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Syntactic Government in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines

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ABSTRACT

Several studies on Nigerian newspaper headlines have focused heavily on issues of style, language use, ideology and meaning but little has been done from a syntactic perspective. This study, therefore, examines the nature of syntactic government in the headlines from a generative grammar approach. The data for this study comprises newspaper headlines randomly collected from national Nigerian newspapers and are subjected to syntactic analysis with a view to describing the nature of syntactic government in Nigerian newspaper headlines. It is discovered that while all forms of government operate in the headlines, head-government and theta-government are not always visible at S-structure of the headlines. Also, lexical and Antecedent-government operate only in headlines where A¹ movement has taken place.

Keywords: Generative grammar, Government, Nigerian newspaper headlines, Syntactic analysis.

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1.0 Introduction

News headlines constitute a very important aspect of newspapers. They represent the title of news stories and events covered in a newspaper and according to (Reah, 1998: 4), they summarize the entire story or information about social events that are of interest to a larger group of people in the society. Similarly, (Taiwo, 2007: 222) informs they do not only act as forerunners to news reports but reflect the social, cultural and national consciousness in the society at a particular time. Furthermore, this area has continued to attract more scholarly attention from various perspectives.

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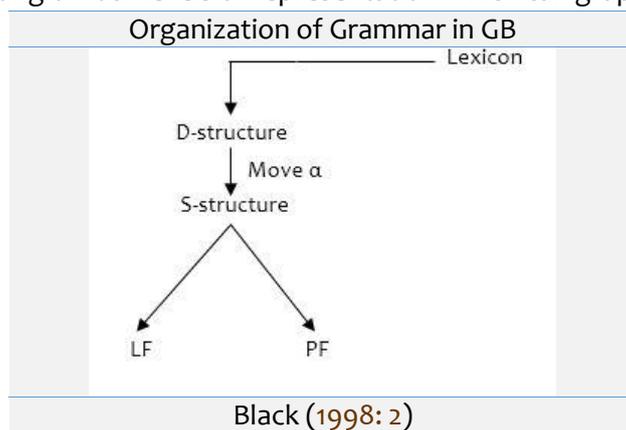
Chiluwa (2005) examines pragmatic processes and social meaning in the news headlines and lead stories of three major Nigerian news magazines. He underscores that language in the news media is a representation of a particular ideological position. Thus, language in a news text performs a mediatory function and as a semiotic code reflects what experience, perspectives or an idea about that the news hold. Alabi (2012)'s study was based on lexical choices in selected newspaper headlines and according to the study, these choices include deletion, special use of tenses, the use of acronyms and abbreviations, ambiguity, premodification and capitalization. Ehineni (2014b) examined lexical and functional heads in Nigerian newspaper headlines. In his study, based on a generative grammar approach, he identified that lexical heads such as nouns, verbs, adjectives etc and functional heads such as determiners, complementizers, inflection are projected in Nigerian newspaper headlines. He however notes that lexical heads are more projected than functional heads in Nigerian newspaper headlines which could be justified by the fact that lexical heads have more substantive content than functional heads. Ehineni (2014d) identifies the lexical, structural and rhetorical features of Nigerian print media in a study of selected newspaper headlines. These features often portray the peculiar style engaged in the print media (Chiluwa, 2005; Ehineni, 2014d). These studies have examined Nigerian newspaper headlines from different linguistic perspectives. This study however, by focusing on syntactic government, attempts to discuss a significant area that has not been examined in the structure of headlines.

2.0 Methodology

The data for this study are Nigerian newspaper headlines which are collected from selected Nigerian newspapers. These newspapers are national newspapers including 'The Punch', 'The Nation', 'Nigerian Tribune', 'Vanguard', 'The Sun' and 'Sahara Reporters'. The data are syntactically analyzed through the Generative Grammar approach and the Government theory more specifically will be used to explicate the nature of government in the selected Nigerian newspaper headlines. This discussion includes how different forms of government operate in Nigerian newspaper headlines.

3.0 The Government and Binding Framework

The Government and Binding (GB) was first introduced by (Chomsky, 1981) based on the notion of universal grammar (UG) which describes all languages. This theory aims at identifying the 'principles and parameters' that are universal to human languages. The 'principles' relate to the core which is common to all languages while the 'parameters' relate to how individual languages differ. For instance, while languages have certain constituents in common (e.g, heads in phrases) in terms of principles, they differ in the ordering of these constituents in terms of parameters. Ouhalla (1999: 14) notes that 'Chomsky (1981) is a detailed and highly technical account of the attempts to replace rules with general principles and explain crosslinguistic variation in terms of parameters'. Within this framework, it is assumed that a large portion of the grammar of any particular language is common to all languages and is therefore part of Universal Grammar. The PPT holds that Universal Grammar can be broken down into two main components: levels of representation and a system of constraints. It assumes a derivational model consisting of four levels of representation which can graphically be explained below:



According to Black (1998: 2), the lexicon lists the idiosyncratic properties of lexical items which constitute the atomic units of the syntax and these properties relates to the subcategorization features, agreement features (number, tense, etc.) of arguments. The process begins from the lexicon where the items originate. These lexemes from the lexicon are combined at an underlying structure known as the D-structure and are later moved into a surface representation known as S-structure. The Phonological Form (PF) and the Logical Form (LF) follows directly from the S-structure. The PF relates to sounds while the LF relates to meaning. This explanation gives a succinct overview of grammar in the GB framework. While there are a number of sub-components/theories in GB, the government theory will be discussed since the paper focuses on syntactic government in news headlines.

3.1 Government Theory

Government theory is a main sub component of the Government and Binding framework. The notion of government was originally given by Chomsky below as:

α is governed by β if α is c-commanded by β and no major category or major category boundary appears between α and β .
Chomsky (1993: 25)

The definition reveals that government only holds between elements that are adjacent to each other without any structural intervention of another element. In a similar vein, Ouhalla (1999) explains that government operates in the structural relationship of sisterhood as well as locality relationship in a structure. He, therefore, defines government as follows:

α governs β iff:

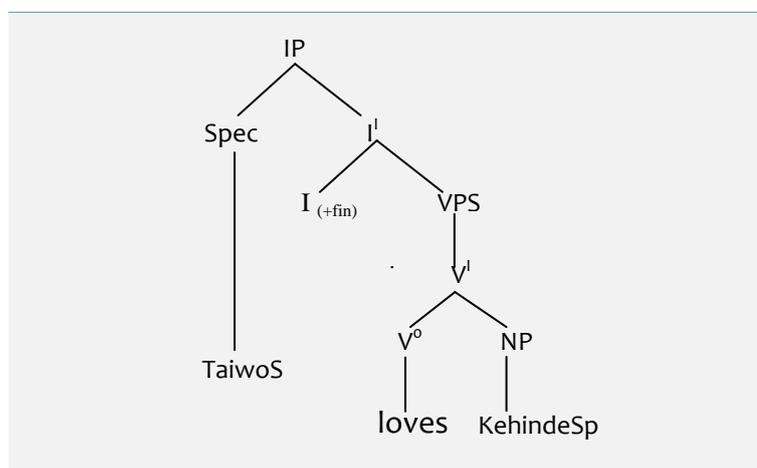
- i) α is a X^0 category
- ii) α c-commands β
- iii) Minimality is respected

Ouhalla (1999: 191)

In this definition, α and β stand for particular categories. Clause (i) requires that α be one of the heads which could be a noun, verb, inflection, preposition etc. Usually, β is an argument or NP. Clause (ii) determines how high up the tree a head may govern. Ouhalla (1999: 189) notes that C-command defines the government domain of a head. Clause (iii) provides the lower limit of government by not allowing the head to govern down into another category other than IP. Hence, clauses (i) and (ii) establish locality constraints on the government relation for each head. This is explained through the following sentences given below:

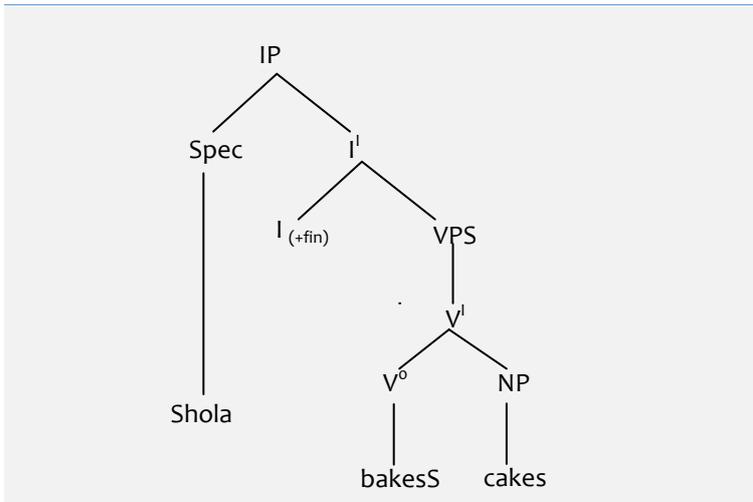
- i) Taiwo loves Kehinde
- ii) Shola bakes cakes

i)



In this sentence, the lexical head *love* governs *Kehinde* while the inflectional head $I_{(+fin)}$ governs *Taiwo*. Thus, government theory deals with how heads govern other elements in the structure of a sentence.

ii)

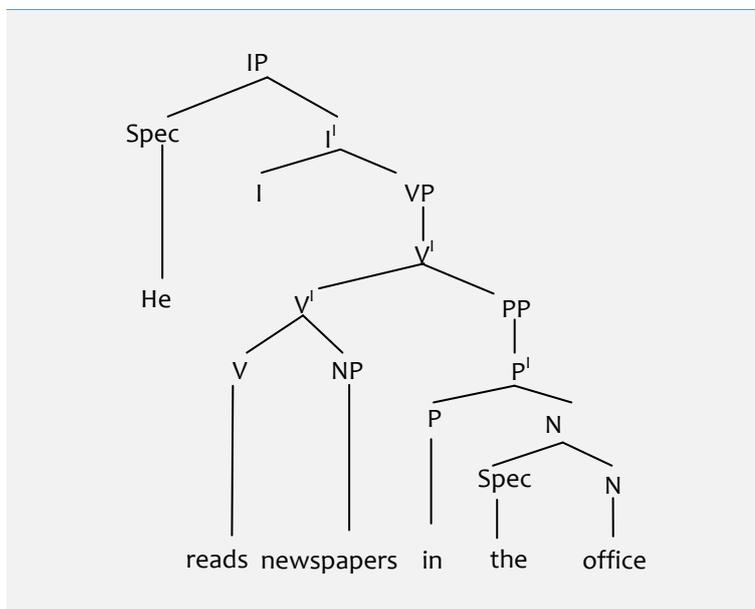


In the tree above, there are two heads that govern: $I_{(+fin)}$ and *V bakes*. The $I_{(+fin)}$ governs its specifier NP *Shola* and the *V bakes* governs its complement NP *cakes*. $I_{(+fin)}$ cannot govern NP *cake* neither can *V bakes* govern the specifier NP *Shola* since they are not in their governing domain or locality. The analysis of these two sentences reveals how syntactic government in a particular structure. Furthermore, still discussing the issue of government, Black (1998:37) explains that:

α governs β iff:

- i. α is a head
- ii. Every XP that dominates α also dominates β
- iii. Every XP (other than IP) that dominates β also dominates α .

This implies that for government to occur, there must be a head (N, V, P, A, $I_{C_{for}}$) and this head must have a relationship with other elements to govern them. This relationship is based on C-command and M-command relations. C-command is based on sisterhood relations a head has with other elements. In this case, A c-commands B if A is a head and A and B are sisters. Haegeman (1994:134) further explains that when X (i.e a head) is equated with the first branching node, A-c-commands B but when X is interpreted as a maximal projection, A m-commands B. Thus, m-command operates higher than c-command in the tree diagram. These two terms can be simply explained in the following example.



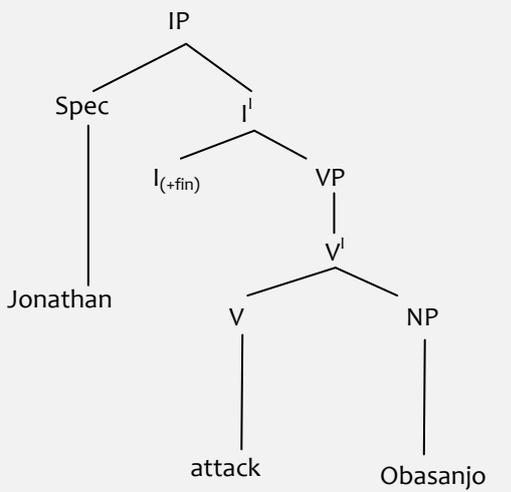
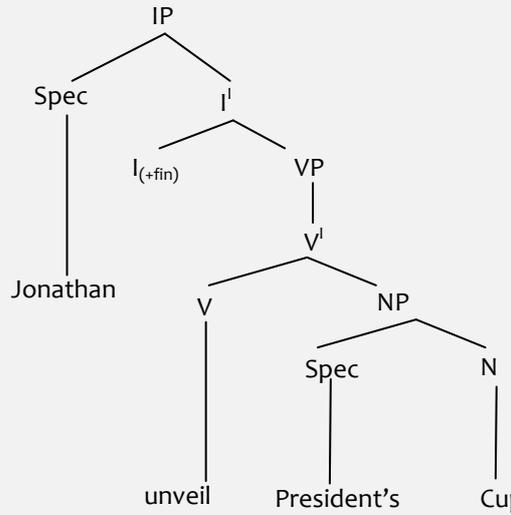
In the above example, the verb 'reads' C-commands the NP 'newspapers' but not PP 'in the office'. However, the verb 'reads' M-commands both NP 'newspapers' and the PP 'in the office'. Essentially, government operates based on these two structural relations, that is, c-command and m-command. First, Government operates by C-command when it is defined in terms of sisterhood. Ouhalla, (1999:189) explains that it is based on the first branching node dominating α (the governor) and β (the governee). Thus, in the above example, the verb 'reads' governs the NP 'newspaper' since they are sisters and both of them are dominated by the first branching node which is the V'. Also, government operates by M-command in terms of maximal projection. This is based on the first maximal projection dominating α (the governor) also dominates β (the governee) (Black, 1998:42, Ouhalla, 1999:194). Thus, in the above example, while the verb 'read' only C-commands the NP 'newspapers', it M-commands both the NP 'newspapers' and the PP "in the office". However, for government to operate by M-command, there must not be any barrier intervening between the head and the element to be governed. Ouhalla (1999) hence, in the above example, the verb 'reads' governs both NP 'newspapers' and PP "the office" but not the NP 'the office'. This is because the NP "the office" is inside another maximal projection (PP *in the office*) and this constitutes a barrier for the verb 'reads' to govern it.

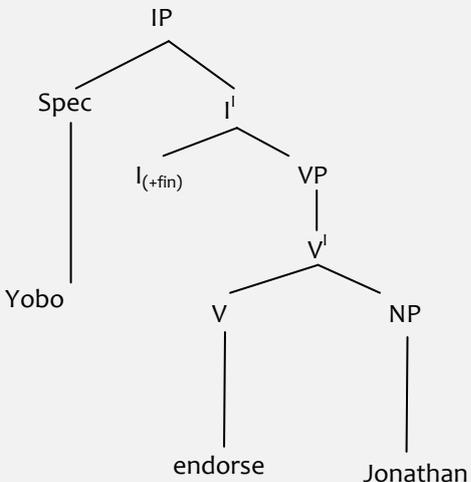
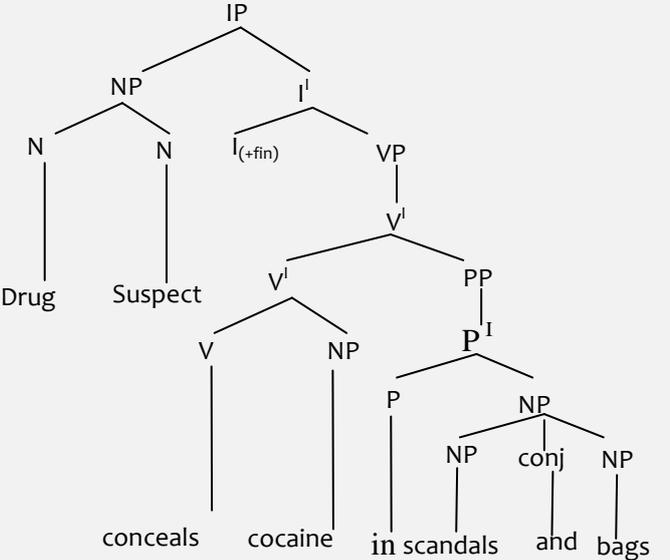
4.0 Syntactic Government in Nigerian newspaper headlines

Haven briefly defined government, this study examines the operation of government in the structure of Nigerian newspaper headlines. This discussion includes the different forms of government such as head government, lexical government, theta-government, and antecedent government operate and how they operate in the structure of Nigerian newspaper headlines.

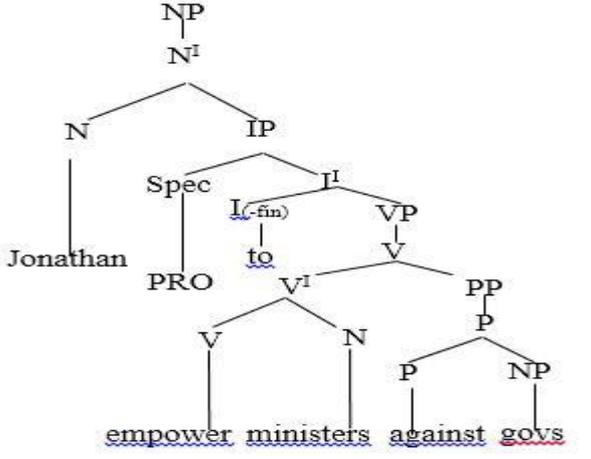
4.1 Head Government in Nigerian newspaper headlines

Head government is a government by a head. Haegenman (1994) claims that 'if X is a head and it governs Y then, X head-governs Y'. Also, Black (1998:37) further explains that only heads denoted by N, V, A, P, I_(+fin) and C_{for} may govern. Thus, in head government, the head is the 'governor' while the governed element is the 'governee'. Head government is examined in the following Nigerian newspaper headlines

1) Jonathan attacks Obasanjo (<i>The Nation</i> , 1/8/2015) (1b)	2) Jonathan unveils President's cup (<i>The Sun</i> , 1/8/2015) (2b)
 <pre> graph TD IP --> Spec IP --> I_prime Spec --- Jonathan I_prime --> I_plus_fin I_prime --> VP I_plus_fin --- I_plus_fin_label[I(+fin)] VP --> V_prime V_prime --> V V_prime --> NP V --- attack NP --- Obasanjo </pre>	 <pre> graph TD IP --> Spec IP --> I_prime Spec --- Jonathan I_prime --> I_plus_fin I_prime --> VP I_plus_fin --- I_plus_fin_label[I(+fin)] VP --> V_prime V_prime --> V V_prime --> NP V --- unveil NP --> Spec NP --> N Spec --- President_s[President's] N --- Cup </pre>

<p>3) Yobo endorses Jonathan (<i>The Punch</i>, 12/20/14)</p>	<p>(4) Drug suspect conceals cocaine in scandals, bags (<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>, 3/5/13) (4b)</p>
	

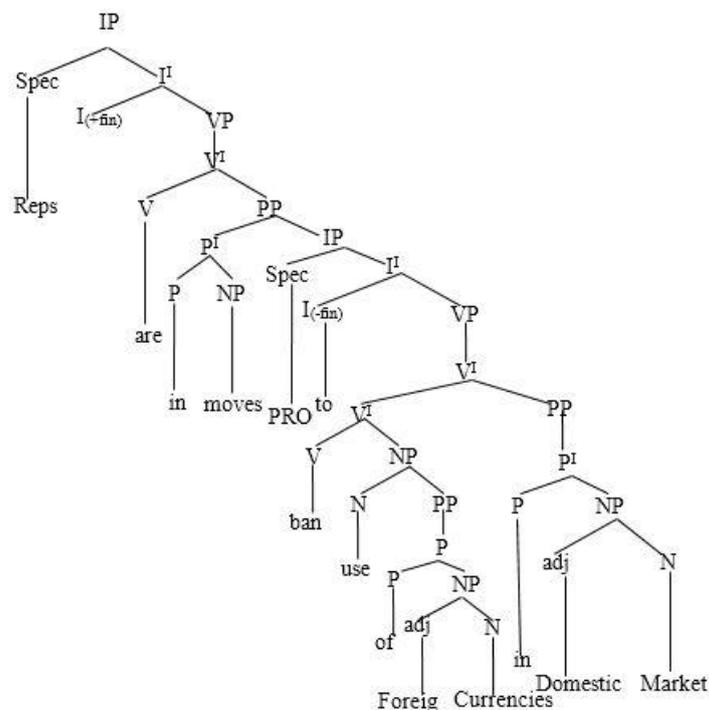
In the headlines given above, head government operates fully. In the first and second example, the subject NPs ‘Jonathan’ are governed by the inflection $I_{(+fin)}$ and the object NPs ‘Obasanjo’, President’s cup’ are governed by the verbs ‘attack’ and ‘unveil’ respectively. Also, in the third example, the NPs ‘Yobo’ and ‘Jonathan’ are governed by the inflection $I_{(+fin)}$ and the verb ‘endorse’. The fourth example has three NPs. The NP ‘Drug suspect’ is governed by the inflection head $I_{(+fin)}$, the NP ‘cocaine’ is governed by the verb ‘conceals’ and the NP ‘scandals and bags’ is governed by the preposition ‘in’. However, there are some headlines with different structures from the ones analyzed above where head government does not operate explicitly at the S-structure but only explicitly at the D-structure. This can be seen in the following headlines.

<p>(5) Jonathan to empower ministers against govs (<i>Punch</i>, 1/8/15) (5b)</p>


In the D-structure of this headline(5), the NPs ‘Jonathan’, ‘ministers’ and ‘govs’ are all governed by heads such as the inflection $I_{(+fin)}$ the verb ‘empower’ and the preposition ‘against’. However, at the S-structure, the NP ‘Jonathan’ seems not to be governed (although governed from the D-structure) because of the elision of the governor ‘is’ in the S- structure. It is important to reiterate, as discussed in

the previous chapter under null categories, that verbs can be null at the S-structure of newspaper headlines. Hence, since verbs are also governors, some NPs may not be overtly governed at the S-structure when they are null but these same NPs are explicitly governed from the D-structure where the verbs are visible. This implies that, in some cases, head government can be invisible that is, not explicit, at the S-structure of Nigerian newspaper headlines.

6) Reps in moves to ban use of foreign currencies in domestic market (*Vanguard*, 2/14/13)
(6b)



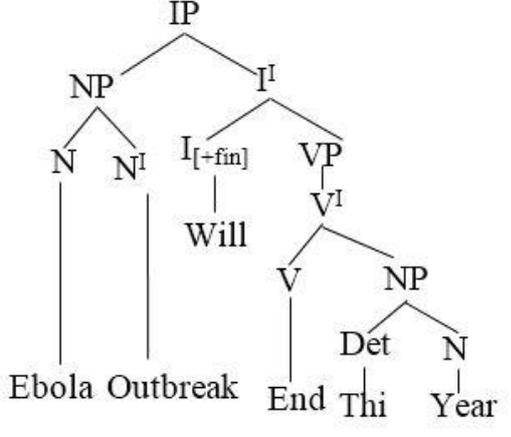
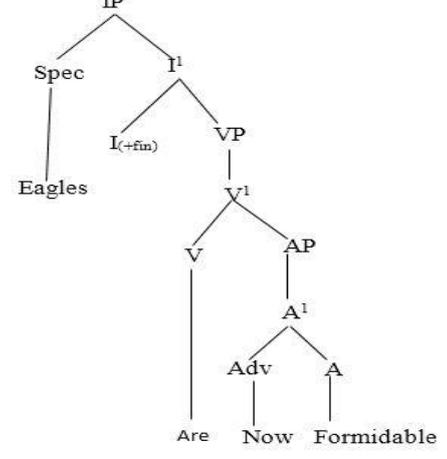
Structurally, the above headline has five overt NPs and a null NP PRO as the subject of the embedded infinite IP. The PRO is not to be governed in agreement with the ²PRO theorem. But, overt NPs should be governed. From the D-structure representation of the example given above, the NPs which are 'Reps', 'moves', 'use', 'foreign currencies', and 'domestic market' are all head-governed by the heads "I_(+fin)" 'in', 'ban', 'of' and 'in' respectively. However, at the S-structure of this headline, there seems to be no explicit governor for the NP 'Reps'. This is because of the elision of the verb 'are' in the S-structure though projected in the D-structure of the above example.

4.2 Theta-government in Nigerian newspaper headlines

Theta-government occurs when a lexical head (i.e. verb) governs an element and assigns a theta role to it. Based on the theta criterion, an argument must be assigned only one theta role and a theta role must be assigned to only one argument (Ouhalla, 1999:164). Hence, theta-government fulfills the ³condition of theta criterion and government. Theta-government is examined in the following newspaper headlines.

² The PRO theorem requires that the PRO (which is an empty category) should not be governed in a structure. See Haegeman, 1994; Ouhalla, 1999.

³ The conditions of theta criterion (θ -criterion) and government are conditions in GB. The θ -criterion holds that a head must be assigned a theta role while government condition requires that a head be governed in a structure. (see Ouhalla, 1999; Black, 1998; Haegeman, 1994; Chomsky, 1981)

<p>(7) Ebola outbreak will end this year <i>(The Nation, 1/2/2015)</i> D-Structure [_{IP} Ebola outbreak _{VP} will end this year] (7b)</p>	<p>8) Eagles now formidable <i>(Nigerian Tribune 1/5/2013)</i> D-Structure [_{IP} Eagles _{VP} are now formidable] (8b)</p>
	

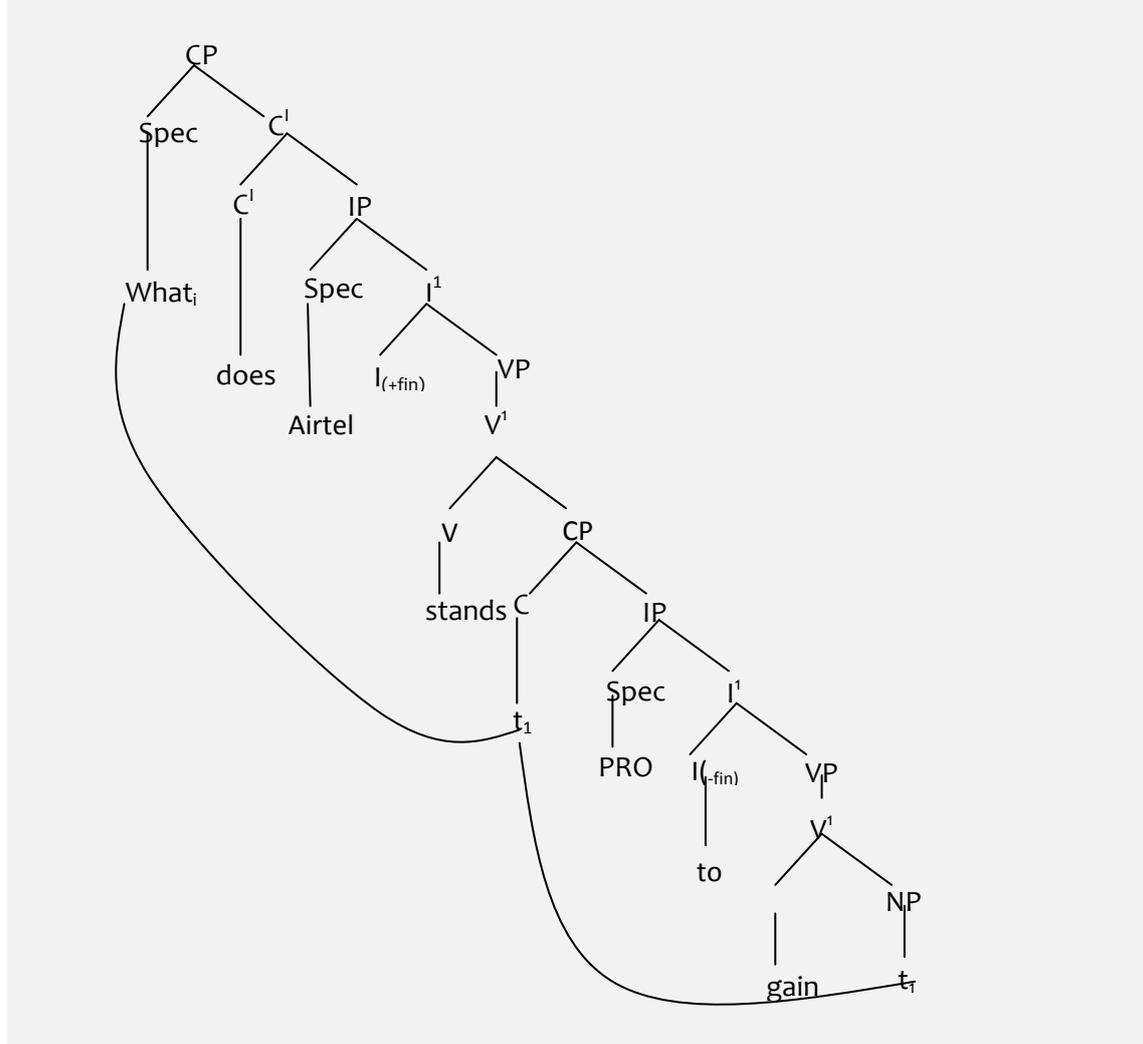
In the headline (7) above, the verb ‘end’ theta-governs the NP ‘this year’. This is possible because both NPs are governed by ‘I_(+fin)’ and ‘end’. Since the verb ‘end’ theta-marks NPs ‘Ebola outbreak’ and ‘this year’, therefore the NPs are theta-governed. However, theta-government may not operate explicitly in the S-structure of some headlines. This can be seen in the headline (8) above.

In this headline (8), the NP ‘Eagles’ is theta governed. This is because of the presence of a X⁰ category such as the verb ‘are’ at the D-structure. The NP ‘Eagles’ is governed by ‘I_(+fin)’ and theta-marked (assigned a theme role). Thus, it is theta-governed. However, at the S-structure, theta government is invisible because the verb ‘are’ is null at this level of analysis. It should be noted that the NP ‘Eagles’ is theta-governed by the verb ‘are’ which though, is invisible at the S-structure is visible at the D-structure. Hence, theta-government operates in Nigerian newspapers headlines but may be invisible sometimes at the S-structure of these headlines.

4.3 Lexical government in Nigerian newspaper headlines

Lexical government is a form of government in which a lexical category (i.e. verb) governs the trace in its object position. Ouhalla (1999:266) claims that traces in the object position are lexically governed by the verb which will also satisfy the Empty Category Principle (ECP). This ECP states that non-pronominal empty categories must be properly governed (Ouhalla, 1999:265). Hence, lexical government applies only to traces in the object position not traces in the subject position since their governor is often a non-lexical category or functional category. Thus, a verb lexically governs a trace in its object position. This can be examined in following headlines.

9a) What does Airtel stand to gain? (*The Sun*, 2/26/13)
 (9b)



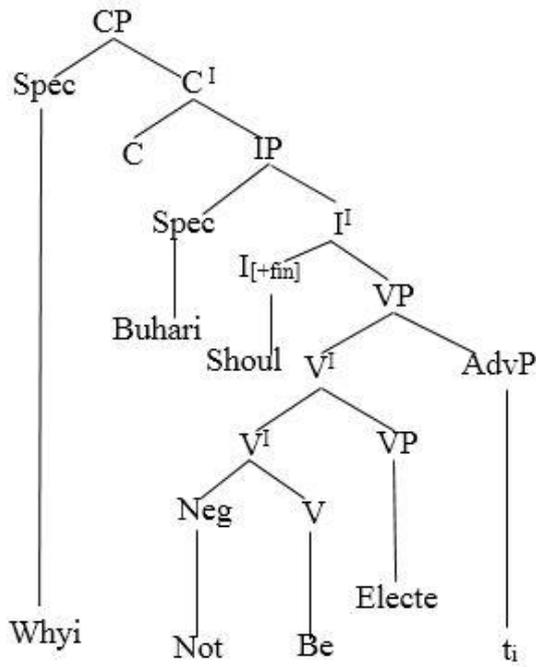
In the above example (9), the element 'what' is moved to the [Spec, CP] position but temporarily lands in the [C, CP] position in agreement with the⁴ subadjacency condition. However, the verb 'gain' lexically governs the trace t_1 of the moved item at its extraction position. Hence, lexical government occurs in this headline. This study therefore notes that lexical government can also occur, although not regular, in Nigerian newspaper headlines.

4.4 Antecedent government in Nigerian newspaper headlines

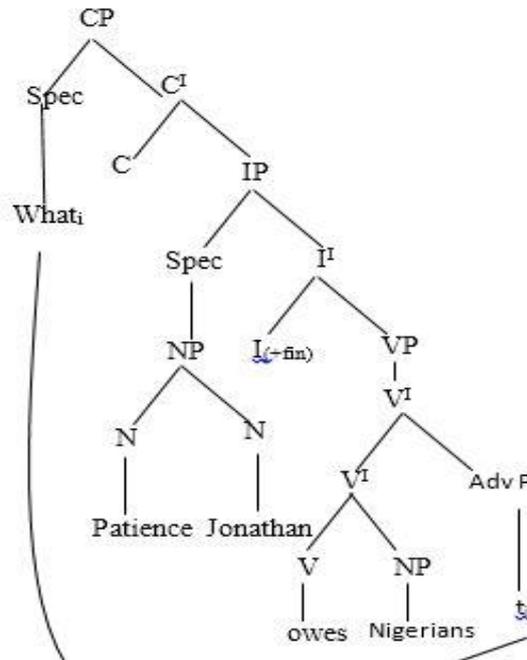
Antecedent government can be defined as a form of government in which a moved item governs its trace. According to Ouhalla (1999: 267), a moved item governs a trace with which it is co-indexed, c-commands the initial trace and there is no barrier intervening between them. Therefore, antecedent government is examined in the following headlines.

⁴ Subadjacency condition holds that a moved item should not cross more than one boundary node at a time and boundary nodes are often IPs. Thus, a moved item lands temporarily in the CP position and then moves again to the landing site in agreement with the subadjacency condition (See Haegeman, 1994; Black, 1998; Ouhalla, 1999)

(10a) Why Buhari should not be elected
 (The Sun, 1/3/15)
 [cp_{why_i} [_{IP} Buhari should not be elected t_i]]
 (10b)



11) What Patience Jonathan owes Nigerians
 (Sahara Reporters, 1/8/15).
 (11b)



In the example (10), the wh–phrase is moved to the [Spec, CP] position and leaves a trace at its previous position. Accordingly, this movement realizes a question at the S-structure. This trace is co-indexed with the moved item which in turn governs the trace. In this case, *why_i* antecedent-governs its trace in the Adv. P. Also, this fulfils the Empty Category Principle (ECP) which requires that traces be properly governed (Ouhalla, 1999: 265).

Also, in this example (11), the element ‘what_i’ is moved to the [Spec, CP] position and leaves a trace in its previous position (Adv.P). Hence, to fulfill the Empty Category Principle (ECP), the moved item ‘what_i’ antecedent-governs its trace indicated as t_i. Thus, antecedent-government can also manifest in Nigerian newspaper headlines. However, it must be noted that this type of government only occurs in the headlines in which A¹ movement has taken place; where an item is moved to the [Spec,CP] position.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the nature of government in Nigerian newspaper headlines. Specifically, different forms of government including head-government, theta-government, lexical-government and antecedent-government have been explored in Nigerian newspaper headlines. First, the paper claims that all these forms of government can operate in Nigerian newspaper headlines. However, head government and theta-government are not always visible at the S-structure of the headlines unlike at D-structure where it is very explicit. This occurs when heads such as verbs which are present at the D-structure are null at the S-structure of the headlines. More predominantly, this occurs in headlines with the structure of small clauses. However, the argument//NPs in such structures are still governed but by a head which is overt in the D-structure.

Also, lexical government and antecedent government operate in headlines when movement has taken place since they both deal with the government of a trace although by different governors (a verb and

a moved item respectively). Thus, they do not occur in simple headlines such as “Ladoja dares Ajimobi”, (*The Sun*, 2/5/13), “Jonathan attacks Obasanjo” (*The Nation* 1/8/15). Essentially, the structural construction of Nigerian newspaper headlines influences the nature of government in the headlines. In the case of small clause headlines, there is implicit government at the S-structure unlike in full clause headlines where government is explicit. The paper therefore avers that Nigerian print media deploy different syntactic structures in the headlines to convey messages to the audience.

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