

## Focus Construction in Àfá

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examines focus construction process in Àfá; one of the endangered languages of Nigeria. Àfá is spoken in Òkè- Àgbè of Akoko Northwest local government area in Ondo state. The data for the research were gathered from informants who are native speakers of the language. The sentences with a focus paradigm designed by the researcher were dictated to the informants, and their responses were recorded both in short and long hands for the purpose of analysis and transcription. The study adopts the Government and Binding Theory for its analysis. The study identifies the various constituents that can be focused in the language. It is established that focus construction is derived through Foc that projects into Foc-P and takes IP as its complement. It is discovered that there are two probes in the syntax of Àfá focus: Foc and Emph. This research serves as a part of the documentation of an aspect of the syntax of Àfá.*

### **Keywords:**

*Àfá; Akokoid; constituents; Spec; Emphasis; Complementizer*

## I. Introduction

Focusing is a universal syntactic phenomenon. There is no language in the world that does not have a means of placing prominence on constituents for emphasis purposes. Cinque (1990) defines focus construction as a syntactic process that typically involves the movement of constituents to the left periphery. He claims that focus constructions is a way of rendering a constituent of a sentence, emphatic. He explains further, 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) sees focus as ‘a construction that is specifically, designed to serve an identificational function’. Lambrecht (1994), claims that focus construction serves 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.

Stockwell (1977) classified focus into three based on their functional properties cross linguistically; these are identificational focus, information focus and contrastive focus. Kiss (1998) explains that identificational focus expresses exhaustive identification and occupies the specifier of a functional projection. He further states that this type of focus involves movement and it is realized as a cleft constituent. Information Focus is also known as presentational focus, it conveys new information. One of the peculiarity of information focus is that it involves movement. Information focus could be answers to WH- questions. At the same time, contrastive focus provides a contrary to the belief of the interlocutor. Contrastive focus does not involve movement similar to information focus. Another peculiarity of focus construction is the marking, languages of the world have various ways in marking focus, these are prosodically, morphologically or structurally. It is pertinent to say that the language (Àfá), under study operates identificational focus and the focus is marked morphologically.

Àfá language has been categorized by numerous scholars' these are; Capo (1989), Akinkugbe (1976), Fadoro (2010), Olaogun (2016). Capo (1989) in his work proposes "Amgbe" as the name for the language. Akinkugbe, in his work posits that the language belongs to Akokoid language family. However, Olaogun (2016) proposes Njo-koo language for a group of mutually intelligible languages, which are formally known as Amgbe/Arigidi cluster spoken in six towns. The six towns are made up of nine settlements which are Afá, Oge, Udo and Aje in oke agbe and Igasi, Erusu, Oyin, Uro, and Arigidi outside Oke agbe. Fadoro (2010), regards the language as Arigidi and Owon, in his work he posits an internal classification for the speech varieties in Arigidi and Owon. Very little is published on Afa. The available works on the speech forms are on the classification without any explicit exploration of the structure of the speech form. This is not to say that there are no myriads of scholar works on focus construction in the languages of work. However, no work exists on the aspect of grammar of the language.

This present paper is an effort to fill this gap and it is prompted by Crystal's (2000) clarion call that linguists should explore endangered languages for the purpose of documentation before the languages go into extinction.

## II. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Focus Constituents in Afa

Focus is a grammatical means of marking the organization of information in discourse. Linguists such as Jackendoff (1972), Dik et al. (1981), Lambrecht (1994), and Aboh et al. (2007: 01) define focused constituents as "that part of the clause that provides the most relevant or most important information given in a discourse situation". Focused constituents is the unit that is moved to the specifier of FP position. In Àfá, focus construction strategy is ex-situ, it involves the movement of the element to be focused to the Spec FP position. Consider the data below;

#### a. Subject NP Focus

The focused constituent here is the subject NP with the grammatical role of subject. When the subject NP is focused in Àfá, it is fronted and marked by the focus marker úwòn. Consider the examples below:

- (1) a. Adéi úwòn ti da ìwé  
Adé foc buy book  
'ADE bought a book'
- b. Bóláí úwòn ti jú àju  
Bólá foc eat yam  
'BOLA eats yam'
- c. Kinniúni úwòn ti pu arán  
Lion foc kill animal  
'LION kills animal'
- d. Akini úwòn ti vè  
Akin foc go  
'AKIN went'

- e. Déléí úwòṅ ti dà àsó  
Délé foc buy cloth  
'DELE buy cloth'
- f. Bàbáí úwòṅ ti pe Sadé  
Father foc call Sadé  
'FATHER called Sade'
- g. Tópéí úwòṅ ti kọ úsìn  
Tope foc sing song  
'TOPE sings a song'
- h. Wáléí úwòṅ ti kọ ìwé  
Wále foc write book  
'WALE writes a book'
- I. Olúí úwòṅ ti dà àwòrán  
Olú foc buy picture  
'OLU buy a picture'
- j. Bóláí úwòṅ ti ju ùju  
Bólá foc eat pounded yam  
'BOLA eats pounded yam'

In examples (1a-j) the subject NP of the sentences are truly focused. It is observed that the focused constituent (subject NPs) are moved from the Spec IP position to the Spec FP position, thereby leaving a trace at the extraction site. This type of focus marking is ex-situ, while the type of the movement that takes place is christened as A-bar movement. In addition, focus construction has a semantic connotation which involves questions. However, the focused constituents above are emphatic answer to questions, for instance, the utterances present in (1a-j) are answers to the questions below:

- (2) a. Konè, è da ìwé?  
Who bought the book?
- b. Konè, è ju àju?  
Who ate the yam?
- c. Konè, è pu àrán?  
Who killed the animal?
- d. Konè, è da ásó?  
Who bought the cloth?
- e. Konè, è pe Sadé?  
Who called Sade?
- g. Konè, è ko úsìn?  
Who is singing?
- h. Konè, è ko ìwé?  
Who write the book?
- i. Konè, è da àwòrán?  
Who bought the picture?
- j. Konè, è ju ùju?  
Who ate pounded yam?

From the questions above, the focused constituents serve as emphatic answers to the questions. One can aver that the background or existential presupposition of the sentence is that someone that performs the actions is known by both discourse participants. The speaker intends to newly inform the hearer that it was the subject NPs in (1a–j) who performed the actions and not someone else. As a result, the focused constituents (subject NPs) in the sentence convey the key ideas. In other words, the subject NPs is non-presupposed but

unique to the hearer in relation to the question that the speaker is posing with the sentences in (1a-j). Similar to this, the two occurrences (deep structure and surface structure) of each of the targeted constituents are a strong indication that movement has occurred. Precisely, each of them precedes the focus marker *úwòn* in each focus sentence.

Olaogun (2019) posits that all focused constituents in the Njokoo have an emphatic marker which is present at the final position in the sentence, the emphatic marker is a baseless morpheme, it copies the last vowel of the contiguous word and the toneme get polarized. Having said this, our present research evinces that all focused constituents in the Njokoo exempt the subject NP and Adverbial have an emphatic marker in other to maintain euphony in making the utterances. Consider the examples below cited from his work:

- |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>a. Adé <i>úwòn</i> &lt;Adé&gt; ju ògèdè é<br/>         Ade FOC Ade eat plantain EMPH<br/>         ‘ADE ate plantain’</p> | <p>b. Títí <i>úwòn</i> &lt;Títí&gt; da àju ú<br/>         Titi FOC Titi buy yam EMPH<br/>         ‘TITI bought a tuber of yam.’<br/>         Olaogun (2019)</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

From the analysis above in the research, it appears that Olaogun (2019) assertion that emphatic marker normally occurs at the final position of all focused constituent in *Àfá* is misleading. He postulated that there are two probes present in all focused constituents in the language. In our present research, it is established that the subject NP and the adverb focus only have one probe, and it serves as a complement to the Spec FP.

The process of focusing a subject NP in *Àfá* is also similar to other languages such as Yoruba, Owe to name a few. However, the distinction in the process is that the two languages mentioned here leave a resumptive pronoun to replace the subject NP after it is moved to extraction site in the languages. Consider the examples below:

Yoruba:

- |                                                                                               |                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>(3) a. Olui ni oi ra isu<br/>         Olu foc RP buy yam<br/>         ‘OLU bought yam’</p> | <p>b. Awai ní oi ra isu<br/>         we foc RP buy yam<br/>         ‘WE bought yam’</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Owe:

- |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>a. Apo ki Titi ra ti<br/>         Pepper FM Titi buy<br/>         ‘Titi bought pepper’</p> | <p>b. Sosi ki baba mi re ti<br/>         Church FM father my go<br/>         ‘My father went to church’<br/>         Arokoyo ()</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In the examples from the languages, there are evidence of resumptive pronoun, which replaces the subject NP after the movement.

### b. Object NP Focus

When the object NP of a verb is focused, the constituent (object NP) is moved to Spec FP. The moved elements leave a trace at the extraction site. Note that when the object NP is moved, the verb is left stranded. See the examples below:

- (1) a. Ìwéi *úwòn* Adé dà ti á  
 Book foc Adé buy EMPH  
 ‘Adé bought a BOOK’

- b. Àjuì úwòn Bọ́lá ju tí ú  
 Yam foc Bọ́lá eat EMPH  
 ‘Bọ́lá ate YAM’
- c. Àránì úwòn kìnìún pù tí ú  
 Animal foc lion kill EMPH  
 ‘The lion killed the ANIMAL’
- d. Olópàáì úwòn Adé tí tí í  
 Police foc Adé is EMPH  
 ‘Adé is a POLICE OFFICER’
- e. Ásóì úwòn Sọ́lá dà tí á  
 Cloth foc Sọ́lá buy EMPH  
 ‘Sadé bought CLOTH’
- f. Ònkòwèì úwòn wálé tí tí í  
 Writer foc wálé is EMPH  
 ‘Wálé is a WRITER’
- g. Sadéì úwòn bàbá pè tí é  
 Sadé foc father called EMPH  
 ‘Father called SADÉ’
- h. Ókoi úwòn Bọ́lá sì tí í  
 Boy foc Bọ́lá birth EMPH  
 ‘Bola give birth to a boy’
- i. Àwòrán úwòn Sadé dà tí á  
 Picture foc Sadé buy EMPH  
 ‘Sadé bought a picture’

From the examples, it is present that object NP is marked with a focus marker ‘úwòn’ in addition to the clause final high tone, the final morpheme present here serves as an emphatic marker. The process of object NP focused present here is similar to what happens when a subject NP is focused, the elements are moved to the Spec FP and nothing occupies the extraction site where constituent is focused. It is pertinent to say that no resumptive pronoun or anaphor is accredited in that position.

Again, motivating the fact that it is the object NPs that are focused in the sentences (3a-i) is also in order here. In respect of subject NP focused, there exists an information structure and clause structure. The focus constituents in these examples are ìwé in (3a), àju in (3b), Àran in (3c), Olópàá in (3d), ásó in (3e), ònkòwé in (3f) Sadé in (3g) Óko in (3h) and àwòrán in (3i). For instance, the speaker who makes the utterance in (3a) is questioning the object NP in the deep structure form and also responding to the Wh-question ko Adé yè dà? ‘What did Ade buy?’ The fact that Ade bought something is known to both the speaker and the hearer thereby, constituting the background or existential presupposition of the sentence whereas, the intention of the speaker is to newly inform the hearer that it was ìwé ‘book’ that Ade

bought and not something else. Thus, the constituent *ìwé* conveys the most salient information in the sentence. Put differently, the constituent is non-presupposed and new to the hearer with regard to the question posed by the speaker which the sentence in (10a) answers.

### c. Verb Focus

The process of verb focus in Àfá involves nominalization, the prefixation of a nominal prefix to the verb. The nominalized verb is moved to Spec FP. This is in line with the Jackendoff (1977) postulation that any focus constituent must have a nominal feature (+nominal). Consider the examples below:

- (1) a. Àvè úwòṅ Olú vè é  
 Nom-go foc Olú go EMPH  
 ‘Olu WENT’
- b. Àju úwòṅ Olú ju àju u  
 Nom-eat foc Olú eat yam EMPH  
 ‘Olu EAT yam’
- c. Àdà úwòṅ Adé dà ìwé e  
 Nom-buy foc Adé buy book EMPH  
 ‘Ade BOUGHT a book’
- d. Àpú úwòṅ Kúnlé pǔ àrán  
 Nom-kill foc Kúnlé kill animal  
 ‘Kunle KILLED animal’
- e. Àrọ úwòṅ Tópẹ rọ ẹtẹ e  
 Nom-grind foc Tópẹ grind pepper EMPH  
 ‘Tope GRIND pepper’
- f. Àşẹ úwòṅ Olú şẹ e  
 Nom-sleep foc Olú sleep EMPH  
 ‘Olu SLEPT’
- g. Àlì úwòṅ Segun lì Bọ́lá yìi  
 Nom-beat FOC Segun beats Bola EMPH  
 ‘Segun BEATS Bola’
- h. Abo úwòṅ Akin bo Uji  
 Nom-drink foc Akin drinks water  
 ‘Akin DRINKS water’

From the examples (4a-h), it is evident that the verbs are focused, this is done by movement of the nominalized verb to the Spec FP position. A copy of the nominalized verb which is focused is left at the extraction site.

### d. Adverbial Focus

An adverb is a word that can modify or describes a verb, adjective or another adverb. In focusing an adverb in Àfá language, the constituent is moved to the Spec FP position and leaves a trace at the extraction site. The examples below exemplify the discussion:

- (1) a. Wẹ̀rẹ̀i úwọ̀n Sadé sí iyí ti  
Ease foc Sadé birth two  
'Sadé gave birth to twin with EASE'
- a. Ìsìí úwọ̀n Kúnlé ga vá ti  
Tomorrow foc Kúnlé will come  
'Kúnlé will come TOMORROW'
- b. Kíákíái úwọ̀n Kúnlé jù ọ̀ju ti  
Quickly foc Kúnlé eat food  
'Kúnlé ate the food QUICKLY'
- c. Eríni úwọ̀n bàbá ga pu àránkwe ti  
Today foc father will kill goat.  
'Daddy will kill the goat TODAY'
- d. Íkẹ̀ghẹ̀ni úwọ̀n ni keke ìpàdé ti  
Here foc they fix meeting  
'The meeting has been fixed HERE'
- e. Ùrẹ̀jì ùrẹ̀jìi úwọ̀n Adé màá òfín  
Frequently foc Adé do sick  
'Adé do fall sick FREQUENTLY'
- f. Jẹ̀jẹ̀i úwọ̀n úwán màá í vè ti  
Ease foc child do prog go.  
'The child is going with EASE'

From the examples above, adverbs are focused with the aid of movement i.e. moving the constituent to the Spec FP followed by the focus marker *úwọ̀n* as evident in the examples above. The adverbs focused leave a significant tracing to where they are extracted. This type of focus marking is known as ex-situ marking and the movement which occurs is known as A-bar movement.

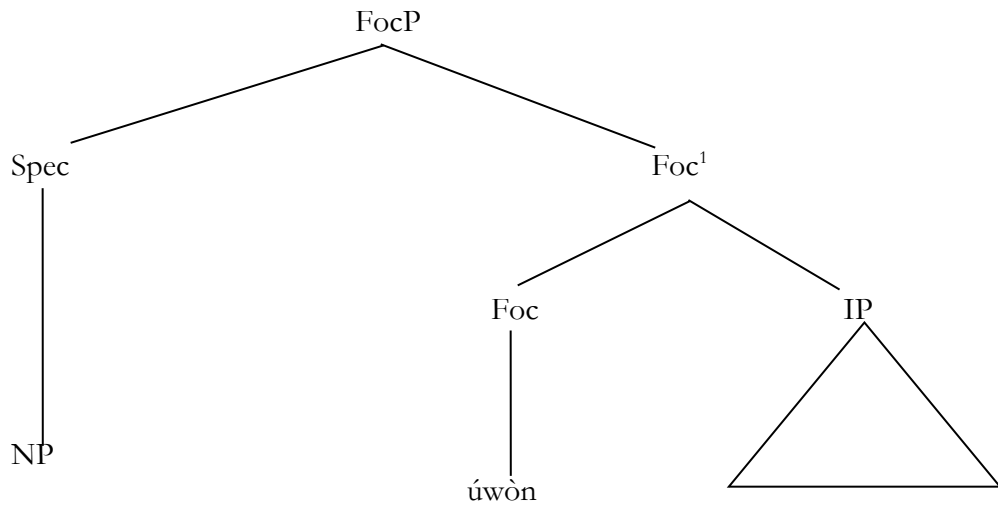
### III. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Derivation of Focus Constituents in Àfá

Scholars have proposed different accounts for the derivation of focus construction in various languages. Arokoyo (2013), explains that the derivation of focus construction in Owe involves movement of the element to be focused from its original position to the sentence initial position. This sentence initial is what she refers to as the Spec FP. Olaogun (2019), explains that the focused constituent must enter into the derivation via internal merge, while the focus marker must enter the derivation through external merge.

From the data present above, I propose that focus construction is derived through FocP that takes IP as its complement to project maximally. The focused constituents irrespective of where they occur within the IP are moved to Spec-FocP. Having said this, the derivation process of the subject NP and Adverbial are barely different from the other focused constituent in the language. As explained above, when the subject NP and adverbs are focused, there is no presence of clause final high tone which serves as an emphatic

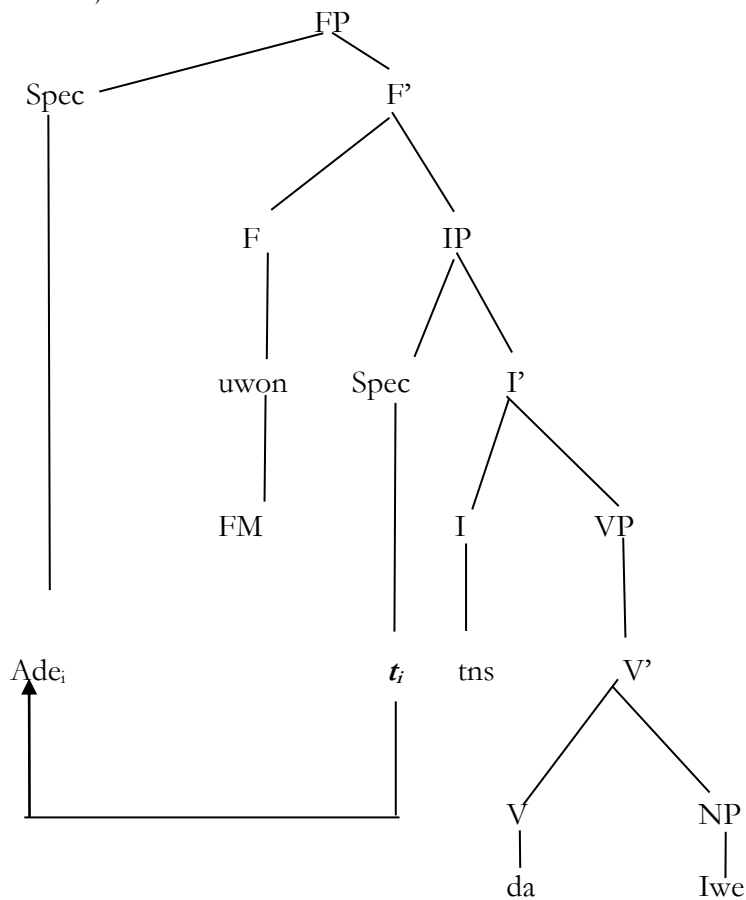
marker. Here, I propose that the subject NP and adverbial focus have only a single CP layer which serves as its complement, consider the diagram below for the derivation.



A subject NP focus such as (a) is derived as given in (b)

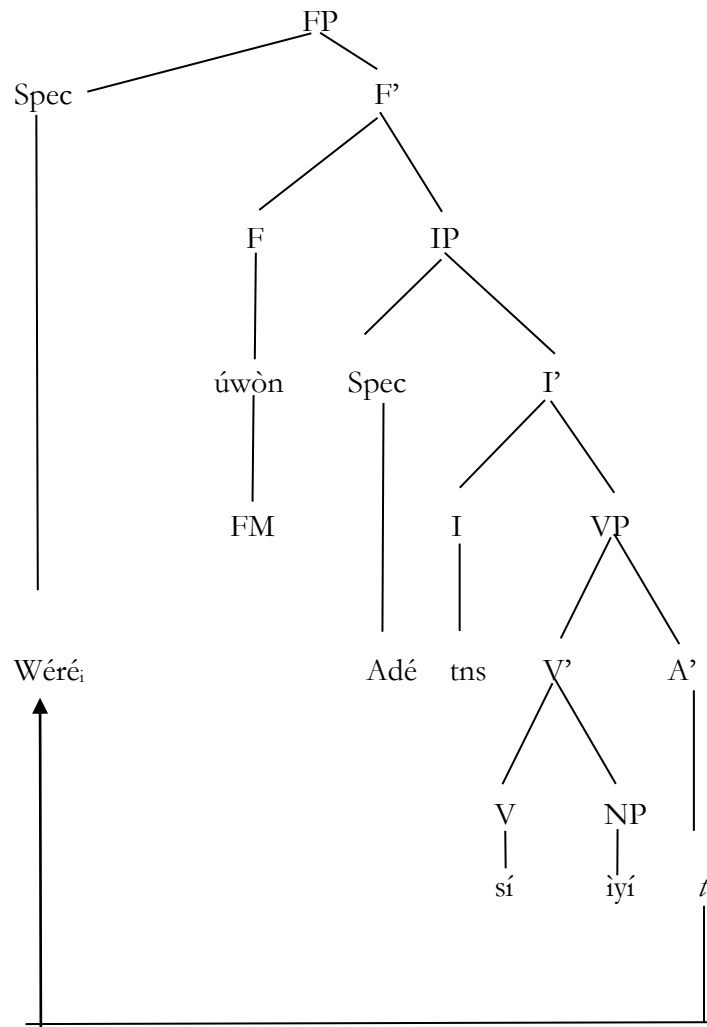
- a. Adé úwòn da ìwé  
 Adé foc buy book  
 'ADE bought a book'

(1) Derivation of subject NP



From the phrase marking above, one can claim that the syntax of focus projection of subject NP involves one probe; Foc. The Foc performs the role of initiating the movement of the focused constituent, however, the focus phrase exhaustively dominates the IP and its complement. From the Government and Binding approach, the process of derivation is through the aid of move-alpha that is moving of the constituent in Spec IP to Spec FP. Having said this, In line with the Case Assignment Principle, it is assumed that the external argument Adé receives its nominative case when it occurs at its original position (Inflectional phrase) and the case assigner (INFL) is present. The subject NP focus loses its case features when it is moved to the Spec FP position and remain caseless.

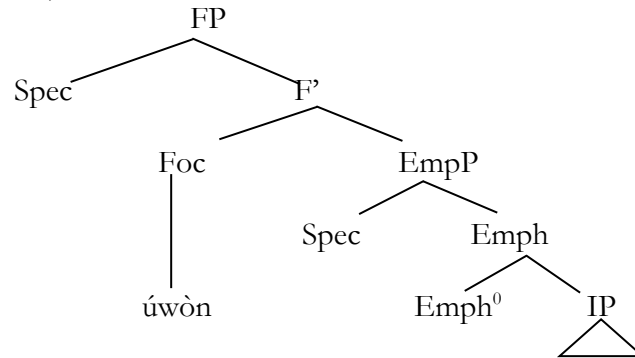
(2) Derivation of Adverbial focus



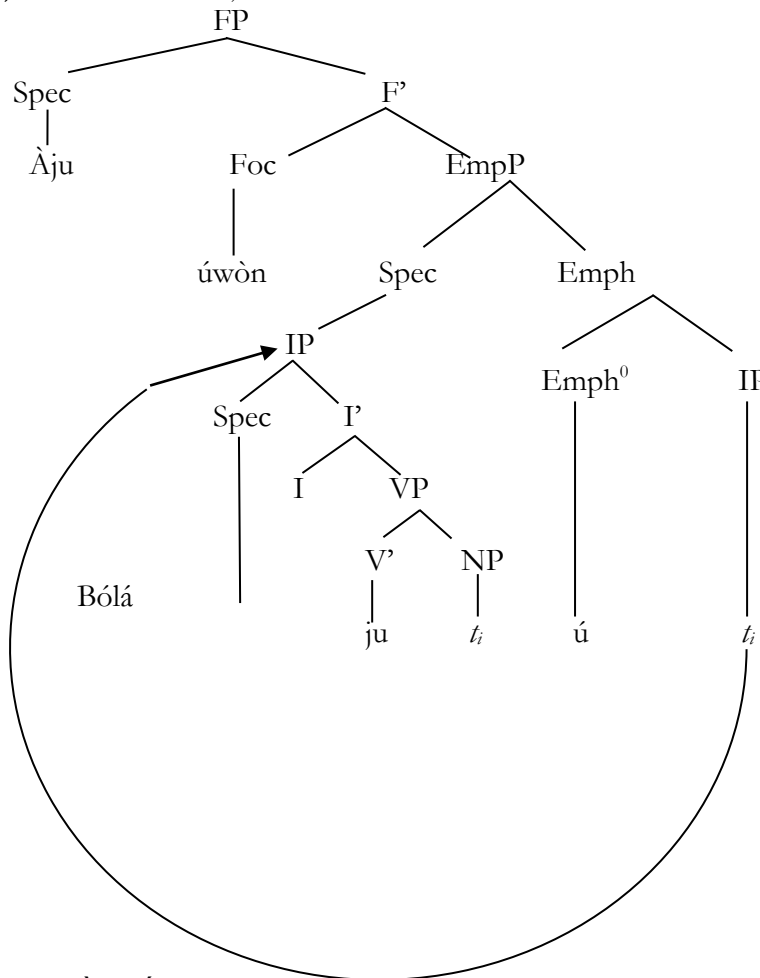
The diagram above evinces the syntax of focus projection of adverb. It is pertinent to say that the derivation of this focused constituent is similar to the subject NP as explained above.

Additionally, in the derivation of other focused constituents (object NP and verb) in the language, the syntax of focus projection of the constituents involves two probes; Foc and Emp. Having said this, for the derivation process, I proposes a multiple CP layers where the Focus phrase exhaustively dominates EmpP and takes IP as its complement. Consider the diagram below for the derivation:

(3) Derivation of Object NP and Verb focus



(4) Derivation of object NP focus

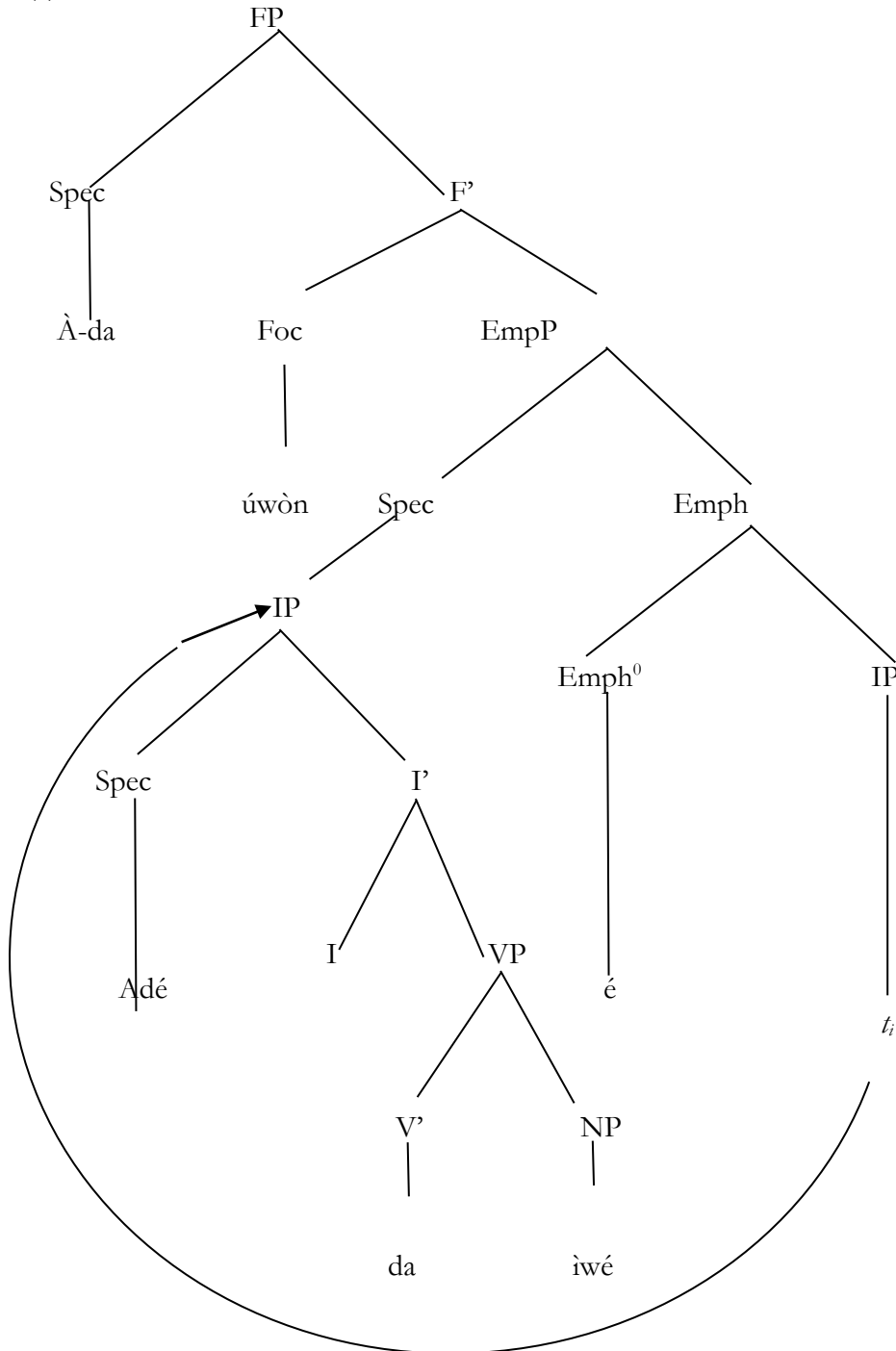


Àju<sub>i</sub> úwòn Bóla<sub>i</sub> ju t<sub>i</sub> ú  
 Yam foc Bóla eat EMPH  
 Bóla ate YAM

From the phrase marking above, one can claim that the syntax of focus projection of object NP involves two probe; Foc and Emph. The two probes perform the role of initiating the movement of the focused constituent, however, the focus phrase exhaustively dominates all the constituents while EmpP takes IP as its complement. From the Government and Binding approach, the process of derivation is through the aid of move-alpha. Having said this, In line with the Case Assignment Principle, it is assumed that the internal argument Àju

receives its accusative case when it occurs at its original position (Inflectional phrase) and the case assigner (VERB) is present. The object NP focus loses its case features when it is moved to the Spec FP position and remain caseless.

(5) Derivation of Verb focus



À-da úwòn Adé da iwé  
 Nom-buy FM Ade buy book  
 Ade bought a book

From the phrase marking above, it is evident that two layers are present: EmpP and IP in which Foc-P exhaustively dominates all the probes and IP serves as complement to the Emphatic phrase.

### 3.2 General Discussion

From the data presented above on focused constituents in the language, it is evident that the case assigned to the NPs are lost when they are moved to the Spec FP position. Thus, there is a total congruity with the fact that the case features assigned to the Subject and Object NPs are present only when they are present at the Inflectional phrase level. The position occupied by the Spec FP has no argument that can assign a particular case to the focused NPs at the landing site. The reason for this, has to do with the landing sites dictating the conditions for receiving any incoming category. When the focused constituent NP is moved to the Spec of FP, it is assigned a structural case by ‘úwòn’ the focus marker which evinces the constituent marked.

The case form of the focused NP is however not nominative when it appears at word initial(Spec FP), since the case assigner is not present, when an Object NP and a Verb phrase is focused, the subject NP retains its nominative case since the INFL which assigns the case is present overtly. However, movement of NPs to the Spec FP, the NPs case is dropped at the extraction site and when moved to the Spec FP, it remains caseless. The reason has to do with the notion that case can only be assigned to NPs when they occur at the inflectional phrase level. Lastly, the FP performs a role, the role proposed is christened as emphatic role, reason for the emphatic role has to do with the functionality of the constituents when focused, it evinces where the information lies. The focus marker (úwòn) governs the FP and it is also in line with the principles of adjacency as no intervening node is present within them.

## IV. Conclusion

This study examines focus construction in Àfá. It gives a detailed description of different constituents that can be focused in the language and the changes that are triggered in the clause by focusing. This study reveals that the syntax of focus in Àfá involves two probes: Foc and Emph, the two probes can trigger movement operations. Having said this, it is pertinent to mention that it is evident in the research that there is a distinction that occurs when the constituents are focused on language, the subject NP and adverb have a single probe: Foc while other focused constituents have two probes: Foc, and Emph. Additionally, it is discovered that the language focus marking strategy is ex-situ.

### List of Abbreviation:

- A- movement- Argument movement
- EMPH- Emphatic
- FOC- Focus
- INFL- Inflection
- FP- Focus phrase
- NP- Noun phrase
- NOM- Nominal
- IP- Inflectional phrase
- VP- Verb phrase

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