the examples (1i.-iii.b, 2i.-iii.b, 3i.-iii.b & 4i.-iii.b) does not in any way affect the thematic roles of the arguments within the clauses. *Ádà* in (1i.b), *Adé* in (2i.b), *wán* in (3i.b) and *mín* in (4i.b), all bear the Experiencer role. Unlike in (9) above where *Ọjó* is the Agent in (9a) and Patient in (9b).

3. Re-visiting symmetrical predicates

Uwalaka (1988) examined the Igbo symmetrical verbs which she regarded as *subject-object switching* within the framework of Case grammar. She pointed out that only a limited number of verbs in Igbo undergo this kind of argument alternation. Her argument based on semantic and syntactic evidence, was that the sentence (10a) below is being derived from (10b) by switching around the positions of the subject and the object.

(10) (a) Àdá kwàrà úkwàrà.
Ada coughPST cough
'Ada coughed.'

(b) Úkwàrà kwàrà Àdá.
cough coughPST Ada
'Ada coughed.'

(Igbo)

Uwalaka's claim stems from the fact that the sentences can be correlated with other sentences of Igbo and other Kwa languages in which the cognate NP of the verb occurs as subject in sentences with these verbs. The verbs in sentences (11a&b) below do not tolerate subject-object alternation.

(11) (a) Águ jì m.
hunger hold me
'I am hungry.'

(Igbo)

(b) Ebi ñ pa mi.
hunger PROG kill me
'I am hungry.'

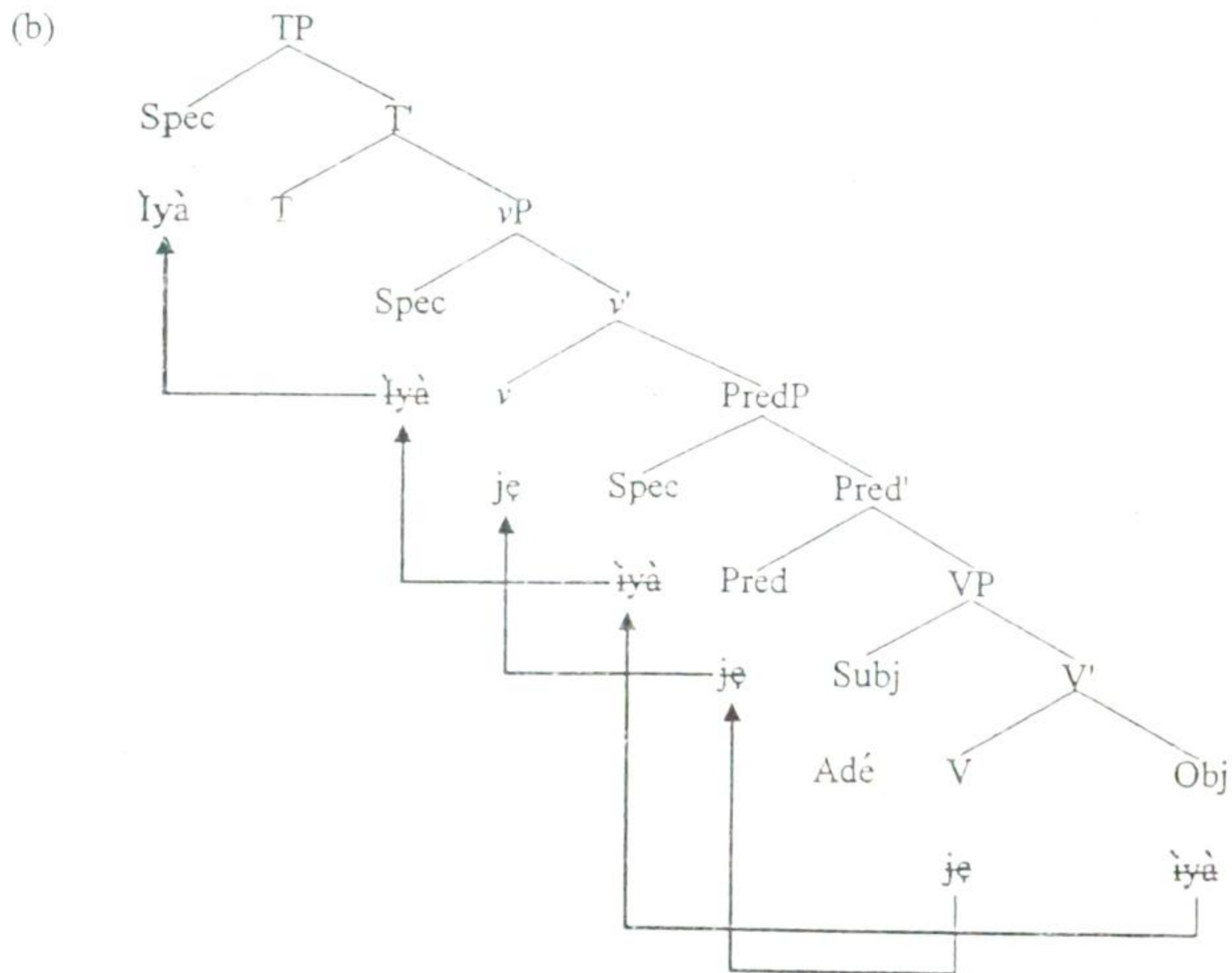
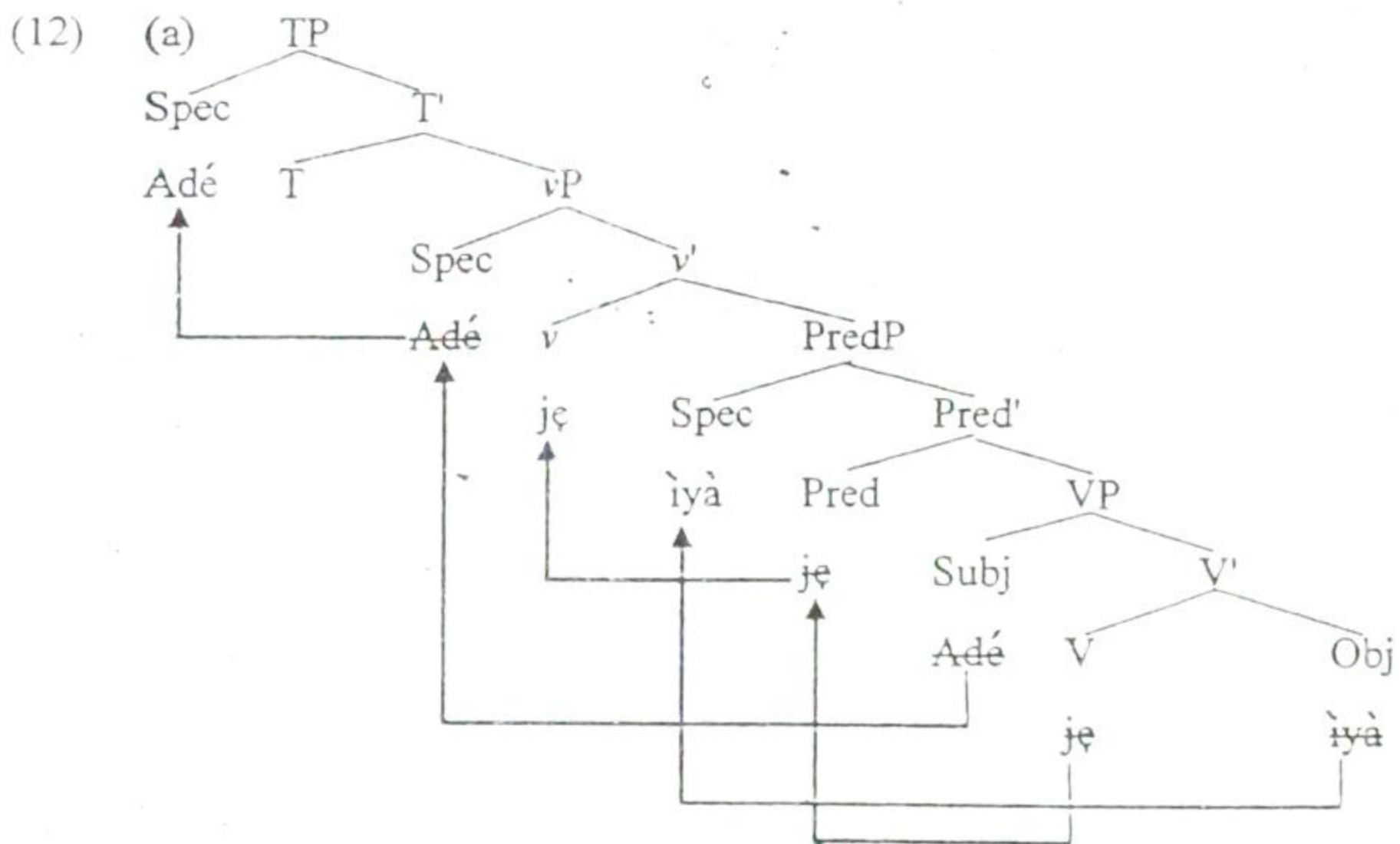
(Yoruba)

The sentences in (11a&b) are Experiencer verbs but in Igbo and Yoruba they are not part of the verbs that allow argument alternation. The subject in (11) above is likened to and looks like what appears to be the object in sentences (1a & 2a).

Yuka and Agbo (2013) are of the opinion that the (b) sentences in (1-4) are derived from their (a) counterpart by a simple switch of argument positions by the subject and the object.

Ilori and Olaogun (2013) argue that each of the pair of clauses in the symmetric structures is independently derived from the same semantic and syntactic core VP base, and that it is not the case that one is derived from the other. They proposed that to derive the (a) and (b) forms of the symmetrical predicates in (1-4) involve raising from within the inner core VP to the subject position of the outer vP shell, and cyclically to the subject position in the IP, following the VP-internal-subject hypothesis. Ilori and Olaogun claim that the structure in (12a) below shows the derivation of sentence (2i.a) while ((12b) is for (2i.b).

In (12b), the Experiencer subject remains in-situ inside the core VP. Thus, the Experiencer argument which seems to appear as the object in the (b) form of the clauses is no object after all, but perpetually remains the thematic subject. This is corroborated by the fact that the thematic subject role is preserved for the Experiencer in the pair of clauses in every symmetrical verb sentence.



4. The derivation of symmetrical verb clauses as perceived in this paper

Following Ilori and Olaogun (2013), we also claim that the pair of clauses involving symmetrical verbs are derived independently, however, empirical evidence is given in this paper to show that Ilori and Olaogun's analysis of the motivation of movement of the Theme object to the Spec of TP is inaccurate, and an alternative analysis that is considered more appropriate is presented under section 5 below.

There are some questions which Ilori and Olaogun left unanswered in their claim about the derivation of the (b) pair of the symmetrical verb clauses, as shown in (12b) above. The essence of having the subject internally generated at the Spec of inner core VP, and moving to the Spec of TP is forced by the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) – the requirement that the Spec of the TP be filled by a subject (Carnie 2007 p.287). The element that does move is the closest, which is the Experiencer subject internally generated in Spec VP as indicated in (12a) above. Therefore, the questions that were left unanswered, for the derivation of the (b) counterpart in each of the symmetrical verb constructions are:

- (i) What hinders the internally generated Experiencer subject from moving in (11b)?
- (ii) Since it is the closest to the Spec TP, why does it have to give way for the Theme object?
- (iii) What syntactic or morphological condition motivates the movement of the Theme object to Spec TP?

Ilori and Olaogun's basis for assuming the derivation of the (b) pair of symmetrical verb clauses stems from the fact that this clause type is similar to what is obtainable in English passives, but the fact is that English passive constructions involve a kind of morphological change in the verb and also involves head movement of the auxiliary. The *-en* suffix, according to Carnie (2007), absorbs the Agent or Experiencer role. That is, when the *-en* is present, the theta grid of the verb only requires a Theme role, which in that case is the object. The Theme object is generated in object position in both actives and passives, but then it is moved to subject position in passives as exemplified in (13) below.

(13) (a) The boy wrote the letter.

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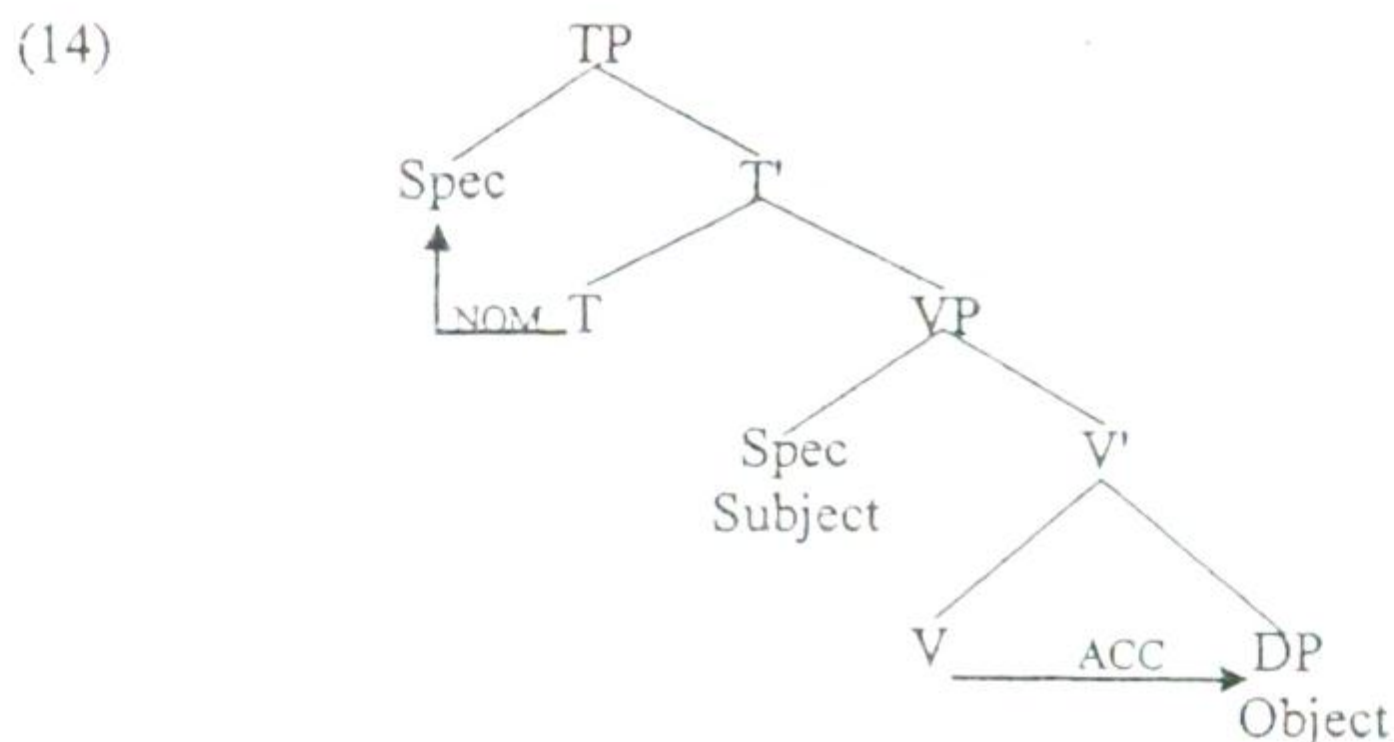
(b) _____ was written (by the boy).

Because *-en* absorbs the Agent role in (13)³, there is only one DP left in the sentence, the object with the Theme role. Since the Agent role is absorbed, there is nothing in the Spec TP, therefore, EPP is violated or not satisfied. To arrive at the order of the passive, the DP movement is employed. The DP Theme object moves to Spec TP to satisfy the EPP. With the above explanation for passives in English, the questions for the symmetrical predicates in Benue-Congo languages as presented in this paper, are: (i) What hinders the movement of the Experiencer subject DP? and (ii) What triggers the Theme object DP movement?

5. Our analysis

To answer the above questions and proffer solution to the problem under consideration, we would like to consider the grammatical relation of Case. The DP movement to Spec TP is not only to check EPP, but also, very importantly, to check Case. The three most important grammatical relations – subject, object and indirect object – represent the syntactic function of a DP in a given clause structure. DPs bear (abstract) Case. Case is a syntactic property that must be structurally triggered. Following Chomsky (1981), DPs are given Case if and only if they appear in specific syntactic positions in the sentence. Nominative Case is checked in the Spec of finite T and accusative Case is checked by the verb. In other words, it is Case that serves as a motivation for DP movement.

Our argument is that the Theme object DP moves to Spec TP in order to check the nominative Case as it is appearing in the subject position in the (b) forms of the symmetrical predicates. In the Case of English passives, the *-en* morphology absorbs both the external theta role and the accusative Case. But in the case of symmetrical predicates under consideration, the Experiencer subject DP still bears its theta role and also the accusative Case in the (b) forms of the predicates. The problem here is that the Experiencer DP, which is generated at the Spec of VP is not a sister of V, and thus cannot be assigned accusative Case as depicted in (14) below.

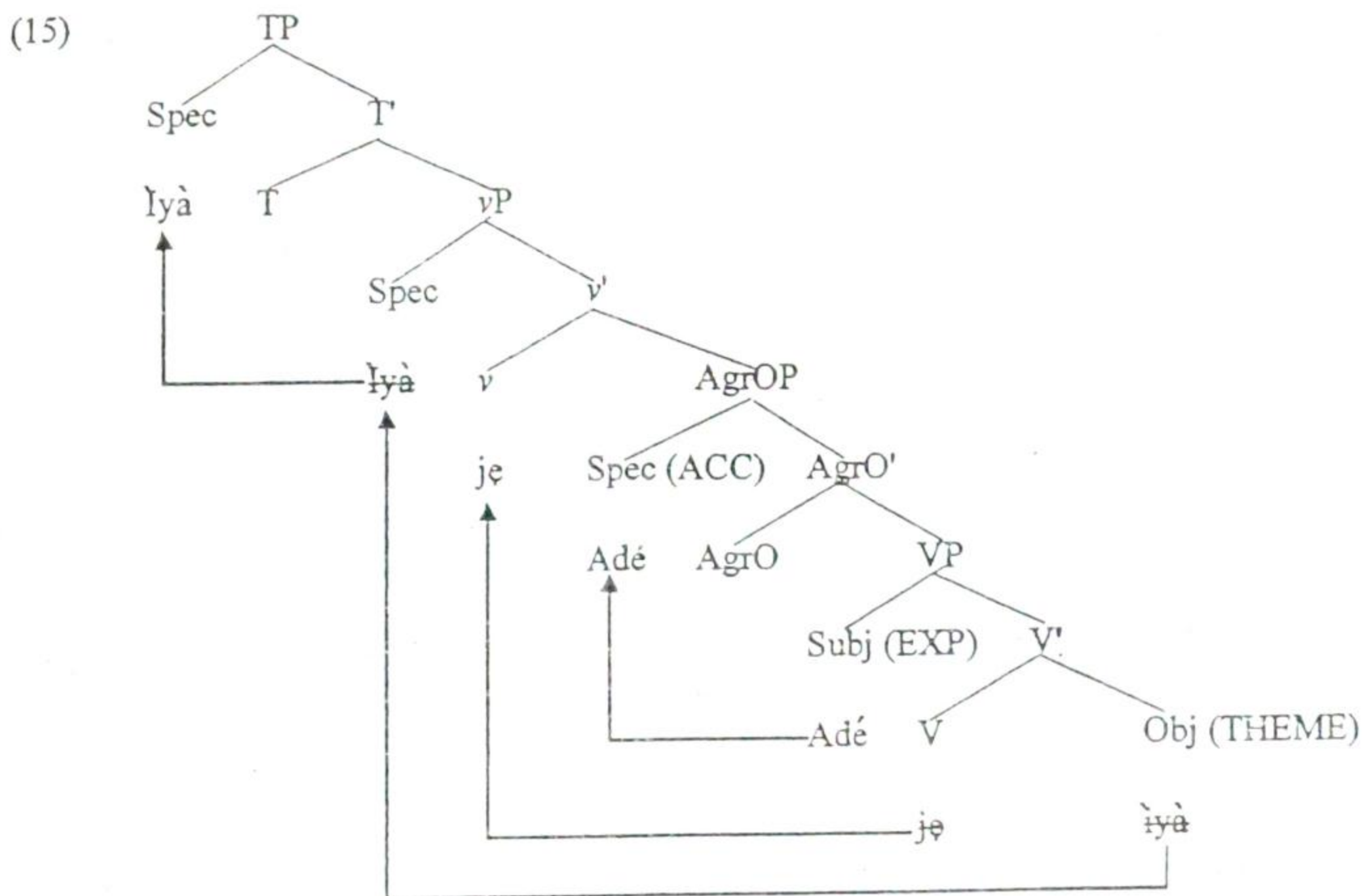


To account for how the accusative Case is assigned to the Experiencer subject DP, we considered Pollock's (1989) Split-Infl Hypothesis and Chomsky's (1991) proposal that there is a special functional category whose sole purpose is accusative Case assignment (i.e. object agreement (AgrO)). The idea behind the name AgrO, according to Carnie (2000, p.378), is the fact that the Case assigner is usually the constituent that agrees with the object.

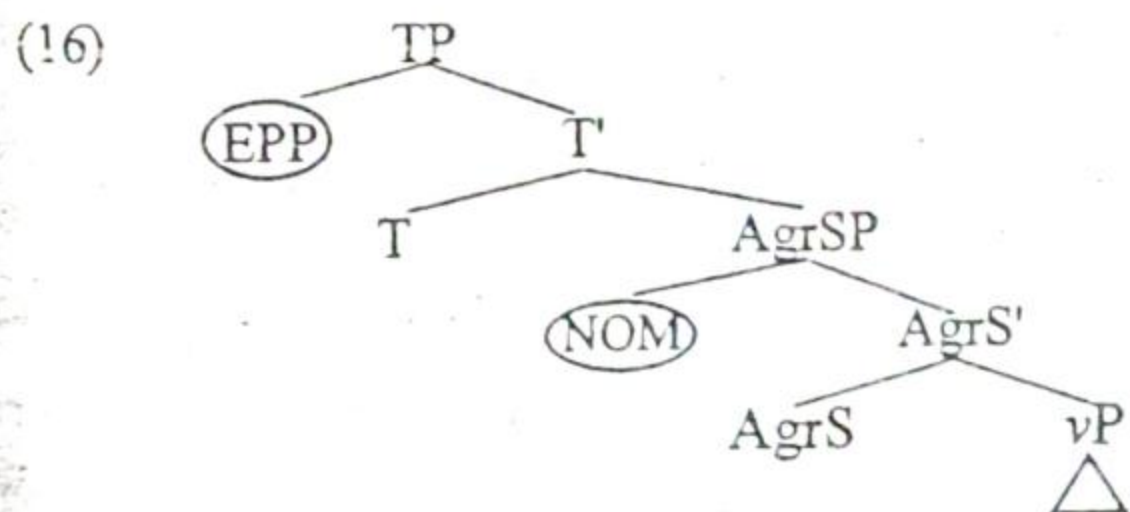
The Experiencer subject DP moves from the position where it gets its theta role – Spec AgrOP to get the accusative Case. This is shown in (15) below. The AgrOP is located between the *v*P and VP.

The derivation of the (b) pair in the symmetrical verb clauses involves the process of assignment of the external theta role (that is, Experiencer) to the subject DP that is first generated in the Spec VP position, from where it gets its theta role, and subsequently moves to Spec AgrOP to get its accusative Case. With the accusative Case being assigned to the Experiencer subject DP, the Theme object is the only DP left. For the construction to

grammatical, the EPP and subject Case requirement must be met. The Theme object DP left moves cyclically from the complement of V position to the Spec vP, and finally to Spec TP to check EPP and Case. The V head also moves into the v head position. This does give the correct output of the (b) forms of the symmetrical verb constructions in the languages under consideration.



There is also AgrSP for subject. It has been proposed that the EPP is a property of TP and that Nominative Case is assigned lower in the structure, in AgrSP, as shown in (16) below.



The Lamnso' data in (3i) repeated here as (17) below clearly show the function of tone in clause structure and its interaction with the subject-object alternation and Case marking.

(17) (a) Wàn ó yár jín.
 child PRES PROG-afflict hunger
 'The child is hungry.'

(b) Jín ó yár wán.
 hunger PRES PROG-afflict child
 'The child is hungry.'

(Lamnso')

The Experiencer subject-DP is base generated in Spec VP where it gets its theta role, and as subject in (3i.a) bears a low tone indicative of the Nominative Case. But when moved to the Spec AgrOP position for the assignment of Accusative Case, the low tone becomes high. The same is true for *jín* in (17a) in V-complement position with a high tone, and *jín* as the subject in (17b).

6. Conclusion

The syntax and semantics of symmetrical verbs have been of interest to linguists over the years. This paper has tried to specifically look at the structure of these constructions and to account for their derivation using the Minimalist framework. The paper reveals that the symmetrical verb constructions are very different from passivization in English, and that the pair of clauses involved are derived independently as claimed by Ilori and Olaogun (2013); however, following Pollock's (1989) proposal of the Split-Infl Hypothesis and Chomsky's (1991) modification of the phrase structure rule as well as the need for Case requirement to be met, this paper has provided empirical evidence from four Benue-Congo languages (Igbo, Lamnso', Nupe and Yoruba) to show the motivation for the movement of the Theme object to the Spec TP position in the (b) counterpart in each of the symmetrical verb clauses. It is not just the case that one is derived from the other by a simple switch of the subject and object, as claimed by some scholars. The symmetrical verb constructions are not only syntactic features of Benue-Congo languages, but found to be productive in the selected languages. It is our recommendation that further researches could be carried out to investigate this phenomenon as it relates to psychological verbs (i.e. verbs that do not involve voluntary actions like to cough, to be hungry, to yawn, etc.). It is noticed that verbs that allow subject-object alternation seem to belong to the class of psychological verbs. The symmetrical verbs should also be examined along with inherent complement verbs, as manifested in Igbo.

Notes

1. Igbo, Nupe and Yoruba belong to the Kwa language family as classified by Greenberg (1963). However, they were reclassified alongside some other Kwa languages, and renamed West Benue-Congo, which together with the East Benue-Congo formed the Proto Benue-Congo (Blench 1989, Williamson & Blench 2000).

2. Lamnso' nouns are sensitive to Case marking. *Wàn*, with a low tone, is assigned nominative Case and when it bears a high tone, it takes accusative Case (Yuka and Agbo, 2013). Lamnso' data are from Yuka and Agbo (2013).
3. The *-en* also absorbs the verb's ability to assign accusative Case (Burzio 1986).

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