

The Syntax of Tongugbe (Ewe) *Nyá*-constructions
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Abstract

Ewe (Kwa, Niger-Congo) has a construction known in the literature as the *nyá*-construction (Ameka 1991, 2005; Collins 1993; Adjei 2014). The logical internal argument of the construction occurs in subject position and the logical external argument is either absent on the surface or represented in the construction as a *for*-PP. In this paper, I consider the syntax of the Ewe *nyá*-construction, exploring data from the Tongugbe dialect. While the construction bears close resemblance to passives on the surface, I argue that it is best treated as a middle. I demonstrate that even though the internal argument undergoes syntactic A-movement to surface subject position, the *nyá*-construction lacks key properties of passives. Furthermore, I contend that the *for*-PP that may occur in the *nyá*-construction is its external argument. I argue that even if the *for*-PP is not overtly realized, it is syntactically projected in Spec vP. The analysis I put forward provides support for Collins' 2022 theory of implicit arguments, according to which implicit arguments are syntactically projected, contra Bruening (2013) and others.

1 Introduction

Ewe has a construction known as the *nyá*-construction (Ameka 1991, 2005; Collins 1993; Adjei 2014) in which the logical internal argument occurs in subject position and the logical external argument is either absent on the surface or represented in the construction as a *for*-PP, as shown in (1) and (2).

- (1) a. Kofí ɖa-á mɔlu.
Kofi cook-HAB rice
'Kofi cooks rice.'
- b. mɔlu nyá ɖa-á (né Kofí).
rice NYA cook-HAB (for Kofi)
'It is easy (for Kofi) to cook rice'
- (2) a. Mí-dzi ha-a.
1PL-sing song-DEF
'We sang the song.'
- b. Eha-a nyá dzi (né mí).
song-DEF NYA sing (for us)
'It was easy (for us) to sing the song'

While the description above is reminiscent of English middles (Keyser and Roeper 1984, Fagan 1988, Stroik 1992, 2006, and others) and, to an extent, English passives, it is not clear what exactly this construction is. Assuming a syntactic analysis of the construction, in which the internal argument moves to the surface subject position, it is also not clear whether the movement of the internal argument to subject position is A-movement or \bar{A} -movement. This is particularly crucial, given that the translation of

(2b) for instance, suggests that it could be a *tough*-construction, as in (3), the derivation of which involves only \bar{A} -movement (Ross 1967, Lasnik and Fiengo 1974; Chomsky 1977, 1981; Williams 1983; Fleisher 2013; among others) or both A-movement and \bar{A} -movement (Rosenbaum 1967, Postal 1971, Hornstein 2001, Hicks 2009, among others).

(3) John is easy to please.

Turning to the optional *for*-PP of the *nyá*-construction, it has yet to be established whether it is an agent, a benefactive, or an experiencer. If it is an agent, is it a syntactically active argument of the construction?

In this paper, I explore data from the Tongugbe dialect of Ewe. I show that the *nyá*-construction indeed involves A-movement. I argue that even though the construction looks like the English passive, it does not, strictly speaking, have passive interpretation. Also, it is incompatible with defining characteristics of passives like the ability to take purpose clauses. I demonstrate that the construction involves A-movement and not \bar{A} -movement of the internal argument to the surface subject position, hence it is best analyzed as a middle instead of a *tough*-construction. I provide additional support for this characterization, drawing on the fact that the *nyá*-construction disallows preposition stranding, which is a known feature of middles (Keyser and Roeper 1984, Fagan 1988). With respect to the optional *for*-PP in the *nyá*-construction, I argue, following Stroik (1992, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2006) and Hoekstra and Roberts (1993), that it is a syntactically active agent of the construction. I show further that the agent is not an adjunct but the external argument of the construction. More so, I argue that even if the *for*-PP is not overtly present, it is syntactically active as the implicit external argument of the construction; reflexive binding, secondary predicates, and control of PRO in nominalizations provide robust support for this position.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 distinguishes *nyá* from similar lexical items in the Tongugbe grammar. In section 3, I discuss the (in)compatibility of *nyá* with some Ewe verbs. In Section 4, I establish that the *nyá* construction is a middle. Section 5 and 6 present a syntactic analysis of the *nyá* construction. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2 Distinguishing *Nyá* from other *Nya*-Expressions

There are two verbs in Tongugbe that are (nearly) homophonous to the verb *nyá* of the *nyá*-construction (henceforth middle *nyá*). It is worthwhile to show that these verbs differ from *ny'a*, the verb under consideration in this paper. This differentiation will give us some insight into the uniqueness of the middle *nyá* in Tongugbe grammar. In this section, I demonstrate that middle *nyá* is completely different from the verb *nyá* ‘to know’ and the epistemic modal *nyā*.

To begin with, I compare the verb ‘to know’ and the middle *nyá*. The middle *nyá* optionally takes a *for*-PP agent while the verb *nyá* ‘to know’ cannot. Consider (4) below.

- (4) a. Mɔlu nyá ɖa-á (né Kof'i).
 rice NYA cook-HAB (for Kofi)
 ‘It is easy (for Kofi) to cook rice.’
- b. Kofi nyá mɔlu-ɖa-ɖa (né Áma).
 Kofi know rice-RED-cook (for Ama)
 ‘Kofi knows how to cook rice (for Ama).’

In (4a), the *nyá*-construction, the internal argument is the surface subject of the construction even though it bears the theme theta role. This suggests that there is an agent theta role, which the *for*-PP or the implicit *for*-PP bears. In (4b), the internal argument is in its canonical position, bearing the theme theta role and the subject bears the agent theta role. The *for*-PP here cannot take the agent theta role since it is not an argument of *nyá* 'to know', rather it is a benefactive PP for the embedded clause. Therefore, the verb in (4b) can only be the verb *nyá* 'to know'.

Another difference between the verb 'to know' and the middle *nyá* lies in the fact that the verb 'to know' can embed finite clauses while *nyá* cannot. This is illustrated in (5) and (6) below.

- (5) a. Kofí mé-nyá ɔ.
 Kofi NEG-know NEG
 'Kofi doesn't know.'
- b. Kofí mé-nyá bé Áma dzó o.
 Kofi NEG-know COMP Ama leave NEG
 'Kofi doesn't know that Ama left.'
- (6) a. Kofí mé-nyá ble-é ɔ.
 Kofi NEG-NYA deceive-HAB NEG
 'It is difficult to deceive Kofi.'
- b. *Kofí mé-nyá bé ble-é ɔ.
 Kofi NEG-NYA COMP deceive-HAB NEG
 Intended: 'It is difficult to deceive Kofi.'

I now compare middle *nyá* and the epistemic modal *nyā*. Apart from the fact that they differ with respect to tones, they can co-occur in the same clause (7), leading to the conclusion that they are different.

- (7) É-nyā nyá tsiɸuɸu.
 3SG-MOD.UNCERT know swimming
 'S/he probably knows how to swim.'

It is clear from the above that the middle *nyá* differs from the verb 'to know' and the modal. The middle *nyá* is in the extended projection of the main verb, hence it takes preverbal aspectual markers like the prospective marker, shown in (8), which ordinarily precedes main verbs in the clause. The middle *nyá* contributes the semantics of "easiness" to the structure.

- (8) Kofi la nyá ble.
 Kofi PROSP NYA deceive
 'It will be easy to deceive Kofi.'

The progressive marker is lower in the structure. (12) shows that it follows the main verb.

- (9) Edɔ-ɔ nya le wɔ-wɔ̃.
 work-DEF NYA be RED-dō.PROG
 'The work is being done easily.'

3 *Nyá* Verbs

The *nyá*-construction is selective with respect to the verbs with which it is compatible. This selectivity seems not to show a concrete pattern, a property that is reminiscent of the behavior of middles. For English middles, Ackema and Schoorlemmer (2007) express this observation as follows:

“Not every verb can undergo middle formation. The proper characterization of the verbs that can undergo the process is notoriously difficult” (p.158).

That notwithstanding, an attempt can be made to capture the types of verbs that allow the formation of the *nyá*-construction. This characterization hinges on the aspectual properties of verbs, following Vendler’s (1967b) classification, which entails whether the verbs express activities, achievements, accomplishments, or states. Transitive verbs that express activities, achievements, accomplishments, and a subset of stative verbs allow for the formation of the *nyá* construction, as shown in the following examples.

- (10) Transitive activity verb
- a. *Áma* *φo* *vu-ó*.
Ama play drum-DEF
‘Ama played the drum.’
 - b. *Ev-ó* *nyá* *φo* *né* *Áma*.
drum-DEF NYA play for Ama
‘It was easy for Ama to play the drum.’
- (11) Transitive achievement verb
- a. *Kofí* *φle* *vu-ó*.
Kofi buy car-DEF
‘Kofi bought the car.’
 - b. *Ev-ó* *nyá* *φle* *né* *Kofí*.
car-DEF NYÁ buy for Kofi
‘It was easy for Kofi to buy the car.’
- (12) Transitive accomplishment verb
- a. *Wó-tu* *xo-ó*.
3PL-build house-DEF
‘They built the house.’
 - b. *Exo-ó* *nyá* *tu* *né-ó*.
house-DEF NYÁ build for them
‘It was easy for them to build the house.’

Stative verbs such as *di* ‘to want’, *hie* ‘to need’, *nyá* ‘to know’, and *lõ* ‘to love’, disallow middle formation, as shown in (13), (14), and (15).

- (13) Transitive stative verb
- a. *Kofí* *dí* *gá*.
Kofi want money
‘Kofi wants money.’

- b. *Ega nyá dí-é né Kofí.
 money NYÁ want for Kofi
 Intended: 'It is easy for Kofi to want money.'
- (14) a. Kofí híé gá.
 Kofi need money
 'Kofi needs money.'
- b. *Ega nyá híé né Kófi.
 money NYÁ need for Kofi
 Intended: 'It is easy for Kofi to need money.'
- (15) a. Me-nyá ame-ó.
 1SG-know person-PL
 'I know the people.'
- b. *Ame-ó nyá nyá nũ.
 person-PL NYÁ know for.me
 Intended: 'It was easy for me to know the people.'

However, as example (16) shows, the stative verb *nɔ* 'to stay' can co-occur with the middle *nyá*. The conclusion then is that a subset of stative verbs is incompatible with the middle *nyá*.

- (16) a. Kofí nɔ aɸeme.
 Kofi be home
 'Kofi stayed home.'
- b. Aɸeme nyá nɔ-ɔ né Kofí.
 home NYA be-HAB for Kofi
 'It is easy for Kofi to stay at home.'

4 *Nyá*-Construction: *Tough*-construction or Middle?

So far, the middle *nyá* bears an interpretation that is largely analogous to *tough*-constructions in English. It is tempting then to assume that the *nyá*-construction is *tough*-construction instead of a middle. In this section, I argue that the *nyá*-construction does not involve \bar{A} -movement, hence it cannot be a *tough*-construction.

A long-standing debate in the literature on *tough*-constructions concerns the derivation of these constructions. One of the competing positions is that *tough*-constructions are derived via long movement, in which the matrix subject starts out as the object of the embedded predicate and undergoes \bar{A} -movement to the specifier of the embedded Spec CP. It further undergoes A-movement to the matrix subject position, as in (17) (Rosenbaum 1967, Postal 1971, Hornstein 2001, Hartman 2009, Hicks 2009, among others)

- (17) John_i is tough [_{*t*_i} PRO_{arb} to please *t*_i]

The other position is that the matrix subject is base-generated in the matrix clause. An operator undergoes \bar{A} -movement from the object position of the embedded clause to Spec CP of the same clause, as in (18) (Ross 1967; Lasnik and Fiengo 1974; Chomsky 1977, 1981; Williams 1983; Fleisher 2013; among others).

(18) John_i is tough [Op_i PRO_{arb} to please t_i]

The key ingredient from the *tough*-construction literature for this paper is that the opposing views on the derivation of tough-constructions converge on the assumption \bar{A} -movement is inherent in the derivation. If the *nyá*-construction is a tough-construction, then it should have some \bar{A} -movement in its derivation. The extraction facts I discuss below show that the *nyá*-construction does not involve \bar{A} -movement, and therefore, it is not a *tough*-construction.

Both the direct and indirect objects in Tongugbe double object constructions can be extracted via \bar{A} -movement. Consider example (19).

- (19) a. Kofí ná ga Ama.
 Kofi give money Ama
 ‘Kofi gave Ama money.’
- b. Ame-ka-a Kofí ná ga ɔ?
 person-WH-FOC Kofi give money PRT
 ‘Who did Kofi give money?’
- c. Nu-ka-a Kofí ná Áma ɔ?
 thing-WH-FOC Kofi give Ama PRT
 ‘What did Kofi give Ama?’

Essegbey (2010) points out that the indirect object in a double object construction cannot be promoted to subject position in the Ewe *nyá*-construction. If the *nyá*-construction involved \bar{A} -movement, (20b) would be grammatical.

- (20) a. Ga nyá ná-ná Amí na Kosí.
 money NYA give-HAB Ami for Kosi
 ‘Kosi likes giving money to Ami.’
- b. *Ami nyá na-na ga na Kosi.
 Ami NYA give-HAB money for Kosi
 Intended: ‘Kosi likes giving money to Ami.’

In addition to the facts above, it is well known in the literature that middles disallow preposition stranding (Keyser and Roeper 1984, Fagan 1988, Stroik 1992). According to Keyser and Roeper (1984), the p-stranding fact is one of the distinguishing characteristics of passives and middles since passives allow p-stranding. In what follows, I show that the Tongugbe middle also disallows p-stranding.

Postposition stranding is banned in Tongugbe and many other Ewe dialects. Preposition stranding, on the other hand, is allowed. For instance, Gotah (2021) shows that in \bar{A} -constructions like relative clauses in Tongugbe, prepositions can be stranded while postpositions cannot. The fact that preposition stranding is disallowed in the Tongugbe *nyá*-construction is a compelling reason to describe it as a middle. If the *nyá*-construction were an \bar{A} -construction, preposition stranding would be allowed. Since it is disallowed in the *nyá*-construction, as in (21), but acceptable in relative clauses and other \bar{A} -phenomena such as focus constructions, as (22) shows, the *nyá*-construction necessarily involves A -movement. Hence, it is not a *tough*-construction but a middle. Given this conclusion, I assume that the English middle has a silent counterpart of *nyá*.

- (21) a. Me-wɔ dɔ kpli Kofi.
 1SG-do work PREP Kofi
 ‘I worked with Kofi.’
 b. *Kofi nyá wɔ dɔ kpli.
 Kofi NYA do work PREP
 Intended: ‘It was easy to work with Kofi.’
- (22) a. Me-wɔ dɔ kplí Kofi.
 1SG-do work PREP Kofi
 ‘I worked with Kofi.’
 b. Kofí nyɔ me-wɔ dɔ kplí.
 Kofi FOC 1SG-do work PREP
 ‘I worked with KOFI.’

In fact, Thoms (2011) notes that English *tough*-constructions allow preposition stranding, as illustrated in (23). Thoms points out that preposition stranding is a diagnostic of \bar{A} -movement, as it is attested in languages that disallow it with any A-movement.

- (23) Magicians are difficult to talk to. (Thoms 2011: 20)

Collins (1993) suggests that the *nyá*-construction maybe viewed as an A-movement construction under the assumption that it is analogous to the English passive. However, in expressing passives in Ewe, an impersonal construction, as in (24b), is employed.

- (24) a. Kofí dzrá vu-ó.
 Kofi sell car-DEF
 ‘Kofi sold the car.’
 b. Wó-dzrá vu-ó.
 3PL-sell car-DEF
 ‘The car was sold/lit. They sold the car.’

More so, unlike the impersonal construction, the *nyá*-construction cannot take a purpose clause, an indication that it is not a passive. This is shown in (25).

- (25) a. Evu-ó nyá dzrá.
 car-DEF NYA sell
 ‘It was easy to sell the car.’
 b. *Evu-ó nyá dzrá né wó-á-kó dí ga.
 car-DEF NYA sell so 3SG-FUT-take search money
 Intended: ‘It was easy to sell the car to raise funds.’
 c. Wó-dzrá vu-ó né wó-á-kó dí ga.
 3PL-sell car-DEF so 3SG-FUT-take search money
 ‘The car was sold to raise funds’

Bhatt and Pancheva (2017) make a similar observation for English middles. Consider (26) in which (a), a passive construction, takes a purpose clause, but (b) does not.

- (26) a. The ship was sunk [PRO to collect the insurance]. (Passive)
 b. *The ship sinks easily [PRO to collect the insurance]. (Middle)

5 Argument Structure of the *Nyá*-construction

The Tongugbe middle involves an internal argument that undergoes syntactic movement to the surface subject position of the construction. Ameka (2005: 43) indicates that the agent is “either not expressed, or is expressed as a dative prepositional”. In this section, I argue that the dative prepositional element in the Ewe middle, whether expressed or not, is a syntactically active agent.

Given that the middle optionally takes an overt *for*-PP, which is productively employed in experiencer and benefactive constructions, as shown in (27), it is tempting to conclude that the *for*-PP is either an experiencer or a benefactive, which are adjuncts.

- (27) a. Akú wó mɔlu-ó víví né Áma.
 Aku POSS rice sweet for Ama
 ‘Ama enjoyed Aku’s rice.’
- b. Akú φle awu né Áma.
 Aku buy dress for Ama
 ‘Aku bought a dress for Ama.’

Following Stroik (2006), I argue that the *for*-PP in the Ewe middle is neither an experiencer nor a benefactive. My argument hinges on the fact that experiencer and benefactive readings cannot be obtained. When combined with some verbs, however, the interpretation of the *for*-PP in middles can be ambiguous between an agent and a beneficiary. Consider (28) below.

- (28) Enu mé-nyá φle-é né Kofí o.
 thing NEG-NYA buy-HAB for Kofi NEG
 ‘It is hard to shop for Kofi/It is hard for Kofi to shop.’

As example (29) shows, the ambiguity is resolved when another *for*-PP is added. The next issue that arises concerns the characterization of the two *for*-PPs. Specifically, which of them is the beneficiary and which is the agent?

- (29) Enu mé-nyá φle-é né Kofí né Áma o.
 thing NEG-NYA buy-HAB for Kofi for Ama NEG
 ‘It is hard for Kofi to shop for Ama/It is hard for Ama to shop for Kofi.’

To address this issue, I explore binding relations. In cases where the beneficiary is a reflexive, it must be bound by the agent antecedent. This is illustrated in (30) below. The binding facts provide a compelling piece of evidence that the agent externally merges higher than the beneficiary.

- (30) a. Enu mé-nyá φle-é né Kofí né é-ɔkoe o.
 thing NEG-NYA buy-HAB for Kofi for 3SG-self NEG
 ‘It is hard for Kofi to shop for himself.’
- b. *Enu mé-nyá φle-é né é-ɔkoe né Kofí o.
 thing NEG-NYA buy-HAB for 3SG-self for Kofi NEG
 Intended: ‘It is hard for Kofi to shop for himself.’

We are led to conclude from the above that a single *for*-PP that is not an anaphor is ambiguous between a benefactive and an agent. If we posit an implicit argument in the structure, then the single *for*-PP is a benefactive.

While Stroik (1992, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006) and Hoekstra and Roberts (1993) argue that middle agents are syntactically active, Fagan (1992) and Ackema and Schoorlemmer (1995) and others argue that they are not syntactically active. Stroik notes that the *for*-phrase is the realization of the syntactically active agent in middles. According to Rapoport (1999), middles do not necessarily involve agentivity. One of Rapoport’s argument against agentivity in English middles is that not all middles are incompatible with *all by itself*. However, Bhatt and Pancheva (2017) note that the examples upon which Rapoport’s argument are based are generic unaccusatives and not middles. In Ewe, all middles are incompatible with *all by itself*. See (31) for example.

- (31) a. Eɖu-ɔ̄ mu le e-ɖokoe si.
 car-DEF fall be 3SG-self POSTP
 ‘The car fell on its side all by itself.’
- b. *Eɖu-ɔ̄ nyá dzrá le e-ɖokoe si.
 car-DEF NYA be 3SG-self POSTP
 Intended: ‘*It was easy to sell the car all by itself.’

Even though Stroik (1992, 1995) argues that agents in middles are not syntactically suppressed, he considers them VP adjuncts. Contrary to Stroik’s analysis, the syntactic properties of agents, whether overt or implicit, in Tongugbe middles show that they are external arguments and not VP adjuncts. This, I demonstrate employing pieces of evidence from reflexive binding, control, and secondary predicates.

5.1 Reflexive Binding

As I have already shown in the previous section, the *for*-PP, which is the overt agent, in Tongugbe middles can bind reflexives. In this section, I show that even when the *for*-PP is implicit, it is syntactically active as an external argument.

In (32), the reflexive needs to be bound by an antecedent within the clause to obviate a Principle A violation. Since (36b) is grammatical, there is reason to believe that there is a syntactically active implicit argument that binds the reflexive, an indication that the agent is the syntactically active external argument. This conception aligns neatly with Collins’ (2022) binding diagnostic for the syntactic activity of implicit arguments.

- (32) a. Awu nyá ɸle-é.
 dress NYA buy-HAB
 ‘It is easy to buy a dress.’
- b. Awu nyá ɸle-é ne ame-ɖokoe.
 dress NYA buy-HAB for person-self
 ‘It is easy to buy a dress.’

The case for a syntactically represented argument is particularly clear in Ewe, because the language’s reflexive binding syntax is more transparent than English’s: there are no exempt anaphors¹, as (33) illustrates. Specifically, the reflexives cannot be replaced with

¹Exempt anaphors can be replaced with pronouns without altering the truth-conditions. (1) Bill_i said that the rain had damaged pictures of himself_i/him₁. (Collins 2022:30)

a pronoun that is coindexed with their antecedent. As example (33b) shows, A Principle B violation is incurred when the anaphor is replaced with a pronoun. (See Charnavel and Zlogar 2015 and Collins 2022:30 for discussion on exempt anaphora).

- (33) a. Mɔlu nyá ɖa-a mne Kofi_i ne e-ɖokoe_i.
 rice NYA cook-HAB for Kofi for 3SG-self
 ‘It is easy for Kofi to cook rice for himself.’
 b. Mɔlu nyá ɖa-a né Kofi_i ne_{*i/j}.
 rice NYA cook-HAB for Kofi for.3SG
 Intended: ‘It is easy for Kofi to cook rice for him.’

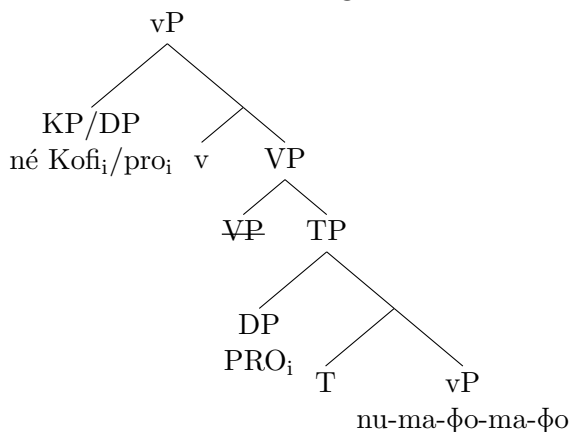
Also, logophoric pronouns are morphosyntactically distinct, as shown in (34), and reflexives are strongly restricted by the simplest descriptive version of Principle A of the binding theory. Reflexives, therefore, cannot be logophors.

- (34) a. Kofi_i gblɔ bé yé_i-dzó.
 Kofi say COMP LOG-leave
 ‘Kofi_i said he_i left.’
 b. Kofi_i gblɔ bé é_{*i/j}-dzó.
 Kofi say COMP 3SG-leave
 ‘Kofi_i said he_j left.’

5.2 Control

Another argument for the syntactic activity of the external argument, whether, overt or implicit, in Tongugbe middles finds expression in the fact that it can control PRO in nominalizations, as in (35). The nominalization *numaɕomaɕo* ‘without talking’ has a PRO subject that needs to be controlled by the external argument of the construction, which is the implicit argument. In (36), the *for*-PP external argument controls PRO.

- (35) Edɔ-ɔ nyá wɔ nu-ma-ɕo-ma-ɕo.
 work-DEF NYA do mouth-NEG-strike-NEG-strike
 ‘It was easy to do the work without talking.’
 (36) Edɔ-ɔ nyá wɔ né Kofi nu-ma-ɕo-ma-ɕo.
 work-DEF NYA do for Kofi mouth-NEG-strike-NEG-strike
 ‘It was easy for Kofi to do the work without talking.’
 (37) Partial structure showing how the external argument controls PRO



5.3 Secondary Predicates

The licensing of secondary predicates is another argument for the syntactic activity of the external argument in Tongugbe middles. Secondary predicates must be licensed by a *c*-commanding DP, hence the *c*-commanding DP, the external arguments, in (38a and c) license the secondary predicate *afɔɸuɸlu* ‘barefoot’. (38b) shows that the implicit external argument licenses the secondary predicate. One of Collins’ (2022) arguments for the syntactic activity of implicit arguments in short passives is based on the fact they can take secondary predicates. The idea is that the secondary predicates modify the implicit arguments. The Ewe data discussed here corroborates Collins’ argument.

- (38) a. Wó-ɸo bɔlu-ɔ afɔɸuɸlu.
 3SG-play ball-DEF barefoot
 ‘They played the ball barefoot.’
- b. Bɔlu nyá ɸo-ɔ afɔɸuɸlu.
 ball NYA play-HAB barefoot
 ‘It is easy to play soccer barefoot.’
- c. Bɔlu nyá ɸo-ɔ né Kofi afɔɸuɸlu.
 ball NYA play-HAB for Kofi barefoot
 ‘It is easy for Kofi to play soccer barefoot.’
- (39) a. Wó-ɸu tsi amama.
 3PL-swim water naked
 ‘They swam naked.’
- b. Etsi nyá ɸu-ɔ amama.
 water NYA swim-HAB naked
 ‘It is easy to swim naked.’
- c. Etsi nyá ɸu-ɔ ne Kofi amama.
 water NYA swim-HAB for Kofi naked
 ‘It is easy for Kofi to swim naked.’

I have demonstrated in the above sections that the *for*-PP, overt or covert, can be the syntactically active external argument of the Tongugbe middle and not an adjunct.

6 Deriving the Tongugbe Middle

In this section, I outline the derivation of the Tongugbe. I follow the merge-based approach to argument structure (Chomsky 1995, Collins 2022), positing that the external argument of the Tongugbe middle merges in Spec vP. Also, I adopt the smuggling mechanism (Collins 2005) in accounting for the movement of the internal argument to the surface subject position.

Drawing inspiration from the merge-based approach to argument structure (Chomsky 1995, Collins 2022) and similar proposals (Merchant 2008, Coon and Preminger 2011, Halpert and Zeller 2016), I assume that the external argument, a KP, in the spirit of Caha 2009 and Roberts 2019, headed by a vacuous preposition like the English *by*-phrase, is projected in the specifier of vP, where it is assigned the agent theta role. Note that the

KP contains a DP (overt external argument), which is assigned case by the K head. The implicit external argument DP, on the other hand, lacks case altogether.

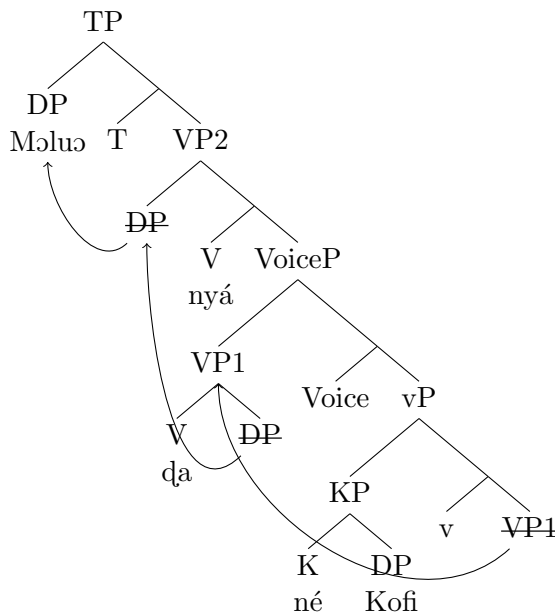
The internal argument is externally merged as the complement of the main verb of the construction, where it is assigned its theme theta role. The V head projects VP1. Since the middle verb *nyá* requires the movement of the internal argument to subject position, Spec TP, this argument has to move past the external argument, which is merged higher in the structure. To obviate MLC and Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990) violations, the smuggling mechanism is invoked. The VP1, containing the internal argument, must move to Spec VoiceP, which dominates vP (see Ahn and Sailor 2010 for a similar analysis of English middles)². Recall that the external argument is in Spec vP. With the internal argument internally merged above the external argument, it is visible to be attracted to Spec TP for case and EPP reasons.

It is imperative to indicate here that the VoiceP postulated departs from the argument-introducing VoiceP due to Kratzer (1996). In my analysis, VoiceP serves as the locus of the middle voice and facilitates the realization of arguments in Argument positions, hence its specifier is an indirect escape hatch for the internal argument (see Collins 2005a, 2022 for discussions). (40) shows the derivation for middle with an overt external argument in Tongugbe.

(40) Tongugbe Middle Derivation

Mɔlu-ó nyá ɖa ne Kofi.
 rice-DEF NYA cook for Kofi

‘It was easy for Kofi to cook the rice.’

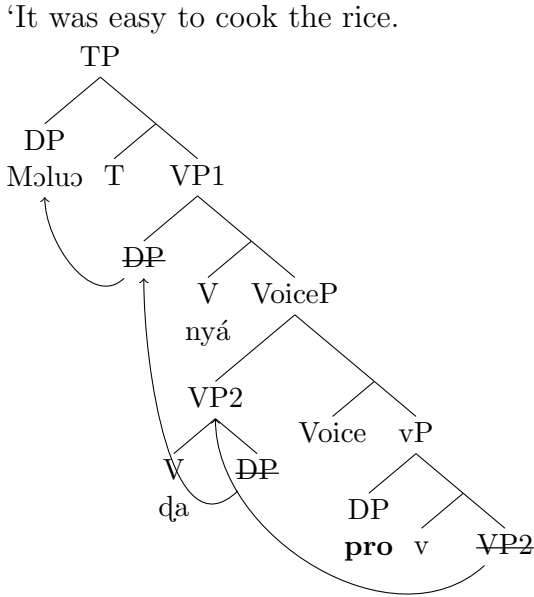


(41) shows the derivation of the middle with an implicit external argument in Tongugbe.

(41) Structure for the implicit argument

Mɔlu-ó nyá ɖa.
 rice-DEF NYA cook

²This movement is strictly phrasal in that head movement of V will strand verb particles yielding an unacceptable word order



An outstanding issue that needs explanation is whether little *v* fails to assign accusative Case to the internal argument in VP1 or not. If indeed it fails to assign accusative Case to the internal argument, what blocks this? If it does assign accusative Case to the internal argument, why does the internal argument move from a Case position to another? In addressing a similar issue in the derivation of English passives, Collins (2022: 84) points out that the movement of the PartP dominating the VP raises the internal argument to a position accessible to T for phi-feature agreement. According to Collins, little *v* does not check the Case feature of the internal argument in this configuration. Even though there is no PartP in the derivation I put forward for the Ewe middles, Collins’ (2021) analysis carries over straightforwardly to the Case-assignment issue. In particular, VP1 raises the internal argument to a position (Spec VoiceP) visible to the T, allowing for the nominative Case feature of the internal argument to be checked. Little *v* does not check the Case feature of the internal argument.

The argument structure of the Tongugbe middle demonstrates clearly that the implicit external argument is syntactically projected. The analysis above supports Collins’ (2022) theory of implicit arguments for the passive, contra Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, and others.

7 Conclusion

I have shown in this paper that the *nyá*-construction in Tongugbe dialect of Ewe is best described as a middle. The characterization stems from the fact that the construction exhibits properties of middles and not *tough*-constructions. My contention has also been that since the *for*-PP, overt or implicit, in *nyá*-constructions can bind reflexives, control PRO in nominalizations, and can be modified by secondary predicates, it is a syntactically active external argument of the construction. Furthermore, I have argued, following Chomsky (1995), Merchant (2008), Coon and Preminger (2011), Halpert and Zeller (2016), and Collins (2022), that this external argument is syntactically projected in Spec, vP. The derivation I proposed for the *nyá*-construction draws on the smuggling mechanism for the displacement of internal arguments. In particular, I have shown that

the internal argument, which is contained in VP1, subextracts from the VP1 after its movement to the specifier of a Voice projection in the clausal spine. The analysis I put forward can be extended to other dialects of Ewe.

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