

Yes / No Question in Ào*

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This paper describes question markers in Ào within the Minimalist framework. They are Nsé, Sé, pà...rín and pàrin. Nsé and Sé occur in pre-subject positions, pàrin occurs at the sentence – final position while pà...rín, has its first part occurring after the subject while the other part, occurs at the sentence–final position. The structure of pà...rín poses problem for the Extended Endocentricity Principle. Pà...rín may be portrayed as a double head-word of a projection, thus violating the EEP However, we analyse pà...rín as a single- head. The work also discusses the co- occurrence of yes/no question markers.

Keywords: yes/no question, Ào language, minimalist framework

1. Introduction

A Yes/No question is a question to which *yes* or *no* would be an appropriate answer. This is in contrast to other question–type known as WH–question or content question in which the answer requires more than a yes or no but a sentence. As the case is in Standard Yorùbá, Yes/No Questions have question markers in Ào¹. They are Nsé and Sé, which occur in sentence initial position, and can be used interchangeably, pà...rín and pàrin.

This paper gives a descriptive account of Yes/No Questions in Ào within the Minimalist Framework of generative syntax as developed in Chomsky (1995) among others. It is shown that the structure of pà...rín, one of the yes/no question markers, does not conform with the Extended Endocentricity Principle (EEP) which states that every phrase is a projection of a single head word category, and every word category projects into a corresponding phrase category. We shall show, in this work, that pà...rín actually occupies the sentence- final position as the head of the CP in the head-last structure, and that some properties or features of pà motivate it to move to be adjoined to the TASP head of the TASPP.

2. Yes/No Question Markers

The Yes/No question markers are as follows:

- (1) a. Nsé
- b. Sé
- c. Pà...rín
- d. Pàrin

Nsé and Sé occur in sentence-initial position and can be used interchangeably as in (2) below:

- (2) a. Ñzẹ́/Sé Táyé ó zẹ udòṅ?
 lit.ques. mkr Taye agr eat meat
 i.e. ‘Did Taye eat meat?’
- b. Ñzẹ́/Sé azá à gbó in?
 lit. ques. mkr dog fut. bark you(pl)
 i.e. ‘Will the dog bark at you?’

In negative sentences, *Sé* is more frequently used, in fact the use of *Ñzẹ́* sounds odd if not totally unacceptable. The sentences in (3) show that *Sé* can be used to ask questions in a negative sentences while *Ñzẹ́*, though use like *sé* to ask questions in negative sentences, its use is not as common and frequent as the use of *Sé*.

- (3) a. Sé Táyé é zẹ udòṅ?
 lit. ques. mkr Taye past neg. eat meat
 i.e. ‘Did Taye not eat the meat?’
- b. ?Ñzẹ́ Táyé é zẹ udòṅ?
 lit. ques. mkr Taye past neg. eat meat
 i.e. ‘Did Taye not eat the meat?’
- c. Sé azá níí gbó in?
 lit. ques. mkr dog fut. neg bark you(pl)
 i.e. ‘Will the dog not bark at you?’
- d. ?Ñzẹ́ azá níí gbó in?
 lit. ques. mkr dog fut. neg bark you(pl)
 i.e. ‘Will the dog not bark at you?’

Another Yes/No Question marker in Ào is *pà...rín*, (1c), a pair of particles, which has its first part occurring after the subject DP and the second part occurring at the sentence final position. It has the low and mid tones in its first and second parts respectively, when it occurs in affirmative sentences, as well as in negative sentences that have the present and future tense markers. Consider the following sentences.

- (4) a Táyé ó pà zẹ udòṅ rín?
 lit Táyé agr que.mkr eat meat que mk
 i.e. ‘Did Taye eat the meat?’
- b. Táyé pà à yà rín?
 lit Taye que mkr fut come que mkr
 i.e. ‘Will Taye not come?’

- c. Táyé pà nìí yà rín?
 lit Taye que mkr fut neg come que mkr
 i.e. ‘Will Taye not come?’

In a past negative sentence, the first part of the particle also doubles as the past tense negative marker.

- (5) a. Táyé è yá.
 lit Taye past. neg come
 i.e. ‘Taye did not come?’
- b. Táyé pà yá rín?
 lit Taye que mkr come que mkr.
 i.e. ‘Did Taye not come?’

(5a) is a simple past negative sentence. The low tone is the past tense negative marker. It is borne by a vowel similar to the last vowel of the subject DP. But where the simple past negative sentence is an interrogative sentence with *pà...rín* as the question marker, the low tone past tense negative marker is not realised, rather *pà* performs the role of the past tense negative marker as in (5b) above.

In a Non-future continuous sentence, the first part of the pair doubles as the continuous aspect marker, this time, with a mid tone.

- (6) a. Táyò ó zẹrun.
 lit Tayò cont. eat
 i.e. ‘Tayò is eating’
- b. Táyò pa zẹrun rín?
 lit Tayò que.mkr eat que.mkr.
 i.e. ‘Is Tayò eating?’
- (7) a. Mì² ya³.
 lit I come
 i.e. ‘I am coming.’
- b. Mì pa ya rín?⁴
 lit I que. come Que.
 i.e. ‘Am I coming?’

In (6a), the continuous aspect marker is the high tone borne by a vowel identical to the last vowel of the subject DP. However, (6b) has no such marker, but *pa*, with a mid performs this role. In the sentences in (7), the continuous aspect marker is not realised, the subject pronoun *mi*, ‘I’ doubles as the continuous aspect marker in (7a), but in (7b), it is *pa*, the first part of the

question marker that doubles as the continuous aspect marker. None of the elements of *pà...rín* can occur alone in an utterance without the other, occurrence of one without the other will make such utterance to be ungrammatical as in the following:

- (8)
- | | | | | | |
|----|------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| a. | | *Mì | pà | | ya? |
| | lit. | I | que. mkr. | | come |
| b. | | *Mì | ya | rín? | |
| | lit. | I | come | que. mkr. | |
| c. | | *Táyò | pà | | zẹrun? |
| | lit. | Tayọ | que. mkr. | | eat |
| d. | | *Táyò | zẹrun | rín? | |
| | lit. | Tayọ | eat | que. mkr. | |
| e. | | *Táyé | pà | | zẹ udọ̀n? |
| | lit. | Taye | que. mkr. | | eat meat |
| f. | | *Táyé | | zẹ udọ̀n | rín? |
| | lit. | Taye | | eat meat | que. mkr. |

All the sentences in (8) are ungrammatical. In (8a), (8c) and (8e), the first part of the pair *pà* is the only element in these sentences, *rín*, the second part of the pair, does not occur. In (8b), (8d) and (8f) the second part of the pair, *rín*, is the only element that is found in the sentences.

The last of the Yes/No Question markers in Ào is *pàrin*, (1d). *Pàrin* is not to be confused with *pà...rín* which we discussed above. The sentences in (9) are examples of sentences with *pàrin* as the Yes/No Question marker.

- (9)
- | | | | | | | | | |
|----|------|---|--------------|---------|----------|---------|------|---------|
| a. | | Wò | | jú | pàrin? | | | |
| | lit. | you(sg) | | go | que mkr | | | |
| | i.e. | 'Did you go?' | | | | | | |
| b. | | Ayọ | í | ulí | pàrin? | | | |
| | lit. | Ayọ | be | house | que. mkr | | | |
| | i.e. | 'Is Ayọ at home?' | | | | | | |
| c. | | Ọkinrin | tiẹ | ríì | ní | zẹ | uyán | pàrin? |
| | lit. | man | the cont.neg | fut.neg | eat | pounded | yam | que mkr |
| | i.e. | 'Will the man no longer eat pounded yam?' | | | | | | |

We shall discuss the structure of the CP with *pà...rín* as head in details in below. Semantically, *pàrín* and *pà...rín* do not have the same meaning. Compare the sentences in (10) below.

- (10) a. Wò yá pàrín?
 lit: you(sg) come que. mkr
 i.e. ‘Is it that you come?’
- b. Wo pà yá rín?
 lit: you(sg) que. mkr. come que. mkr
 i.e. ‘Did you come?’

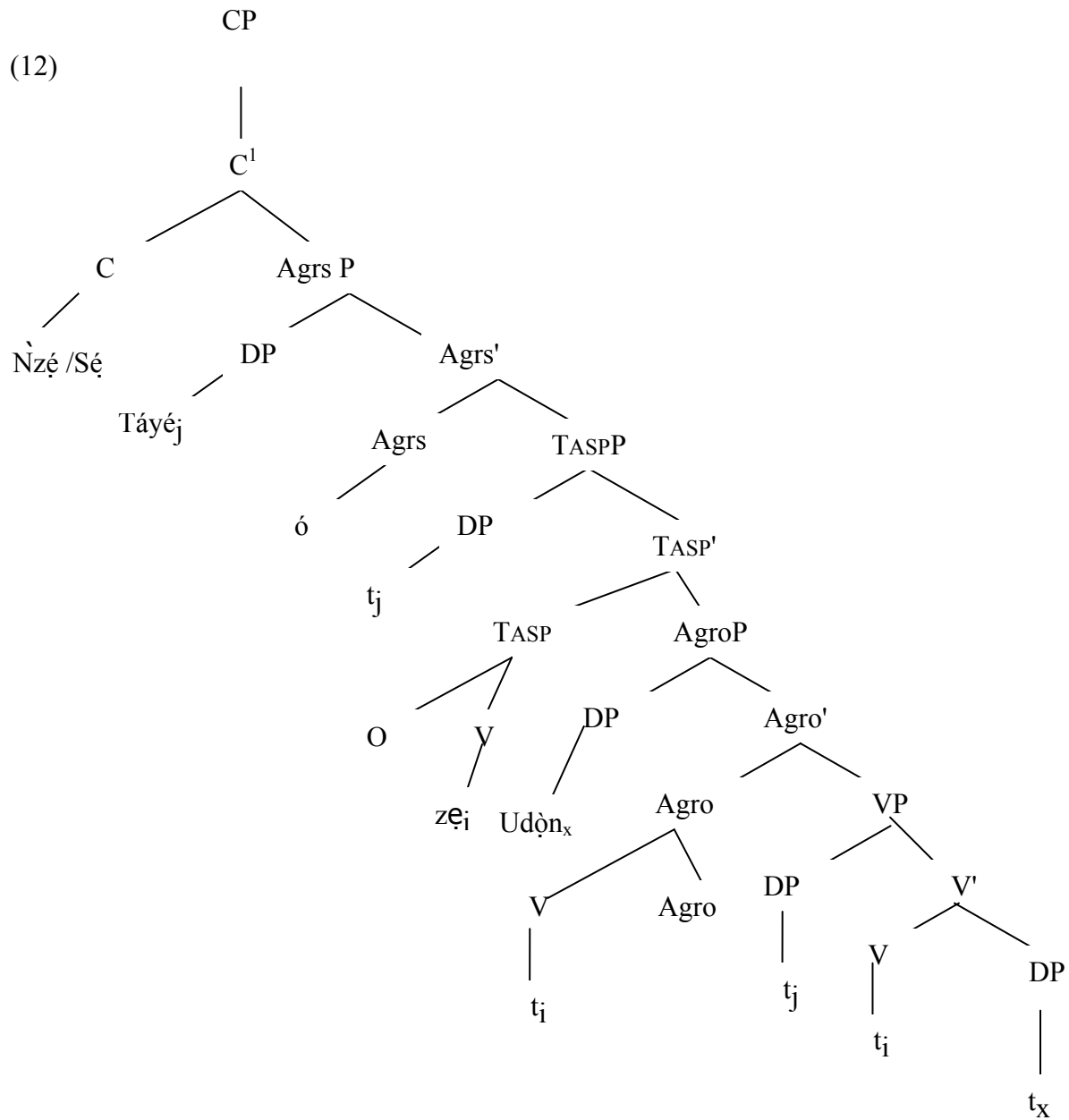
In (10a) where *pàrín* is the question marker, the speaker is asking a question to confirm whether what is said is correct, hence, *pàrín* serves not only as a question marker but also to reassert the action that has been done earlier. However, (10b) is used to ask a question and no other intention or meaning is intended or involved. The speaker of (10b) is asking the addressee whether he actually comes or not. Therefore the use of *pà...rín* in an utterance is to ask a question, converting a declarative sentence to an interrogative one.

3. The Structure of Interrogative Sentences

We shall now discuss the structures of the interrogative sentences where the question markers in (1) occur. The question markers, *Ẹ̀zẹ̀* and *Sé*, in (1a) and (1b) respectively, occur in the sentences in (2) and (3). We shall use (2a) repeated below as (11) as our guide.

- (11) Ẹ̀zẹ̀/sé Táyé ó zẹ udọ̀n?
 lit. ques. mkr Taye agr eat meat
 i.e. ‘Did Taye eat meat?’

The sentence in (11) has the structural representation in (12).



As we observe from (12), *Nzè* and *Sé* are question marker complementizers which occur at the pre-subject position of clauses. Technically, they occupy the comp position as the head of the CP. After the derivation of the basic clause, *Táyé ó zɛ udõn* ‘Taye ate meat’ in (12), the whole derivation targets a CP, and it is merged with the Comp to give us *Nzè / Sé Táyé ó zɛ udõn* ‘Did Taye eat the meat?’

The structure of the interrogative sentence with *pà...rìn* as the question marker is quite different from what we have in (12). This is because *pà...rìn* is a pair of particles unlike *Nzè* and *Sé*.

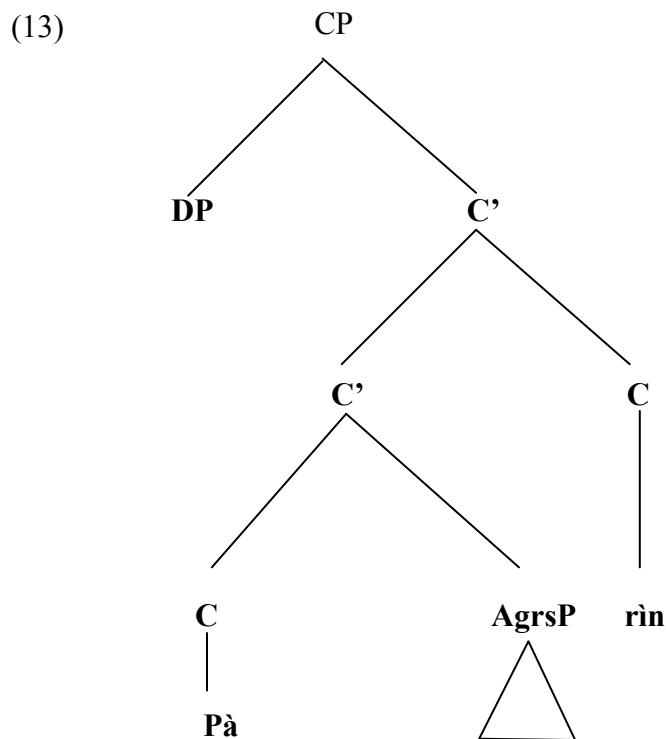
Two possible analyses can be given for the structure of the sentence with *pà...rìn* as question marker. We discuss the two alternatives below.

3.1 *Pà and rìn as two independent markers*

Each of the pair of particles, *pà* and *rìn*, can be treated as two independent question markers, co-occurring in a sentence since it is possible to have other question markers co-occurring in the sentence. For example, *sé* and *pàrìn* can co-occur in a well-formed sentence. However, while *sé* and *pàrìn* are two distinct question markers that can occur alone in a well-formed sentence, as we have in the sentences in (3) and (9) above, *pà* and *rìn* cannot, hence, the sentences in (8) above are illformed because only one of the pair of *pà...rìn* appears alone in them. Since these sentences are illformed, each of the pair of particles *pà* and *rìn* can not be treated as independent question marker.

3.2 *Pà and rìn as separate heads*

Another analysis of *pà...rìn* is the double head analysis, where each of the particles is accorded the status of a head. In (13) below, one head, *pà*, is a sister of AgrsP and daughter of C' and the other, *rìn*, is the sister of C' and daughter of a higher C'



(14) **Extended Endocentricity Principle**

Every phrase is a symmetrical projection of a single head word category, and every word category projects symmetrically into a corresponding phrase category.

The analysis in (13) also failed to capture the semantic uniformity of *pà...rín* as it suggests that *rín* is generated higher than where *pà* is generated.

4. The broken-question marker analysis

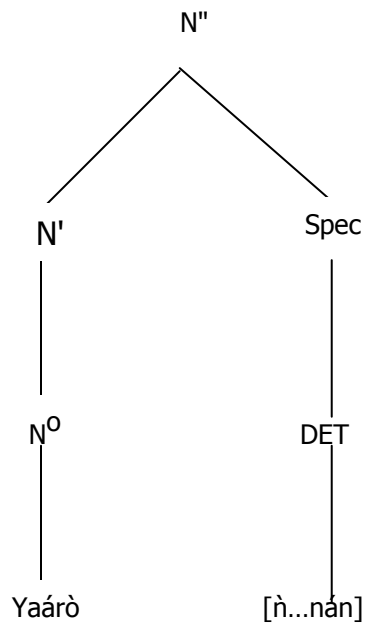
Since the two possible analyses discussed above failed to account for the pair of particles, *pà...rín*, as a question marker, we shall consider the broken determiner analysis of Amfani 1996 to analyse the question marker, *pà...rín*, in *Ào*.

Amfani (1996:121-135) proposes a broken determiner analysis for Hausa NP constructions that comprise a head noun and two syntactically independent determiners since these determiners denote some unified semantic sense which is captured by a single determiner in other languages. Consider the Hausa example below.

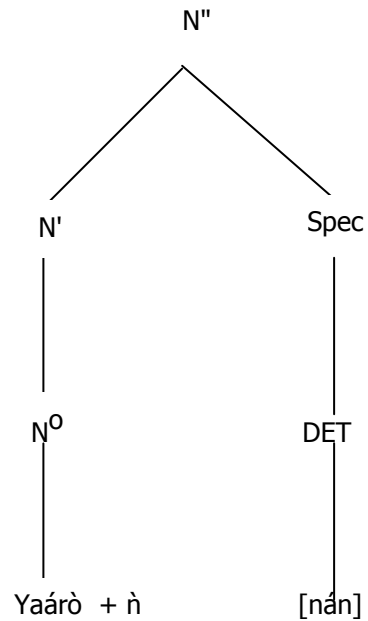
- (15) *yaárò ò nán*
boy the other
'The other boy'

Amfani argues that the two determiners *ò nán* 'the other', constitute a unified semantic sense, and that neither of the two determiners alone can aptly capture the sense denoted by their semantic alliance, therefore, they should appear as a single unit at D-structure in a broken fashion (i.e. DET...DET) and a component of the single unit attaches to the head N at PF. (15) will have (16) and (17), (Amfani's (122) and (123) respectively), as D-structure and PF representations respectively.

(16)

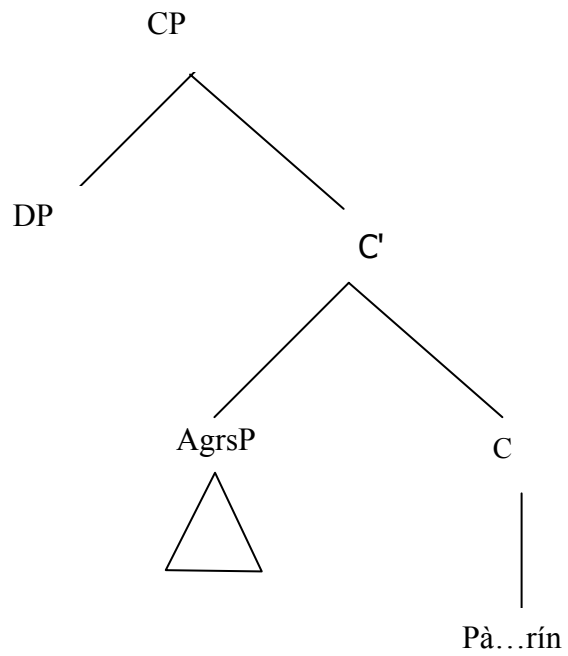


(17)



Following Amfani (1996), we shall argue that the pair of particles, *pà...rín*, occupies the sentence final position, as in (18) below, and that some morphological properties of the first part of the particles, *pà*, motivate it to move at LF.

(18)



The question marker, *pà...rín*, occurs in (4a) above, repeated as (19) below. It has the structural representation in (20).

(19) Táyé ó pà zẹ udòn rín?
lit Táyé agr que.mkr eat meat que mkr
i.e. ‘Did Taye eat the meat?’

The lexical items in the sentence (19) have the following grammatical features:

Pà...rín	Head-features: Specifier features: Complement-features:	Question marker, Tense/Aspect AgrsP None
Táyé	Head-features: Specifier-features: Complement-features:	Nominative case third person singular DP None Tense/Aspect feature
Ó	Head-features: Specifier features: Complement feature:	Agreement marker Nominal feature None
zẹ	Head-features: Specifier features: Complement-features:	Transitive verb, Tense/Aspect Nominative case DP Accusative case DP
Ø	Head-features: Specifier features: Complement features:	Affirmative Tense/Aspect feature, interrogative-features Affirmative DP (Pronoun and Noun) None
udòn	Head features: Specifier features Complement features:	Accusative case Third person singular DP noun None None

The head of the CP in (20) is *pà...rín*, which occurs at the sentence final position. The first part of the particle, *pà*, has Tense/Aspect head feature which must be checked, hence *pà* moves from the sentence-final position as part of the Comp and is adjoined to the TASP to check this head-feature. Here, its specifier feature, which stipulates that it must have a DP specifier, is satisfied, and the feature is erased. *Rín*, the second part of the particles, has, apart from its interrogative head-features, the AgrsP as its specifier features, which stipulates that the whole of AgrsP is its specifier. The DP subject, *Táyé*, moves from its position as the Spec of VP, targets the Spec of TASP to check off its Tense and Aspect complement-features, thereafter, it moves to the Spec of the AgrsP to check off its nominative case head-features. At each of these positions, the appropriate features are found for the DP subject to check, and therefore, erase all these uninterpretable head-features.

The agreement marker, *ó*, has its specifier-features, affirmative DP, which specifies that it must have a DP as its specifier. This feature is checked and erased when the DP subject moves to the Specifier of AgrSP.

The Tense/Aspect features demands that, though it is zero (\emptyset) realised, it must have an affirmative DP as its specifier, and since it also has interrogative head–feature, the first part of the Comp, *pà*, is adjoined to it for the checking and elimination of the interrogative head–feature since the feature is uninterpretable at LF.

The verb, *zẹ* ‘eat’, is a transitive verb. It has the DP, *udòn* ‘meat’, as its object. It is adjoined to the Agro for the checking off its case features before it finally moves to be adjoined to TASP to check off its tense/aspect feature. Its nominative case feature is also checked by the trace of the DP at the Spec of TASPP. *Udòn* ‘meat’, the DP object, has the accusative case at its head-feature, since this is not interpretable at LF, the DP object is moved to the Spec-AgroP position where the accusative case head-feature is checked appropriately and eliminated.

After all the uninterpretable features have been checked at the appropriate domain and erased, these are the only head-features remaining for each of the lexical items.

<i>Pà..rín</i>	-	Question – feature, Tense/Aspect feature
<i>Táyé</i>	-	Third person singular DP subject
<i>Ó</i>	-	Agreement marker
<i>zẹ</i>	-	Transitive verb
\emptyset	-	Affirmative Tense/Aspect feature
<i>udòn</i>	-	Third person singular DP

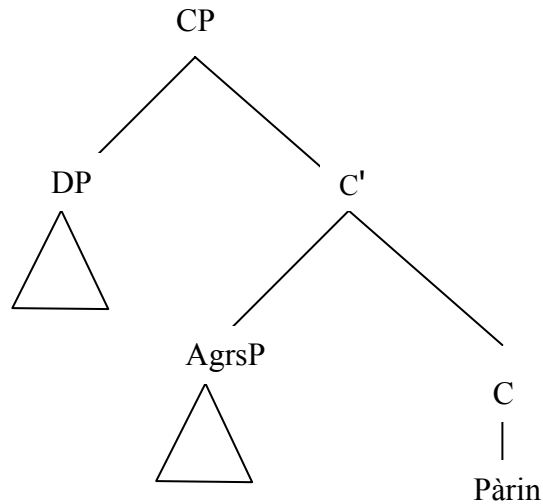
Our analysis above has some implications for the Minimalist Framework adopted in this work. In the MP, and in generative syntax generally, a transformational rule will move a whole constituent from one position to the other. However, our broken-question marker analysis shows that *pà...rín*, as the head of the CP, is a pair of particles, and that movement does not affect the whole particles but only the first part of the particles since it is *pà* that has features that need to be checked in some other places. While it moves and leaves behind a trace, t_s , the second part of the particles, *rín*, is left behind at the head position of the CP where it checks and erases its only uninterpretable feature which is its specifier-features.

The last of the question markers is *pàrin*, (1d), which occurs in the sentence in (21).

(21)	<i>Okinrin</i>	<i>tiẹ</i>	<i>ái</i>	<i>zẹ</i>	<i>uyán</i>	<i>pàrin?</i>
	lit. man	the	hab.	eat	pounded yam	que mkr
	i.e. ‘Does the man usually eat pounded yam?’					

The structure of the CP, with *pàrin* as head, is given in (22) below.

(22)



Following (22), the structural representation of (21) is given in (23).

In the derivation of the sentence in (23), the AgrsP that targets and merges with Comp (*pàrin*), thereafter, the Spec of AgrsP moves to the Spec of CP.

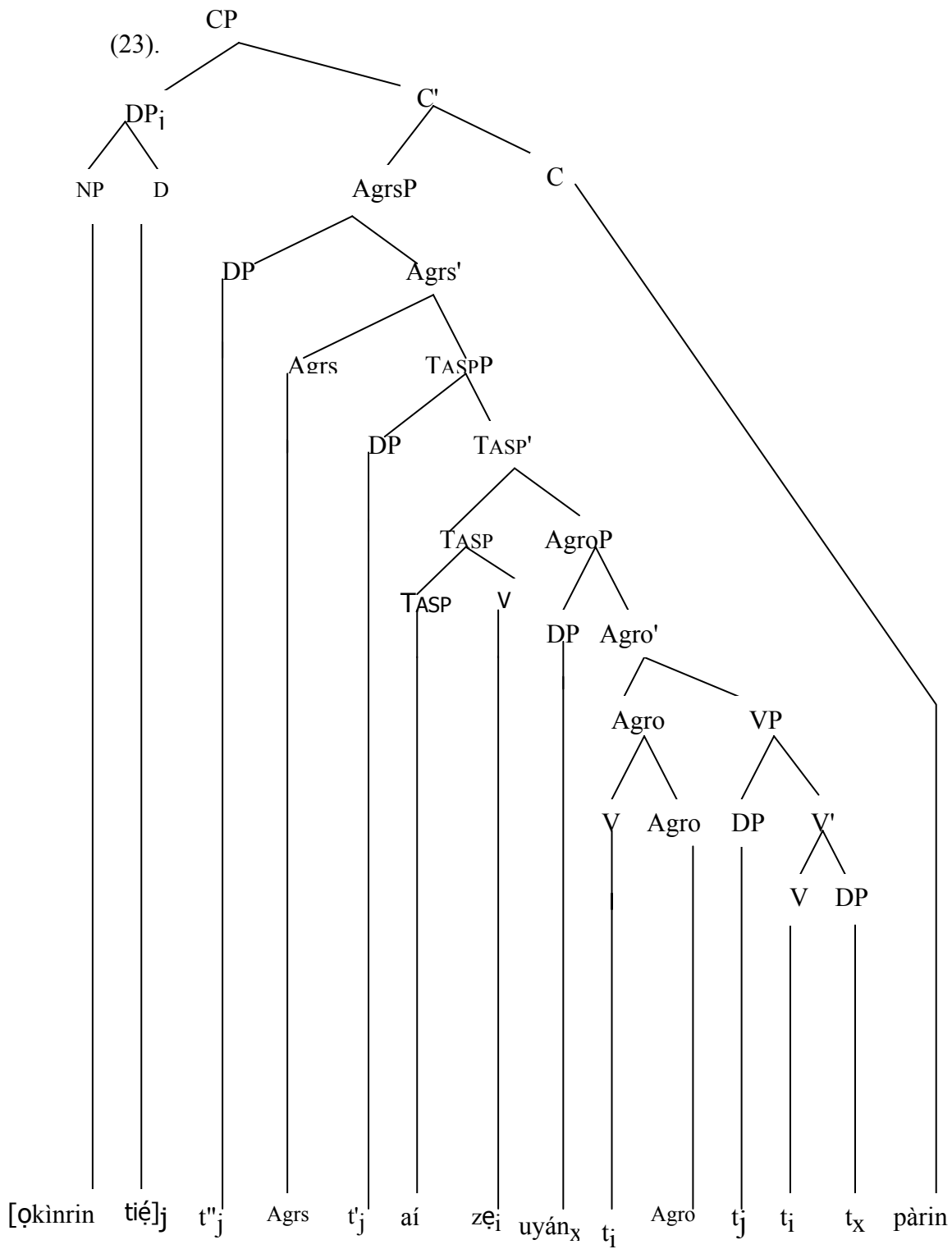
The CP structure with *pà...rín*, (20) or *pàrin* (23), as head is known as head-last. However, while the first part of *pà...rín* moves to be adjoined to the TASP, *pàrin* does not move but maintains its position at the sentence final position.

5. Co-occurrence of Yes/No question markers

Some of the Yes/No Question markers that have so far been identified, *Nzè*, *sé*, *pà...rín*, and *pàrin*, can co-occur in an utterance. *Pà...rín* can not co-occur with *pàrin* because *pàrin* occurs at the sentence-final position, a position where the second part of the pair of *pà...rín* (i.e. *rín*) occurs, this rules out the co-occurrence of the two markers.

Pà...rín can not co-occur with either *Nzè* or *Sé* because the first part of *pà...rín*, which is *pà*, occupies the same structural position with *Nzè* and *Sé* as the head of the CP. Since they occur in the same position, they are mutually exclusive.

Pàrin and *Sé* can co-occur in a sentence. Where this is the case, as we have in the sentences in (24) below, we have two heads in the CP, one at the sentence initial position, while the other is at the sentence-final position.



- (24) a. Sé tírhà ó gbó pàrin?
 lit. que.mkr teacher agr hear que. mkr
 i.e. ‘Did the teacher hear?’
- b. Sé ín níí yá pàrin?
 lit. que you (pl) fut.neg come que mkr
 i.e. ‘Will you(pl) not come?’

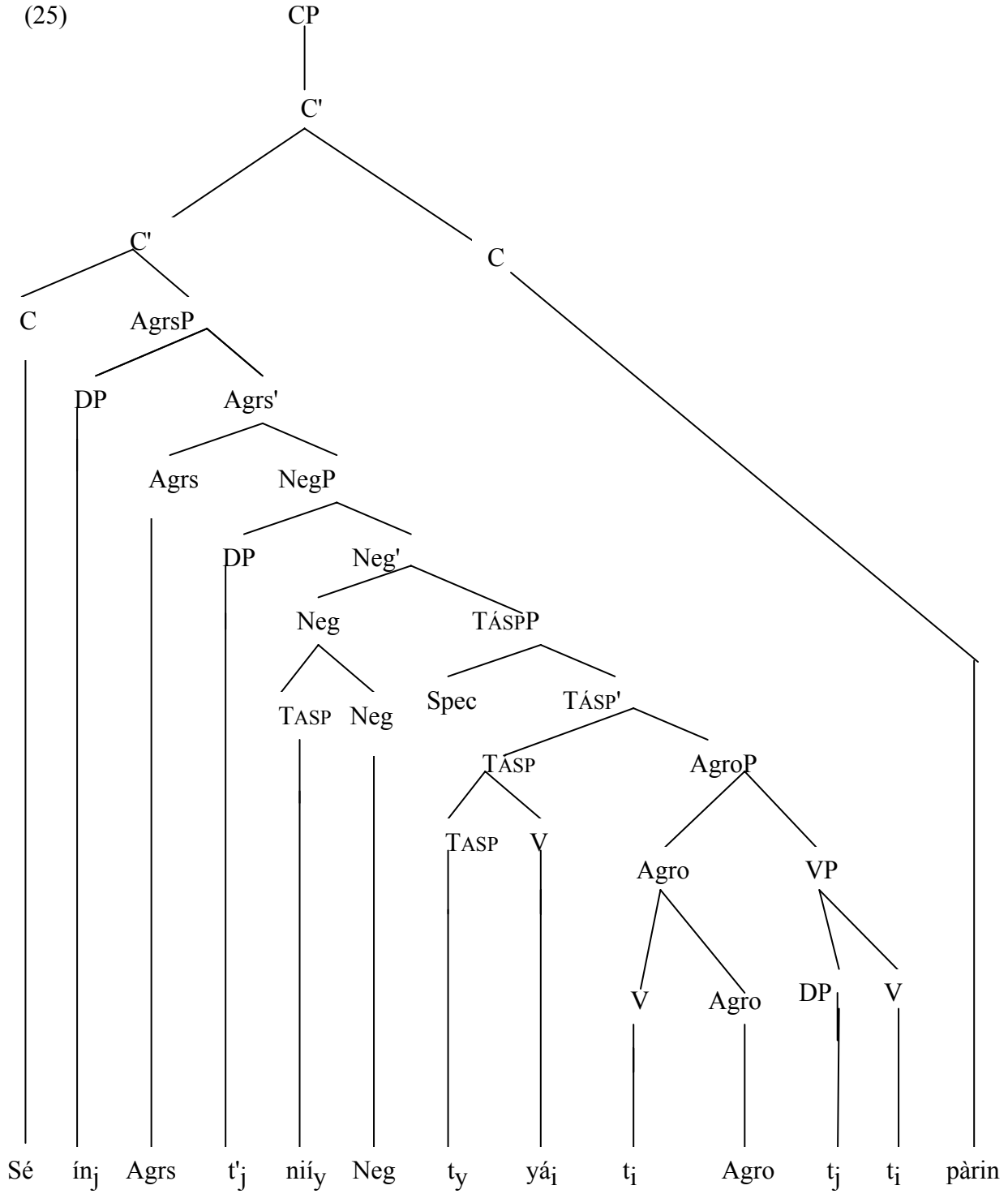
The structure of (24b) is given in (25).

Nzè, however, is not found in any sentence co-occurring with *pàrin*. Despite the fact that the two occur in two different structural positions, they do not co-occur in a sentence. This may be due to the fact that *Nzè* is not commonly employed in a Yes/No Question as we observed above. The restriction of the occurrence and use of *Nzè* can account for its non-occurrence with *pàrin* in a sentence.

6. Conclusion

Yes/No questions in Ào dialect of Yorùbá have overt markers. These are *Nzè*, *Sé*, *pà...rín* and *pàrin*. *Nzè* and *Sé* are variants that can be used interchangeably, they occur in presentential position as clause introducers. *Sé* is more frequently used in negative sentences while the use of *Nzè* seems to be odd if not unacceptable. *Pà...rín* is a pair of particles which has its first part adjoined to the TASP and the second part occurring at sentence final position. In a negative sentence, the first part of *pà...rín* bears a mid tone rather than low tone. *Pàrin* is an indivisible word which occurs at the sentence final position and since it is the head of the CP where it occurs, the structure of the CP with *pàrin* as head gives us a structure known as head-last. *Pàrin* can co-occur with *Sé* but cannot co-occur with *Nzè* and *pà...rín*.

(25)



Notes

* I am grateful to Professor Kola Owolabi for his comments and useful suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. All errors are, however, mine.

¹ Ào is a name given to a speech form spoken in some towns and villages in the north-eastern part of Ondo State of Nigeria. These are Ìfira, Ìpèsì, Imerì, Ìdógún, Àfò, Ikún and a part of Ìdòàní. See Oye Taiwo (2003c) where Ào is grouped along with the South- Eastern Yoruba (SEY) following Awobuluyi (1998).

² The Subject pronoun has various forms in various constructions in Ào as we can observe from (7a) and (7b). The features of the pronoun, and those of the lexical item the pronoun is merged with by Operation Merge, determine the form of the subject pronoun in a particular construction. See Taiwo (2005) for details.

³ The intransitive verb, *ya* ‘come’, bears a mid tone in a continuous sentence as in (7), but bears a high tone in a non- continuous sentence as in (5) above. We shall not pursue this further here since it has nothing to do with our subject matter.

⁴ The first part of the particle can retain its low tone in a non- continuous utterance as in (i) below.

- (i) Mì pà ya rín?
I que. mkr come que mkr
i.e. ‘Should I come?’

The sentence in (i) does not have the continuous aspect unlike (7b), hence the subject pronoun bears a low tone. (i) above has a zero aspect as well as the non- overt non – future tense.

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