

INALIENABLE POSSESSION IN IGBO

LARRY M. HYMAN, DANNY KEITH ALFORD AND
ELIZABETH AKPATI

Numerous languages of the world reserve a particular subset of syntactic characteristics for behaviour that has been traditionally termed 'inalienable possession'. Perhaps the best known instance of this occurs in French, where we find

- (1) *il m'a cassé le bras*
'he broke my arm'

but not

- (2) **il m'a cassé le bâton*
'he broke my stick'

An extensive inquiry into the nature of possession in French will reveal that the syntactic form of (1) obtains for only a very restricted minority of French nominals, and that instead the normal pattern to be expected is exemplified by

- (3) *il a cassé mon bâton*
'he broke my stick'

Corresponding to the distinction between 1 and 3 we search hard in English for the following:

- (4) he looked me straight in the eye

which is a remnant form (certainly not productive) for

- (5) he looked straight into my eye

In this case the choice is optional, although the distinction between alienable and inalienable possession has been nearly lost in English, syntactically. However, underlying the syntactic behaviour of French, we might wish to propose a universal semantic dichotomy of RELATIONAL concepts (e.g. body parts and perhaps directionals and kinship terms) which exist only in relation to or by possession of another concept (a 'hand' always belongs—or has belonged—to someone, while 'left' is always left OF something), and NON-RELATIONAL concepts (most other nouns) which need not be so conceived. The first group (of nominals) refers to what we are terming 'inalienable possession', the second to 'alienable' or 'non-inalienable' possession.

The first basic source of evidence for such a universal is the syntactic¹ manifestation of this dichotomy in many non-related languages: in Europe the distinction is particularly strong in French, German and Swedish. In West Africa, the source of information for this paper, traces can be as easily ascertained as in French. Our attention will be focused on the wide variety of phenomena in Igbo owing their existence to this basic semanto-

¹ In this paper we are concerned only with SYNTACTIC manifestations of inalienable possession. In many languages (such as the Mande languages and the Mayan languages) inalienable possession is expressed at the MORPHOLOGICAL level, since the independent form of each inalienable noun is always cited with a possessor and never occurs without one. (We owe this observation to William E. Welmers.)

syntactic cleavage in nouns.² For example, corresponding to 1 and 3 in French we find, respectively,³

- (6) ϕ gbàjiri m áka
 he broke to me arm
 'he broke my arm'

- (7) ϕ gbàjiri ósisi m
 he broke stick my
 'he broke my stick'

It is the first case (in which we shall mark the noun object with the feature specification [+INALIEN]) that is the 'exception'. In certain circumstances to be elaborated below, a noun with the feature specification [+INALIEN] triggers an operation that creates a surface INDIRECT OBJECT. A related phenomenon we observe is that, in informal terms, when the referent of the possessor of a noun marked [+INALIEN] is identical to the referent of the subject, the possessor noun-phrase is DELETED (instead of being transformed into an indirect object) as we see from

- (8) ϕ gbàjiri áka
 he broke arm
 'he broke his (own) arm'

which corresponds to the French sentence

- (9) levez la main!
 'raise your hand'

In fact, we observe that (6) and (8) represent two general tendencies in those languages in which inalienable possession is marked syntactically: (1) a possessor of a noun marked [+INALIEN] is (either optionally or obligatorily) deleted when reference to that possessor has been made in the same sentence (most frequently in the subject), and (2) a possessor of a noun marked [+INALIEN] is incorporated as near to the verb of the sentence as possible (normally as indirect object) when the referent of the subject is not the same as the referent of the possessive, and also when the verb is an action (i.e. non-stative) verb. Both of these general tendencies that we note are subject to further refinement. The claim being made here is that these tendencies betray a conceptual distinction basic to all mankind, and that this distinction between 'inalienable' and 'alienable' (or perhaps more satisfactorily, between 'relational' and 'non-relational') will tend to manifest itself (as it indeed has done) among the world's languages.

Most of our discussion will centre around 'body parts', a subset of those relational notions inalienably possessed, since this subgroup has proven to be the most manageable.

² We shall be concerned with only those Igbo dialects that make a clear-cut distinction between inalienable and alienable nouns. Some dialects have apparently lost the distinction and many Igbo's will differ with what we shall have to say. However, a comparative study of Igbo inalienable possession was not our aim here and we shall ignore dialect differences as much as possible.

³ Standard Igbo orthography is used in this study. Thus the APPROXIMATE phonetic equivalents for Igbo vowels are:

i = [i]	u = [u]	j = [e]	ψ = [ʊ]
e = [ɛ]	o = [o]	a = [a]	φ = [ɔ]

The tonal orthography adopted is that developed by William E. Welmers. Two tones, á=high and à=low, are recognized as well as a 'down-step'. Each unmarked syllable carries the same tone as the preceding syllable and each acute accent (´) following another acute accent represents a down-step.

Extending the notion of inalienable possession we shall see that other 'relational' nouns in Igbo fall into this domain. Our discussion will be devoted to an in-depth look into the syntactic processes of inalienable possession in Igbo. Each of the first four sections will deal with a single syntactic operation dependent upon this dichotomy, while the fifth section will conclude our study with some additional considerations.

1. IDENTICAL POSSESSOR DELETION

This rule is presented first both because of its basic simplicity and also because it most tangibly gives us a first understanding of Igbo inalienable possession (rule ordering will be discussed below). It has been assumed that all nouns specified [+INALIEN] MUST be semantically (i.e. in the deep structure) possessed. That we find sentences such as (8) should not be alarming, since although we observe no overt syntactic possessor, *áka* is still semantically possessed by the subject and the possessive pronoun *yá* is recoverable as a result of the inalienable nature of *áka*. The argument is that underlying sentence 8 is

- (10) **ǝ gbàjiri áka yá*
 he broke arm his (own)
 'he broke his arm'

((10) itself is grammatical only if taken to mean 'he broke HIS arm', with the same ambiguity as in English. See the emphasis rule in section 3 below). This identical possessor deletion rule derives (8) by deleting the superfluous pronoun *yá*. What this rule does, in informal terms, is to delete a possessive (pronoun) when its referent is identical to some other referent in the sentence. This second referent most commonly (though not always) appears in subject position. Thus we have

- (11) **ǝ sàra áka yá* →
 he washed hands his (own)
 he washed hands his (own)
 ǝ sàra áka
 'he washed his hands'

while we do not derive

- (13) *ǝ sàra ǝgbǝ yá* →
 he washed car his (own)
 he washed car his (own)
 **ǝ sàra ǝgbǝ*
 'he washed his car'

since *ǝgbǝ* 'vehicule, car' is marked [−INALIEN]. (Note that (14) is a grammatical sentence, although it means 'he washed the car', where the car belongs to anyone or no one, but is not obligatorily possessed by the subject as in the case of *áka* 'hand, arm' in (12).)

Although the possessive pronoun most frequently modifies the direct object, it needn't be so restricted. In (16) *yá* 'his' has been deleted from what would traditionally be termed 'object of the preposition':

- (15) **ó tìnyere íhe n' ǝnǝ yá* →
 he put thing in mouth his (own)
 he put thing in mouth his (own)
 ó tìnyere íhe n' ǝnǝ
 'he put something in his mouth'

In fact, although much rarer, the subject may lack such a possessor when there is some mention of the same referent elsewhere in the sentence. (18) is representative of this,

where the verbal expression *írú + ízìzì* means 'to be asleep' as in idiomatic English 'my foot has gone to sleep':

(17) **úkwù m̀ rùru m̀ ízìzì* →
 foot my V me N

(18) *úkwù rùru m̀ ízìzì*
 'my foot has gone to sleep'

Justification for our underlying forms is obtained from (19),⁴ where the subject noun *ónya* 'sore' functions as [−INALIEN] and the verbal expression *írú + ízìzì* (here used in the present tense) means, in idiomatic English, 'to give the creeps to':

(19) *ónya yá nà erú yá ízìzì*
 sore his V him N
 'his sore gives him the creeps'

Here it is not permitted for us to delete the possessive pronoun *yá* since in

(20) *ónya nà erú yá ízìzì*
 sore(s) V him N
 'sores give him the creeps'

ónya is conceived of in its generic sense and there is in fact no possessor.⁵

Finally, one peculiar restriction on the operation of this rule should be noted. When there is a sentence benefactive, the deletion rule cannot apply. Therefore

(21) *ó sàara m̀ áka yá*
 he washed for me hand his
 'he washed his hands for me'

does not become

(22) **ó sàara m̀ áka*

which might be expected. Instead, such a sentence is anomalous in that *áka* is conceived as [−INALIEN] by the hearer, and (22) would mean 'he washed the hand for me' parallel to

(23) *ó sàara m̀ úgbọ̀*
 he washed for me car
 'he washed the car for me'

⁴ Further justification for the underlying form (17) is available from the existence of

(a) *ó b̀ù úkwù m̀ rùru m̀ ízìzì*
 it is foot my V me N
 'it is MY foot that has gone to sleep'

though we do not obtain

(b) **ó b̀ù úkwù m̀ rùru ízìzì*
 it is foot my V N
 'it is MY foot that has gone to sleep'

If (b) were obtainable as a grammatical sentence, then the underlying form of (18) would be derivable from the underlying form

(c) **úkwù m̀ rùru ízìzì*
 foot my V N
 'my foot has gone to sleep'

by means of the switch rule to be discussed in the next section.

⁵ Alternatively we might wish to claim that there is a semantically present, though syntactically deleted, 'of people' and that the underlying form would be something like 'sores of people (or of people and animals) give him the creeps'.

where *úgbọ* is not explicitly possessed by anyone and can, in fact, belong to someone other than the subject. It is explicitly possessed by the subject in

- (24) *ọ sàara m úgbọ yá*
 he washed for me car his
 'he washed his car for me'

(21) and (24) have the same surface structure, since the syntactic distinction between [+INALIEN] and [-INALIEN] breaks down after a benefactive.⁶ No thoroughly convincing explanation for why the deletion rule should break down after a benefactive has been advanced. The only plausible explanation that immediately comes to mind is that since the referent that conditions the deletion can appear in a variety of positions in the sentence, a sentence such as (22) which had undergone the deletion rule would be ambiguous, since we could not recover the deleted pronoun, as shown in the two possible would-be underlying forms: (21), where the referent of the possessive pronoun agrees with the referent of the subject, or

- (25) *ọ sàara m áka m*
 he washed for me hand my
 'he washed my hands for me'

where the referent of the possessive pronoun *m* is identical with the referent of the benefactive object *m*. Thus, this argument would claim, the language spared itself this ambiguity by disallowing the deletion of an inalienable possessor after a benefactive.

2. POSSESSOR SWITCH

Until now we have been considering situations where the nouns marked [+INALIEN] are possessed by a nominal identical in referent to some other nominal in the same sentence, most often the subject. Let us now look at related sentences where the two referents are NOT identical. Corresponding to (12) and (14) we find (27) and (28):

- (26) **ọ sàara áka m →*
 he washed hand my

⁶ Note that the benefactive is formed by lengthening the vowel of the verb stem. In some dialects the distinction between *sàara* 'washed' and *sàara* 'washed for (someone)' has been lost and we find only one form *sàara* serving both functions. In such a case, and in accordance with the next rule to be discussed, the following sentence is ambiguous:

- (d) *ọ gbàjiri ya mbọ*
 (i) he broke to it claw
 (ii) he broke for him claw

The interpretation of (i) would be 'he broke its claw' (attached), while the interpretation of (ii) would be 'he broke the claw for him' (detached). The word *mbọ* 'claw, fingernails' is normally [+INALIEN], but can be [-INALIEN] if (as in the second gloss) the claw has been detached from the animal. (In this case the 'claw' would be non-inalienable only syntactically, while semantically it would still have to belong to something.) In this paper we are interested in the first possibility and mention this ambiguity in certain dialects only to avoid possible confusion. We shall ignore this possible ambiguity and record 'benefactive' as a lengthened vowel in the verb phrase, as in

- (e) *ọ gbàjiiri ya mbọ*
 he broke for him claw
 'he broke the claw for him'

- (27) ọ sàra m áka
he washed to me hand
'he washed my hand(s)'

- (28) ọ sàra ụgbọ m
he washed car my
'he washed my car'

though NOT:

- (29) *ọ sàra m ụgbọ
he washed to me car
'he washed my car'

(See, however, footnote 6.) What this rule does, again informally, is transform (and permute) the postnominal possessive NP (noun or pronoun, as we shall see) into an indirect object immediately following the verb. The possessed nominal is [+INALIEN] and the referent of the possessive is not duplicated elsewhere in the sentence. In other words, when there is no second identical referent then deletion of the possessive is not obtained, but instead it is permuted. This means that there can be a distinct second referent as in (26) or simply no other possessive referent present at all, as in (40) below.

There is one further important constraint on the structural description of both the deletion and the switch rules. Note that

- (30) ọ hụrụ áka yá
he saw hand his (own)

does not transform into

- (31) *ọ hụrụ áka
'he saw his hand'

just as

- (32) ọ nùrụ ólu yá
he heard voice his (own)

does not transform into

- (33) *ọ nùrụ ólu
'he heard his voice'

Also,

- (34) ọ hụrụ áka m
he saw hand my

does not transform into

- (35) *ọ hụrụ m áka
he saw to me hand
'he saw my hand'

and

- (36) ọ nùrụ ólu m
he heard voice my

does not transform into

- (37) *ọ nùrụ m ólu
he heard to me voice
'he heard my voice'

Instead (30), (32), (34) and (36) are the grammatical forms, since the verbs [hú 'to see' and [nú 'to hear' are STATIVE.⁷ So in the structural description of the deletion and shift rules we require that the verb be specified as an 'action' (i.e. non-stative) verb.

Once again, the rule is not limited to object possessors. As in the case of the deletion rule, we find that the possessives can be on an object of the preposition:

- (38) *ó tìnyere íhe n' ɔnú ya →
 he₁ put thing in mouth his₂
 (39) ó tìnyere ya íhe n' ɔnú
 he₁ put to him₂ thing in mouth
 'he put something in his mouth'

Also, as in the case of the deletion rule, the possessive may occur on the subject of the sentence, although this is apparently not a productive process, but rather (we believe) represents a former state of the language which has left traces behind in a number of frozen expressions. Compare (41) and (42):

- (40) *íke m ágwùla →
 strength my is all gone
 (41) íke ágwùla m
 strength is all gone to me
 'I'm tired'
 (42) égo m ágwùla
 money my is all gone
 'my money is all gone'

(42) does not undergo the switch rule to yield

- (43) *égo ágwùla m

since égo 'money' is [-INALIEN] while íke 'strength' is [+INALIEN]. 42 is the grammatical form for non-inalienables. Similarly, we have

- (44) *ísi m wàra →
 head my split
 (45) ísi wàra m
 head split to me
 'I had a headache'

but the following:

- (46) ódó m wàra
 mortar my split
 'my mortar split'

which does not undergo the shift rule to become

- (47) *ódó wàra m

⁷ Significantly, we find the same constraint in French, since we do not obtain

- (f) *il s'est entendu la voix
 'he heard his (own) voice'
 (g) *il m'a entendu la voix
 'he heard my voice'

but instead, the non-inalienable forms

- (h) il a entendu sa voix
 (i) il a entendu ma voix

In both (41) and (45) the expressions 'I'm tired' and 'I had a headache' are highly idiomatic. It is hard to make them productive, in either the starred or non-starred form, since there are not many [+INALIEN] things that, like *íke*, can be 'all gone to someone', just as there are not many parts of the body that can 'split to someone' as can the head. (For pain located elsewhere in the body, Igbo utilizes different verbal expressions.)

Finally, the archaic nature of the shifted cases is seen in the two sentences:

- (48) *úkwù m̀ sìrì íke n' àla*⁸
 foot my V strength on ground
 'my foot is strong on the ground'
 (49) *úkwù sìrì m̀ íke n' àla*
 foot V to me strength on ground
 'my feet are firmly planted on the ground'

(49) is clearly idiomatic, while the form of (48) is the productive one:

- (50) *áka m̀ sìrì íke*
 hand my V strength
 'my hand is strong'

Not all of the idiomatic expressions tied up with the shift rule involve shifting the possessor from subject position. (51) has two glosses:

- (51) *ó m̀cìrì m̀ ónù*
 he closed to me mouth
 'he closed my mouth (physically)' (= literal sense)
 'he interrupted me' (= idiomatic sense)

Curiously, when emphasis (the next rule) applies to idiomatic expressions such as (51) we get

- (52) *ó m̀cìrì ónù m̀*
 he closed mouth my

which can only mean 'he physically closed MY mouth' and NOT 'he interrupted ME' as we might have expected. (That (52) is identical to the form underlying (51) will be dismissed as coincidental.) Returning to (41), notice what happens when we violate the specification of [+INALIEN] as in

- (53) *íke m̀ ágwùla*

The result is not an emphasis of the possessor *m̀*. There is instead some question of whether or not we should consider (53) ungrammatical or simply semantically anomalous. It is clear that an Igbo can assign a meaning to (53) that will render the form grammatical, and our informant (Miss Akpati) assigns to it the following gloss:

- 'my physical reservoir of strength that I have stored up outside of me has been used up'

Thus *íke*, in this case, has been interpreted as [−INALIEN]. The problem is that people don't have physical reservoirs of stored up strength, so we conclude that the violation in (53) is SEMANTIC.

Turning to another issue, it was stated (p. 90) that the possessor could be either a pronoun or a noun. Thus far we have seen only the first case. However, corresponding to (26) and (27) are

⁸ The verbal expression *ísí + íke* means 'to be strong' though the verbal element *ísí* has no related meaning of its own, and is found only in conjunction with *íke* 'strength'.

(54) * ϕ sàra áka η watàkírj $\rightarrow$

he washed hand child

(55) ϕ sàra η watàkírj aka

he washed to child hand

'he washed the child's hand(s)'

Finally, DIRECTIONALS are also [+INALIEN] in Igbo and are therefore subject to the shift rule (although we have had semantic difficulties isolating cases of deletion under the first rule). Most Igbo directionals are found as body parts as well. Some common ones are: íhu 'face, front', àzú 'back, behind', and élú 'sky, top, above'. We shall use élú in this exemplification, since our desire is to demonstrate that the feature value [+INALIEN] encompasses more than the semantically defined class of body parts. These 'directionals' have a 'concrete' (e.g. 'front', 'back', 'top') and an 'abstract' (e.g. 'in front of', 'behind', and 'above') sense. In their concrete sense the shift rule is inapplicable, since we get

(56) ϕ sàra élú ha

he washed top their

'he washed the top of them'

but not

(57) * ϕ sàra ha élú

he washed to them top

We offer no explanation for this, since it seems that a top is a top only in relation to something and should therefore be expected to conform to the behaviour of other inalienables. In their abstract sense, however, we note two differences. First, the preposition nà 'at, to' is used in conjunction with 'face', 'back' and 'top':

nà + íhu $\rightarrow$ n'íhu 'in front of'

nà + àzú $\rightarrow$ n'àzú 'in back of, behind'

nà + élú $\rightarrow$ n'élú 'on top of, above'

And second, these prepositionals are now definitely [+INALIEN], since the switch rule applies when they are used in conjunction with non-stative verbs. This is seen in (59), which is derived from (58):

(58) * ϕ d ϕ kwàsiri óce n' élú ya $\rightarrow$

he put chair on top its

(59) ϕ d ϕ kwàsiri ya óce n' élú

he put to it chair on top

'he put the chair on top of it'

3. EMPHASIS

Some of the starred underlying forms of sections 1 and 2 are actually grammatical Igbo sentences. They differ, however, from the surface forms in exhibiting an extra 'emphasis' on the possessor, which is normally subject to rules 1 and 2. Thus, if we wish to emphasize the owner of the 'hands' in (12), we see the derivation

(60) ϕ sàra áka yá + EMPH $\rightarrow$

he washed hands his (own)

(61) ϕ sàra áka yá

he washed hands his

'he washed HIS (own) hands'

Actually, the surface form (61) is ambiguously HIS (his own) or HIS (another person's), although since we have marked the second referent with the word 'own' (60) is the underlying form only for the first interpretation. Underlying the second interpretation is

- (62) ϕ sàra áka yá + EMPH
he₁ washed hands his₂

which differs from (60) only in that the referent of yá is specified as distinct from that of ϕ . (There is, however, some disagreement among our informants. Some claim that only the first interpretation is possible and that the second, which we reproduce as

- (63) ϕ sàra áka m
he washed hands my
'he washed MY hands'

to make clear that the hands are not possessed by the subject, makes áka [-INALIEN]. Still others actually prefer (63) to (27) (though they accept both forms). We were unable to resolve these differences and assume that they are attributable to the sharply differing dialects of Igbo.)

It thus appears that this general mechanism of emphasizing inalienables says: in the presence of EMPH IGNORE rules 1 and 2. Thus (61) is derived from (60) by replacing the EMPH trigger with $\emptyset$. The deletion rule is hence inapplicable as a result of the presence of EMPH. Similarly, underlying (63) we see

- (64) ϕ sàra áka m + EMPH

which yields (63) by replacing the EMPH with $\emptyset$.

The significance of the foregoing is that so-called 'emphasis' is realized differently according to the inalienable or non-inalienable nature of the noun in question. Thus,

- (65) ϕ sàra úgbọ yá + EMPH
he washed car his

is realized as

- (66) ϕ sàra úgbọ ñke yá
he washed car that of his
'he washed HIS car'

where the word ñke 'thing, that of' is inserted between the noun and its possessor to emphasize the ownership of that noun. ((66) is ambiguous in the same way that (61) is.) Corresponding to (63) is

- (67) ϕ sàra úgbọ ñke m
he washed car that of mine
'he washed MY car'

That (66) and (67) correspond to (61) and (63), respectively, is ascertained from the non-occurrence of

- (68) * ϕ sàra áka ñke yá
he washed hand that of his (own)
'he washed HIS (own) hands'
(69) * ϕ sàra áka ñke m
he washed hand that of mine
'he washed MY hands'

where an attempt is made to insert an *ɲke* into sentences (61) and (63).⁹ In both of these cases the Igbo speaker identifies *áka* as [+INALIEN] (i.e. detached from the body) and both are unacceptable for this reason. The general emphasis rule is then that inalienables are emphasized by ignoring rules 1 and 2 (i.e. by permitting their surface manifestations to be identical to non-emphasized non-inalienables) and non-inalienables are emphasized by the insertion of *ɲke*. Furthermore, *ɲke* cannot be used with inalienables (see, however, footnote 9). The non-use of *ɲke* extends beyond the semantic class of body parts as witnessed in

- (70) **ɔ̌ sàra élú ɲke há*
 he washed top that of them
 'he washed the top of THEM'

Similarly, we do not find

- (71) **ɔ̌ dɔ̌kwàsiri óce n' élú ɲke há*
 he put chair on top that of them
 'he put the chair on top of THEM'

For directionals there is apparently no way to obtain such an emphasis. It is clear from these examples that *ɲke* can never be used with a noun marked [+INALIEN]. It can apparently (subject to further investigation) always be used with nouns marked [−INALIEN], although there is some hesitation in certain cases, for example with *úcé* 'thought':

- (72) (?) *úcé ɲke m̃ d̃i ícè*
 thought that of my is different
 'MY thought is different'

Here the *ɲke* form is acceptable, though the non-*ɲke* form is preferred.¹⁰

4. CONTRAST

'Contrast' is the term we are using for emphasis of the subject of a sentence. Thus

- (73) *ɔ̌ gbàjiri áka*
 he broke arm
 'he broke his (own) arm'

is the NON-contrasted form, while

⁹ Some Igbo speakers apparently accept forms such as (68 and 69). These would appear to be those who have either no or a very weak syntactic distinction between sentences with [+INALIEN] nouns and those with [−INALIEN] nouns.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that *ɲke* can serve to disambiguate [+INALIEN] and [−INALIEN] lexical meanings of the same word, for instance, *ɔ̌nɔ̌* 'mouth' [+INALIEN] and *ɔ̌nɔ̌* 'hole' [−INALIEN], as in (k). The sentence

- (j) *ó mèciri ɔ̌nɔ̌ ya*
 he closed {mouth} his/its
 {hole}

is ambiguous: it can mean 'he closed HIS mouth' or else 'he closed its (say, the mouse's) hole', whereas

- (k) *ó mèciri ɔ̌nɔ̌ ɲke yá*
 he closed hole that of its

is unambiguously: 'he closed ITS hole'.

- (74) ϕ gbàjiri oṅwé yá aka
 he broke self his arm
 'he broke his arm HIMSELF'

is the corresponding CONTRASTED form. Underlying (74) is

- (75) ϕ gbàjiri áka yá + CONTR

where the yá will have to be deleted (since it agrees in referent with the subject) and the CONTR trigger will have to be replaced by òṅwé yá 'himself', which will then be permuted into the correct place in the sentence. As it turns out, the CONTR trigger does not have to be permuted at all in most cases. With a non-inalienable noun, ósisì 'stick', we obtain the following derivation:

- (76) ϕ gbàjiri ósisì (yá) + CONTR →
 he broke stick his
 (77) ϕ gbàjiri ósisì (yá) n' òṅwé yá
 he broke stick his 'by' self his
 'he broke (his) stick HIMSELF'

Not only does the CONTR trigger maintain its post-sentential position, but also we find òṅwé 'self' preceded by nà (n'): whenever CONTR is in this position, it requires nà. Unfortunately, the distinction is not as simple as inalienable/non-inalienable, for we find

- (78) ϕ gbàjiri m áka n' òṅwé yá
 he broke to me arm 'by' self his
 'he broke my arm HIMSELF'

We account for these facts in the following way: post-sentential n'òṅwé + PRON is obtained, except when (1) the object noun is [+INALIEN], and (2) the referent of its possessor is identical to the referent of the subject (or agent). When these two exceptional conditions are met, we find the form òṅwé + PRON in its permuted position. This would account for the non-occurrence of

- (79) * ϕ gbàjiri oṅwé yá osisi (yá)
 he broke self his stick his
 'he broke (his) stick HIMSELF'

since the first condition is not met. Notice also that

- (80) (?) ϕ gbàjiri áka n' òṅwé yá
 he broke arm 'by' self his
 'he broke the arm HIMSELF'

is semantically anomalous, since áka would be considered in such a case to be [−INALIEN].¹¹

Final support for this solution is obtained from the following: sentences (with inalienables) that have undergone both emphasis and contrast are extremely cumbersome and redundant. Thus, although

¹¹ Of course we can argue that (79) is also semantically anomalous, since it results from the reverse confusion: a [−INALIEN] noun is taken to be [+INALIEN]. It is evidently part of man's conceptual framework that it is harder to conceive of a normally non-inalienable (i.e. detached, a non-body part in this case) as inalienable (a body part), than it is to conceive of an inalienable as non-inalienable.

- (81) (?) ϕ gbàjiri oṅwé yá aka yá
 he broke self his arm his
 'he broke HIS (own) arm HIMSELF'

derived from

- (82) ϕ gbàjiri áka yá + EMPH + CONTR

is grammatical, one should not expect to ever hear it. It is significant, however, that (81) would be the surface realization of (82), and NOT

- (83) * ϕ gbàjiri áka yá n' òṅwé yá
 he broke arm his 'by' self his

which would classify áka as [–INALIEN] according to our informants. The two conditions on CONTR-permutation are therefore upheld, as we conclude from (81) that the application or non-application of the deletion rule is irrelevant to the formulation of the contrast rule.

5. ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS IN INALIENABLE POSSESSION

The purpose of this section is to discuss briefly four additional issues that have arisen in our study of inalienable possession in Igbo: rule ordering, compounds, 'double objects' and, finally, feature violations.

Given the current inadequate state of linguistic knowledge, we are hesitant to spell out formally the four rules we have made reference to. However, a few words can be said about their respective ordering. A lot will depend upon the exact form of the individual rules, since no strong arguments independent of such considerations can, as far as we know, be advanced in support of any ordering. For instance, we have assumed that the deletion and switch rules can apply ONLY in the absence of the EMPH trigger. Therefore we do not want to spell out EMPH until these rules have had a chance to apply. Note, however, that we could have chosen a number of possible means of describing the effects of rules 1 and 2, many of which would have necessitated a change in the rule ordering. Also, the placement of the contrast rule does not, at this time, appear to be crucial. We present these rules hoping that the order of their presentation will be indicative of what little we DO know, but acknowledging the weakness of our position.

Our discussion of compounds will centre around *mbọ́ aká* 'fingernails' (literally: claws of hand), *ọ́ryà ézé* 'tooth trouble' (literally: illness of the teeth), *ákpù aká* 'elbow' (literally: point of arm) and *ḡkpjsj aká* 'fingers' (literally: little sticks of the hand). The first does not seem to present any problems:

- (84) ϕ bère mbọ́ aká
 he cut fingernails
 'he cut his (own) fingernails'

has undergone the deletion rule, while in

- (85) ϕ bère m mbọ́ aká
 he cut to me fingernails
 'he cut my fingernails'

we find that the switch rule has applied. In

- (86) ϕ bère mbọ́ aká ya
 he cut fingernails his (own)
 'he cut HIS fingernails'

we find the expected emphasis of (84). (We shall not discuss the contrast rule any further, since it operates as expected.) The other compounds are more interesting and troublesome, however. The compound *ǫryà ézé* is interesting because of

- (87) *ǫ gwǫǫrǫ m ǫryà ézé*
 he cured for me tooth trouble
 'he cured the tooth trouble for me'

Here it would appear that *éze* 'tooth, teeth' appears in this compound without a possessor. In accordance with our suggestion in footnote 5, we might wish to claim that in the semantic representation we must have something like 'people's tooth trouble' or 'the illness of people's teeth'. However, note

- (88) *ǫ gwǫǫrǫ m ǫryà ézé m*
 he cured for me tooth trouble my

which means 'he cured my unique tooth trouble' or, alternatively, 'he cured the illness of MY tooth/teeth'. Either we are forced to recognize this second gloss (which in effect destroys the compound and makes of it two nouns in a genitive construction) or else we must recognize two possessors of the compound: 'people's' and 'my', as if the gloss should be: 'he cured my people's tooth illness' or 'he cured my illness of people's teeth'. Future investigators may have to recognize double genitives, and it is interesting to note that some English speakers accept

- (89) he wanted to borrow my book of yours

while everyone should accept

- (90) the dog chewed his bone

where the 'his' is quite different from the 'his' in

- (91) the man broke his leg

Notice how double genitives in English are most commonly handled by compounds:

- (92) the man ate up his chicken wings¹²

The most interesting problem posed by a compound in Igbo is found with *ákpù áká*, or *ǫkpìsj aká*. In both cases the head of the construction (*ákpù* and *ǫkpìsj*) are [— INALIEN] and this apparently prevents the deletion rule from taking affect:

- (93) *ǫ sàra ákpù áká ya*
 he washed elbow his
 'he washed his elbow'

- BUT: (94) **ǫ sàra ákpù áká*
 'he washed his (own) elbow'

We star (94) although there is some tendency to accept it on the part of the informant, though not without great hesitation. This we believe stems from the nature of the compound: is it to be conceived of as 'his arm point' or 'the point of his arm'. The first would be the compound and this would appear to be the 'normal' interpretation. However, every informant can extract the two morphemes (or words) forming this compound, and in so doing convinces himself that (94) might be a good sentence. In this case, he is forcing himself to conceive of 'his arm point' as 'the point of his arm' and the pronoun

¹² It has occurred to us that if possessives are to be derived ultimately from embedded 'have' constructions, then underlying (92) might be something like 'the man ate his wings, which a chicken once HAD'.

INALIENABLE POSSESSION IN IGBO

possesses NOT the entire compound (the head of which is [−INALIEN]), but only the word *áka*, an inalienable. Therefore it can be deleted and we get (94) (remove star). We find on the other hand that the switch rule does not demand a reinterpretation of the individual morphemes, since we obtain

- (95) *ó sàra m ákpù áká*
 he washed to me elbow
 'he washed my elbow'

We do not, however, obtain

- (96) **ó sàra ákpù áká m*
 he washed elbow my
 'he washed my elbow'

in which *áka* is [−INALIEN] and incorrectly so. The switch rule seems to apply to all body parts, while the deletion rule only applies to those that are [+INALIEN]. Note also that *ñke* cannot be used with *ákpù áká*:

- (97) **ó sàra ákpù áká ñke yá*
 he washed elbow that of his
 'he washed HIS elbow'

There is apparently no way to obtain 'he washed HIS (own) elbow'.

Certain verbs in Igbo obligatorily require two objects, one of which is held constant. The object held constant is either (in almost all cases) a cognate object as in

- (98) *ó cìrì ya ócì*
 he laughed him laughter
 'he laughed at him'

or else it is [+INALIEN] as in

- (99) *ó gèrè ya ñtì*
 he listened him ear
 'he listened to him'

The strange feature about these inalienable objects is that they seem to have lost much of their identity and therefore can no longer function as nouns in their own right. Thus we do not get

- (100) **ó gèrè ya ñtì yá*
 he listened him ear his
 'he listened to him with his ears'

but rather:

- (101) *ó jì ñtì geé yá ntì*
 he used ear listened him ear
 'he listened to him with his ears'

which is fully grammatical, though a bit redundant. Notice, however, that we do not get

- (102) **ó jì ñtì geé yá*

where the second *ñtì* 'ear' has been left off—*ígè* exists only in combination with *ñtì*. It is not surprising how these frozen expressions arose historically. Since the possessive pronoun was always deleted (by the deletion rule) and since these double object phrases

were used over and over and are limited in number, these verbal expressions came to be learned as one lexical item. A particularly clear example of this is the verb 'to hit' which can take either an instrumental, as in

- (103) ó kùrụ ya ósisi
 he hit him stick
 'he hit him with a stick'

or a limited number of inalienables, as in

- (104) ó kùrụ ya áka
 he hit him hand
 'he hit him with his open hand' =
 'he slapped him'

In (104) (as opposed to (103)) the second object (which is áka) is not an instrumental, but instead expresses the manner in which the hit was effected. In other words, [kù + áka] forms one verbal expression, one lexical entry, meaning 'to slap', just as [kù + úkwụ] ('to hit' + 'foot') is one lexical entry meaning 'to kick'. Thus we can obtain

- (105) ó jì ósisi kụọ yá
 he used stick hit him
 'he used a stick to hit him'

but not:

- (106) *ó jì áka kụọ yá
 he used hand hit him
 'he used his hand to hit him'

There is thus an intimate relationship between inalienable possession and double object constructions, which remains to be investigated in further detail.

We have seen throughout our discussion that there is a continuum of deviancy achieved by violating the feature specifications in the various constructions. Thus, sometimes when one makes an inalienable alienable, the result is a deviant sentence. The sentence

- (107) *ísi m wàra (cf. 45)
 head my split

could only mean 'my head (which I found, etc.) split'. In other cases the feature specification [+INALIEN] MUST be violated:

- (108) ó rìri úkwụ atụrụ
 he ate leg lamb
 'he ate a leg of lamb'

BUT:

- (109) *ó rìri átụrụ úkwụ
 he ate to lamb leg
 'he ate a lamb's leg'

where in (109) it would require that the leg be still attached to the animal at the moment of consumption. Basically, this is what the feature [INALIEN] does in the case of body parts: it informs the hearer of whether or not a body part is still attached to its owner, and in most cases it IS—this is why violating a [+INALIEN] feature specification tends to shock the hearer. This difference is seen in (110) and (111):

INALIENABLE POSSESSION IN IGBO

(110) ϕ gbàjiri ñnụnyụ mbọ [+INALIEN]

he broke to bird claw

'he broke the bird's claw' (attached)

(111) ϕ gbàjiri mbọ nnụnyụ [-INALIEN]

he broke claw bird

'he broke the bird's claw' (after it was detached)

(111) has another gloss: 'he broke the bird claw' where we are not saying whose claw it is or was, but rather WHAT KIND IT IS. Thus in order to use an inalienable in its generic sense one must violate its [+INALIEN] specification and make it non-inalienable. In English we make this distinction in the following manner:

(112) he ate a chicken wing for dinner [-INALIEN]

(113) he ate a chicken's wing for dinner [+INALIEN]

In the first case it was cooked—in the second it was raw.