

PSYCH-VERBS IN OLD ENGLISH: FROM THEIR ORIGIN IN
THE LEXICON TO FINAL SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

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In a lecture delivered in St. Louis at the beginning of this century, the great linguist Otto Jespersen expressed his deeply felt convictions about the scientific study of English in the following terms:

A scientific treatment of the English language must presuppose the scientific treatment of a great many other languages as well. (1904:2)

And later he went on to say:

But it is clear that indirectly, too, the scientific study of any language may be of value to the student of English. His ideas ought not to be narrowed down to one particular type of linguistic structure. (1904:6)

These programmatic words could fit equally well in any of the prolegomena to the various reformulations undergone by Chomsky's theory since *Syntactic Structures*. But the course of events have amply demonstrated that the twins shall never meet. In fact there is some work in progress which endeavours to compare the grammatical achievement of Jespersen and other traditional grammarians with that of contemporary generative grammar in order to prove that they are not complementary as Chomsky recently suggested.

Curiously enough, there is hardly an issue like that of 'grammatical case' to highlight the diversity of approach. In the pioneering lecture I have just quoted from, Jespersen, with a touch of humour which brings us quite close to the subject of this paper, states the following:

In a very able book on the absolute participle in English, the author says that it is right to parse the so-called nominative ab-

solute as 'a dative in disguise'. Now this amounts to very much the same thing as saying that a locomotive is a horse in disguise or – to remain within the sphere of language – to say that in 'he likes pears' he is a dative in, likes a plural in disguise, and pears the subject in disguise, because in Old English the sentence would run 'him liciap peran'. (1904:8)

Despite the intrinsic eloquence of these examples, there is more to it than meets the eye. It is possible to argue that the adoption of a powerful theory such as the 'Government and Binding' approach launched by Chomsky in 1981, which 'sees' the category of 'case' in all human languages, enables us precisely to see through the disguise of things. This is not the same as merely looking at things. Not infrequently, mortals have been surprised by the many secrets which the book of nature, albeit open, keeps in disguise.

It is not my purpose to mediate in any divorce court in order to arrest feelings of fear, doubt and mistrust. I will content myself with the grammatical discussion of OE verbs which express precisely such feelings, the feeling of fear, doubt, liking and abhorrence. These are the so-called 'psych-verbs' or verbs of experience, such as *lystan*, *tweogan*, *speowan*, *wlatian*, *lician*, *lustfullian*, *ondrædan*, etc., which I have classified in four distinct classes. Here are some illustrations:

Class A: LYSTAN: (1) Hwæt, ge þon þeah hwæpwega godcundlices on eowerre saule habbaþ, þæt is andgit & gemynd, & se gesceadwislica willa þæt *hine para twega* lyste (*Boethius* 95). *TWEOGAN:* (2) þis is genog sweotol þætte *nænne mon þæs* tweogan ne þearf þætte ealle men geendiaþ on þam deape, & eac heora welan (*Boethius* 90). *SPEOWAN:* (3) Ælfred kyning hateþ gretan... his wordum luflice and freondlice; and þe kypan hate þæt me com suiþe oft on gemynd, hwelce wutan gio wæron geond Angelkynn... and hu þa kyningas... and hu hi... and hu *him* þa speow ægþer ge mid wige ge mid wisdomes (*Cura Past* 2). *WLATIAN:* (4) Ic wene þeah þæt ic hwæthwugununges þe up ahofe of þære unrottesse fulneah gebrohte æt þam ilcan weorþscipe þe þu ær hæfdes, buton þu git to ful sy þæs þe þe læfeþ is, þat *þe* forþy wlatige (*Boethius* 88).

Class B: LICIAN: (1) þas þing ic on þam foresprecenan bisceope swiþe lufie, forþan ic no ne tweoge þæt *hi Gode* liciap (Bede 35). (2) þætte on þæm þingum þe *hie him selfum* swæ swiþe liciap, þæt *hie Gode* misliciap (*Cura Past* 20). (3) þa heringe *þe him* licode (*Cura Past* 20). *LUSTFULLIAN:* (4) þeah þæt þonne *þæm mode* licige and lustfullige, þeah hir gewundaþ (*Cura Past* 13). (5) Hwæþer *þe* nu licien fæguru lond? (*Boethius* 92). (6) Hwi ne sceolde *me* lician fæger lond? (*Boethius* 93). (7) and *heom eallum* þearle licode ælc para þinga þe he forþ teah (*Apollonius* 152).

Class C: LUSTFULLIAN: (1) Forþon þe ic lustfullede þære stowe swettesse & wlite þe ic þær geseah (Bede 49). (2) ah þæm anum, *þa þe* oppþe for ege tinterigo afyrhte wæron, oppþe mid hyhte para ecra gefeana eadignesse lustfulledon, þam he wolde... secgan (Bede 49).

Class D: ONDRÆDAN: (1) Ær þioson we sægdon feam wordum hwelc se bion

scolde þe medome hierde and lareow bion sceolde, ond eac hwelc se biþ *þe* him ondrædan sceal þæt he unmedome sie (*Cura Past* 14). (2) se de micelne welan hæfþ, *he* him ondræt monige feond; gif he nane æhta næfde, ne þorfte *he* him nænne ondrædan...gif þu þonne swelces nanwuht næfde, þonne ne dorftes *þu þe nanwuht* ondrædan ac meahtes þe gan singende þone ealdan cwide þe mon gefyrn sang, þæt *se nacoda wegferend* him nanwuht ne ondrede (*Boethius* 96). (3) þa þet folc ongan tweogan on heora heortan and hie cwædon 'To hwan ondrædeþ *þeos halige Maria hire deap...?*' þa cwædon þa apostolas... (Blickling 123).

I will approach this discussion as part of a programme of research which attaches great importance to the lexicon as the essential workshop of any language and to whatever is postulated as the initial syntactic base projected from it for all linguistic operations. We assume the particular framework provided by the 'Government and Binding' theory or GB. Old English psych-verbs do not all follow the same syntactic patterning, as a cursory look at our previous list of illustrations will show, and a closer examination of the four classes will reveal important differences. In class A we have two objects and no overt grammatical subject. In class B we have one object and a subject identifiable as the cause of the experience. In class C we also have one object and a subject but this time identifiable as the receiver of the experience. Class D is similar to class C except for the grammatical expression of the object identifiable as the cause of the experience, which in C is not a direct object and in D is an ordinary direct object. In the illustrations of the four classes, the element identifiable as the receiver of the experience appears in italics with the characters spaced out, whereas the element identifiable as the cause of the experience appears simply in italics.

Despite their varying behaviour in syntax, all these verbs seem to illustrate one and the same semantic phenomenon with two distinct arguments: the receiver of the experience (currently called experiencer) and the cause of the experience (currently called theme). Notice that this is so regardless of what appears or fails to appear as the 'external' grammatical subject. Cf. the evidence of some Romance languages like Spanish or Italian. In Spanish, for instance, we have structures of the type *me va bien con el coche*, lit. 'to me goes well with the car' or *me da pena de eso*, lit. 'to me gives sorrow of that', with no overt grammatical subject nor the possibility of supplying one. In order to supply one we have to resort to alternatives like *el coche me va bien* and *eso me da pena*. What this suggests is that all these verbs originate from one and the same matrix. How can we reconcile a common origin in the lexicon with such a varying behaviour in syntax?

Our first thought should be to relate such variations to the information stored in the lexicon, the primary stuff of the initial syntactic configuration in the 'assembly line' of grammar. Couldn't we have, in addition to the plain information concerning the existence of the two arguments (experiencer and theme) in all four classes, other more specific information accounting for the differences amongst the classes? This is what we seem to have. As a matter of fact the four classes I have distinguished in Old English can be reduced to a simple feature based matrix of a type similar to the one recently proposed by Belletti and Rizzi (1986:60-5) working

with Italian data. All we need is additional information in terms of case-specification. We take case as 'inherent case' in the modern sense, that is, dative, genitive, instrumental and prepositional equivalents and any accusative which could not be determined structurally. So, case-specification in this context means an actual morphological case or prepositional equivalent, but we should consider any accusative specification redundant if such an accusative could be determined structurally. The lexical entry of such verbs could be as simple as the four theoretically possible combinations of experiencer and theme plus or minus the specification of case:

	Experiencer	Theme	Verb-class
	+	+	A
Case-	+	—	B
Specification	—	+	C
	—	—	D

Figure 1. Lexical entry of psych-verbs in OE.

This system generates precisely the four classes I have proposed for Old English. The verbs of class A can thus be explained as having inherent case in both arguments: in (1), experiencer *hine* and theme *para twega*; in (2), experiencer *nænne mon* and theme *þæs*; and in (3), experiencer *him* and theme *ægþer ge mid wige ge mid wisdome*. Notice that none of the verbs of class A appear with an overt grammatical subject. Questions of order apart, the structure of these verbs as attested in Old English in final output coincides with the one proposed by Belletti and Rizzi (1986:3) for the initial configuration of Italian *questo preoccupa Gianni*, lit. 'this worries Gianni' and *questo piace a Gianni*, lit. 'this pleases to Gianni'. They take great pains in demonstrating that *questo* in both structures is a derived subject and not the proper subject in the initial configuration as it is projected from the lexicon, probably unaware of the significance of the Old English data. In fact we may have reason to believe that only agents and experiencers without inherent-case-specifications can assume the role of subject at the initial level.

In contrast to the verbs of class A, the verbs of classes B and C possess only one argument with inherent case, the other argument lacking case-specification. In class B it is the experiencer: in (1) *G o d e*; in (2) *him selfum*, etc. In class C it is the theme: in (1) *þære stowe swetnesse*; in (2) *mid hyhte para ecra gefeana and eadignesse*. The argument lacking case-specification is the one that appears as subject in final structure: in class B it is the theme: in (1) *hi*; in (2) *hie*; in (3) *þa heringe þe*; in (4) *fægru lond*; in (6) *ælc para þinga þe he forþ teah*; in (7) *þæt*; in class C it is the experiencer: in (1) *ic*; in (2) *þat þe...* However, if our previous assumption about the externalization of subject is correct, only class C should evidence real subjects in the initial configuration, although this is difficult to prove in Old English. Finally in class D, with no particular case-specification, the experiencer presumably assumes the subject position from the beginning.

But of course, quite independently from the lexical origin of the structures we

have discussed (the four hypothesized variations in the lexicon), we still have to account for their varying positional syntax in actual language. So, let us have a closer look at class A. If we select (1) and (2), we can easily postulate a configuration of the following form:

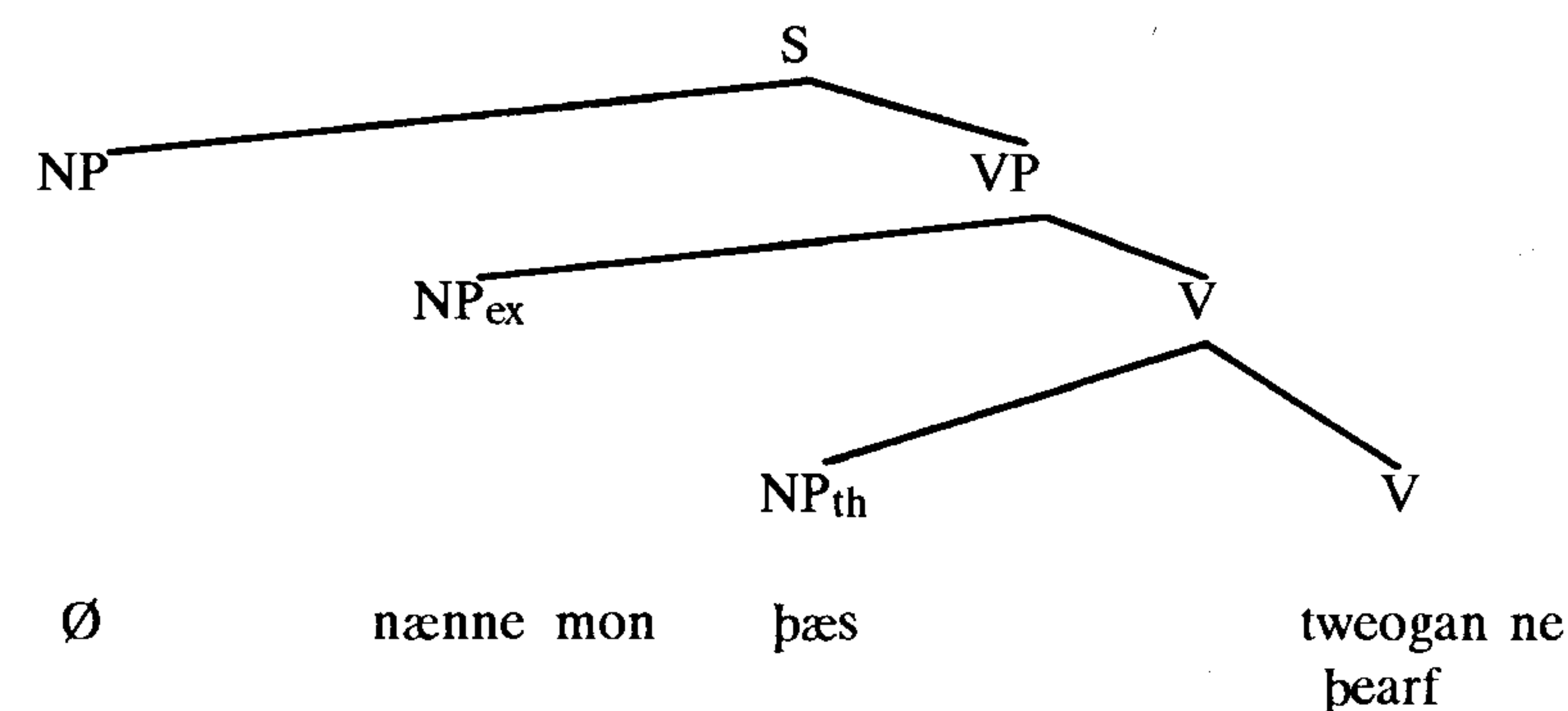
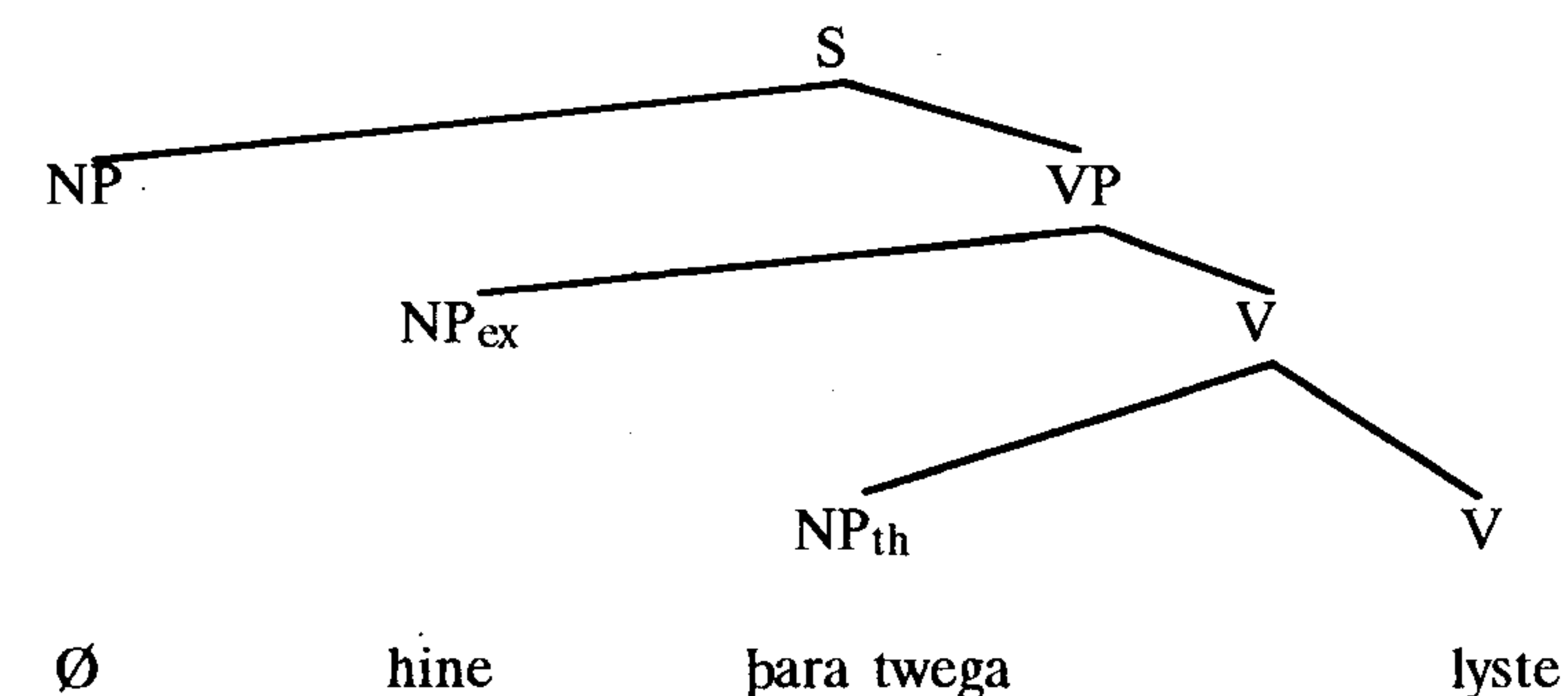


Figure 2. Initial syntactic configuration of Class A, (1) and (2).

In this configuration the NP subject remains empty; then we have the first NP object, an experiencer: *hine* and *nænne mon* respectively; after this we have the second NP object, a theme: *para twega* and *þæs* respectively; and finally, at the end of the structure, we have the verb: *lyste* and *tweogan þearf* respectively. With a minor adjustment, the situation of our example (3) is not very different except for the extraposition of the long NP *ægþer ge mid wige ge mid wisdome*. So, in all these cases, allowing for the subsequent extraposition of a long object, we have the order 'Subject- Object(s)-Verb', that is, an SOV order. This SOV order is generally accepted as the initial structure of the Old English assembly line, the base of Old English, the starting point of the mapping of lexical information into syntax, for whatever sentence we end up with. In a generative grammar it is of crucial importance to establish a base from which to operate. Part of this base is what we may regard as the initial word-order, an abstract category parameter which to a

large extent determines from minimal variations important clusters of properties and differences amongst the languages of the world, within certain universal constraints. Cf. Chomsky's simile in this respect:

We may think of the language faculty as a complex and intricate network of some sort associated with a switch box consisting of an array of switches that can be in one of two positions. Unless the switches are set one way or another, the system does not function. When they are set in one of the permissible ways, then the system functions in accordance with its nature, but differently, depending on how the switches are set. The fixed network is the system of principles of universal grammar; the switches are the parameters to be fixed by experience. (1988:62-3)

Now, if we accept, as is generally done, that an order SOV is the initial order for Old English or, what is the same, that Old English is an SOV language underlyingly, like German or Dutch, we would like to know what the implications are, how do we explain the hundreds of clauses without SOV order and, in the light of this, we would also like to assess the actual validity or necessity of the assumption. One of the implications of accepting an underlying SOV order is that any order different from SOV is derived as illustrated in the following scheme:

Basic order at the initial state in the syntax: <i>SOV</i>	Derived orders		
	<i>TopVS</i>	<i>-VS</i>	VS > SV
	V/2	V/1	main
V/final end-position	second position	front- position	subject position

Figure 3. Word-order scheme.

Cf. for instance the normal 'Topic-Verb-Subject' order in main clauses with topicalization of *þa*, *þonne*, and frequently also with *nu* (that is, as actual adverbs, not as conjunctions!) whether the subject is a pronoun or not: *þa sægde he/þa sægde Apollonius*; *þonne com heo/þonne com seo cwen*; *nu wast þu*, etc. Notice that with other topicalized elements such as objects (prepositional or non-prepositional) we have the order 'Topic-Verb-Subject' only if the subject is not a pronoun. Cf. in our list of illustrations class B, (6) *-and heom eallum (þearle) licode ælc þara...* – as against class D, (1) *-Ær þissum we sægdon...* – at the beginning of the text; (1) of class B, also at the beginning of the text, is similar although a bit more complicated: *þas þing ic... lufie*. Summarizing, we have the 'Topic-Verb-Subject' order (a) in structures with *þa*, *þonne*, *nu*, (b) with other topicalized elements when the subject is not a pronoun. Cf. also the topicalization of *Hw*-words in direct questions (*Hwæt sægest þu?*, etc.) or of the negative particle *ne* in negations (*Ne sceal he noht, ne beo þu...*, etc.). If our assumption is correct, the next step should be to link either order to a different type of structure, that is, SOV to one type, 'Topic- Verb-Subject'

to another. In other words, we should if possible link V-final position to one type and V-second position to another. And indeed this is possible.

Let us now look again at class A, (1), (2), (3), the first three examples in our list of illustrations. All three examples illustrate subordinate clauses. And, of course, subordinate clauses typify such an SOV order even though it may be affected by other factors such as object extraposition, as is precisely the case with (3): the long disjunctive string of two prepositional objects is extraposed, namely *ægþer ge mid wige ge mid wisdom*, thereby partially disrupting what would otherwise be a perfect SOV order. So, the postulated initial order would be the order of the subordinate clause in principle. A similar link can be effected between the order 'Top-Verb-Subject' and main clauses introduced by the topicalized elements we have mentioned. We still have to explain two other presumably derived orders, the VS order associated with 'yes/no questions' and the SV order typical of declarative main clauses without topicalization of objects or adverbs. But it is not difficult to see how these orders are empirically linked to very specific and distinct types of structure. We would also have to explain the actual process of derivation and then why should it be the case that the basic order is SOV and not any of the presumed derived orders. So we have two issues here: (1) the derivational process of all three non-SOV orders (the topicalization order 'Top-V-S', the interrogative order 'VS' in 'yes/no questions', and the 'SV' order in declarative main clauses), and (2) the efficiency in deriving all three orders from SOV order.

As to issue (1), namely, the process of derivation, the solution is straightforward in the case of 'Top-V-S' and interrogative 'VS'. It is enough to assume a simple left-ward movement of the verb from the underlying basic end-position, which ends up to the immediate left of the subject. In 'VS' (the interrogative order of 'yes/no questions') the verb ends up in the first position in the sentence, that is, the immediate left of the subject is the first position in the sentence, but in 'Top-V-S' the movement to the immediate left of the subject materializes in the second position, since the topic by its very nature must appear at the extreme left of the sentence (the leftmost position). The case of 'SV' (declaratives like *ic cume*, *þu gæst*, etc. is explained as a further derivation from the derived 'VS' which accounts for the previous structures, whereby the subject is topicalized. Actually, in Old English there occur cases of 'VS' in declarative main clauses: *com ic* instead of *ic com*. This situation, which is not at all rare, can be perfectly explained as cases one step short of the final process. This simple assumption of general movement leftward from end-position is the 'prima facie' characterization of the already well established Germanic phenomenon called V/2 precisely because the verb generally appears in a second position in declarative main clauses.

As to issue (2), the necessity (putting it strongly) or convenience (putting it mildly) of deriving 'Top-V-S', 'VS?' and 'SV' (all of them generally V/2) from SOV (= V-last, staying in its underlying position), I must refer to the contributions of Taraldsen (1982), Platzack (1985) and Kemenade (1987). Essentially it boils down to the descriptive adequacy that can be achieved if we combine the V/2 phenomenon with an underlying SOV base, without preventing various avenues for expla-

natory adequacy. The V/2 phenomenon as a whole is as normal in Old English as in the other Germanic languages, the Scandinavian languages included, Modern English being the odd one out. Descending to a more precise formulation of the working of the V/2 phenomenon, we may put it this way. The Germanic languages are endowed with a position COMP to the left of the 'NP VP' frame, which is filled either by a complementizer, the case of the subordinate clauses, or by a finite verb, as illustrated in the following diagram:

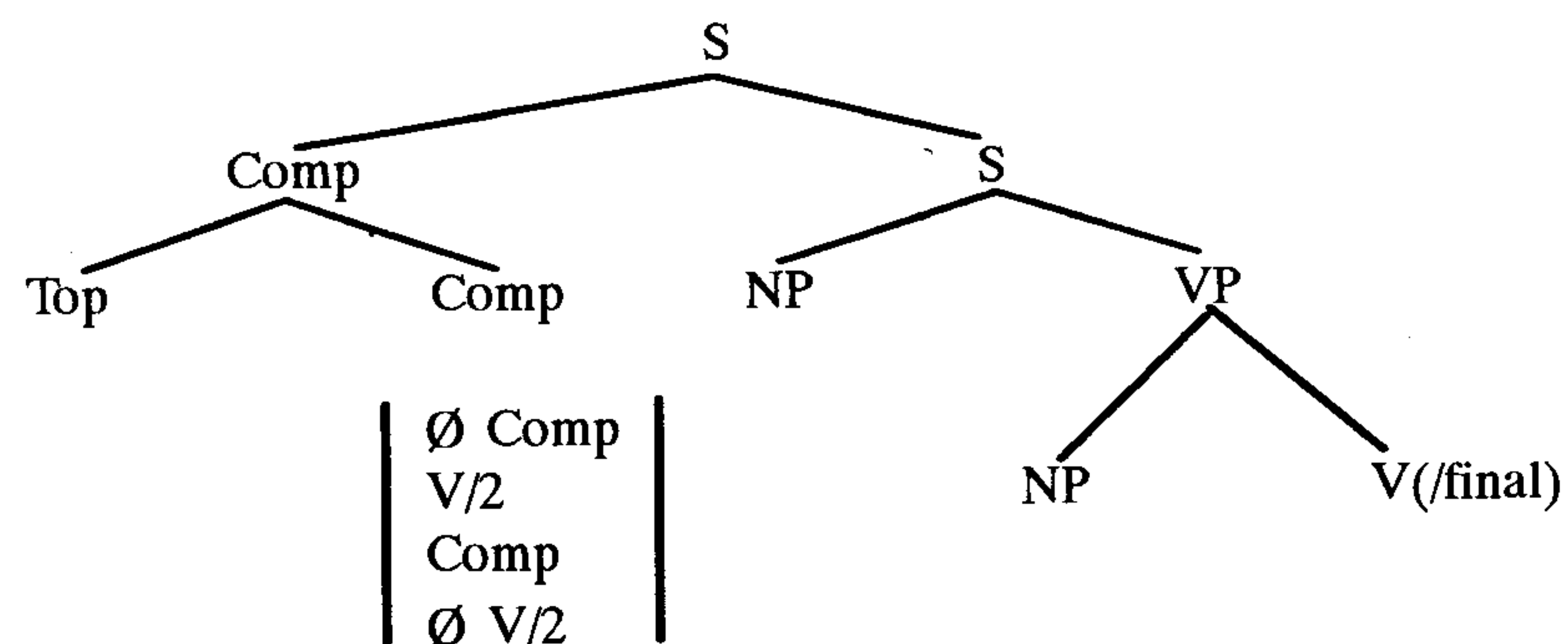


Figure 4. Basic mechanism of sentence structure in Germanic.

When such a position is empty, the finite verb moves to this position filling it; when such a position is filled by a complementizer, the finite verb remains in its base position (end-position) since it cannot move to a filled position. This is what we have precisely in (1-4) of our class A, the common tree of which can now be illustrated with the appropriate and relevant COMP underlined:

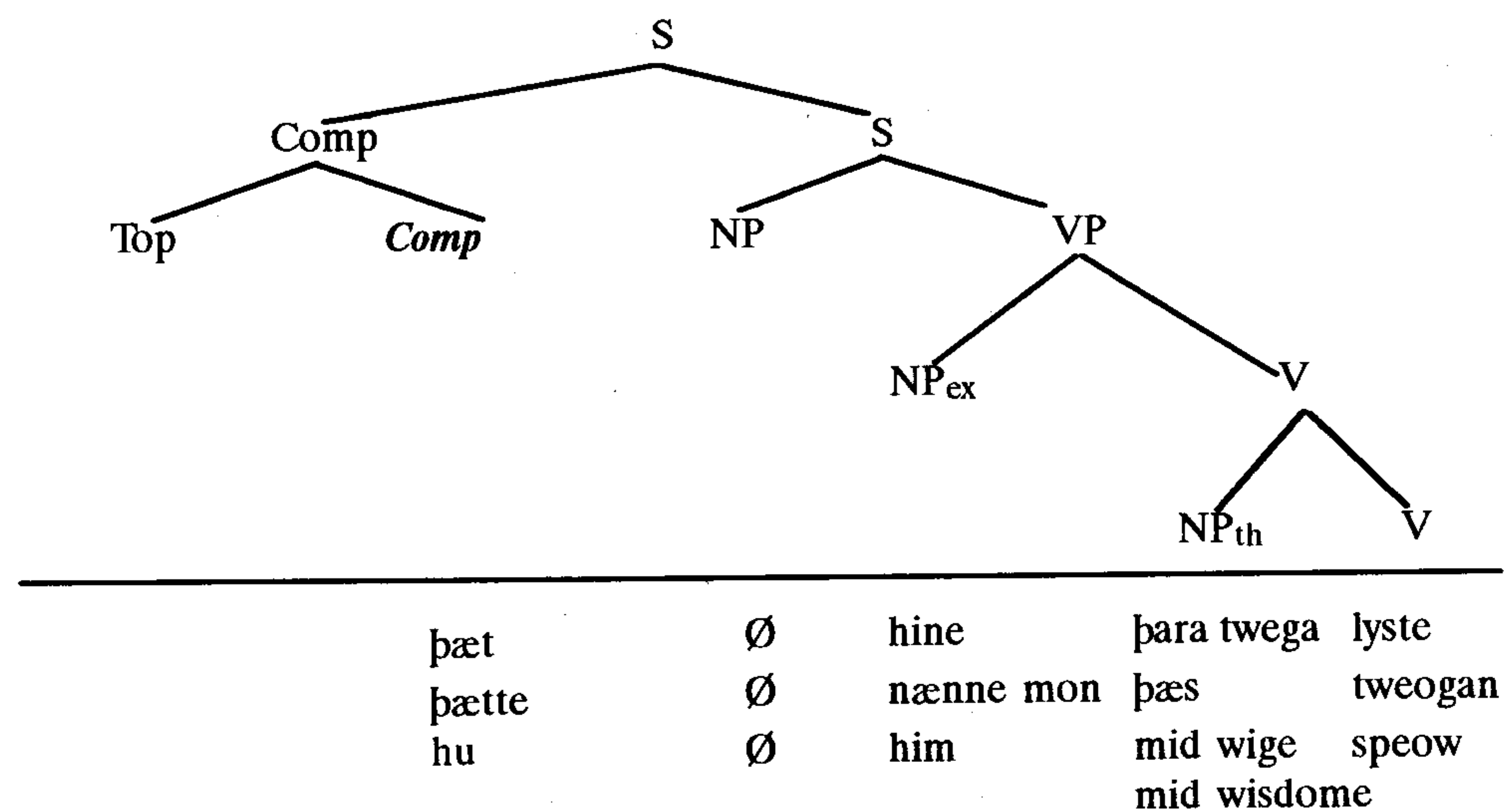


Figure 5. Common initial tree for Class A.

If we follow the same procedure for all other cases, we shall be able to explain the diversity of structure as following directly from the interaction of V/2 and SOV, except for certain adjustments such as the extraposition phenomena of the sort already mentioned in connection within (4) of class A. There are two other adjustments that merit special attention. One concerns the position of clitics (moveable personal pronouns) and the other the position of pre-modals as a result of verb-raising. The position of clitics has been addressed recently by Kemenade. Cf. her scheme (1987:119):

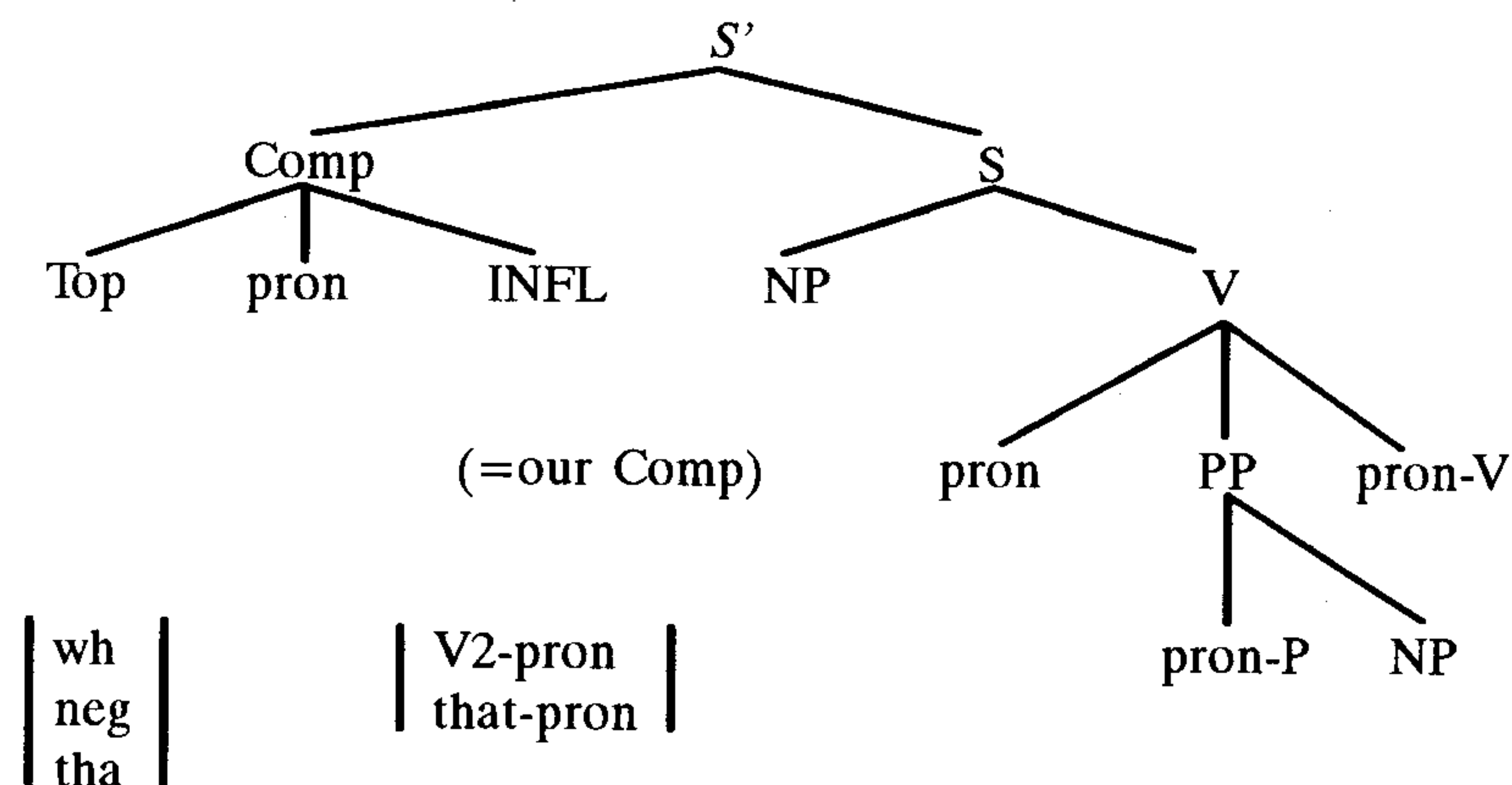


Figure 6. Kemenade's descriptive model for clitic positions.

In (5) of our class B we have an instance of a clitic within the topic as can be easily appreciated in the following diagram:

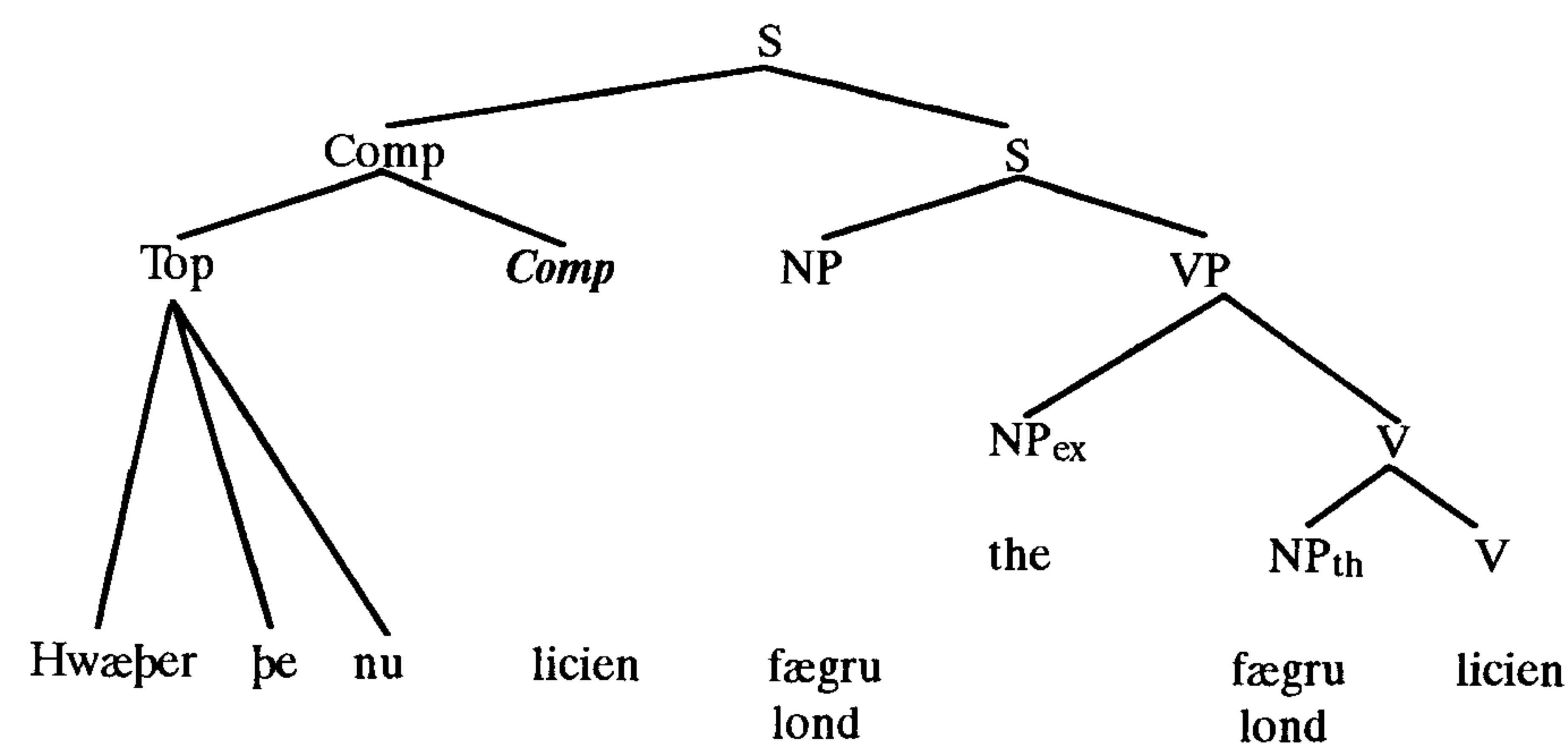


Figure 7. Clitic within the topic.

If we had a *Hw*-word or *nu* alone, the would presumably be between the topic and

Comp. These cases merit further scrutiny. The phenomenon of 'verb-raising' can also be seen in one of our illustrations of class B, namely (6). Let us have a look at a 'prima facie' initial tree:

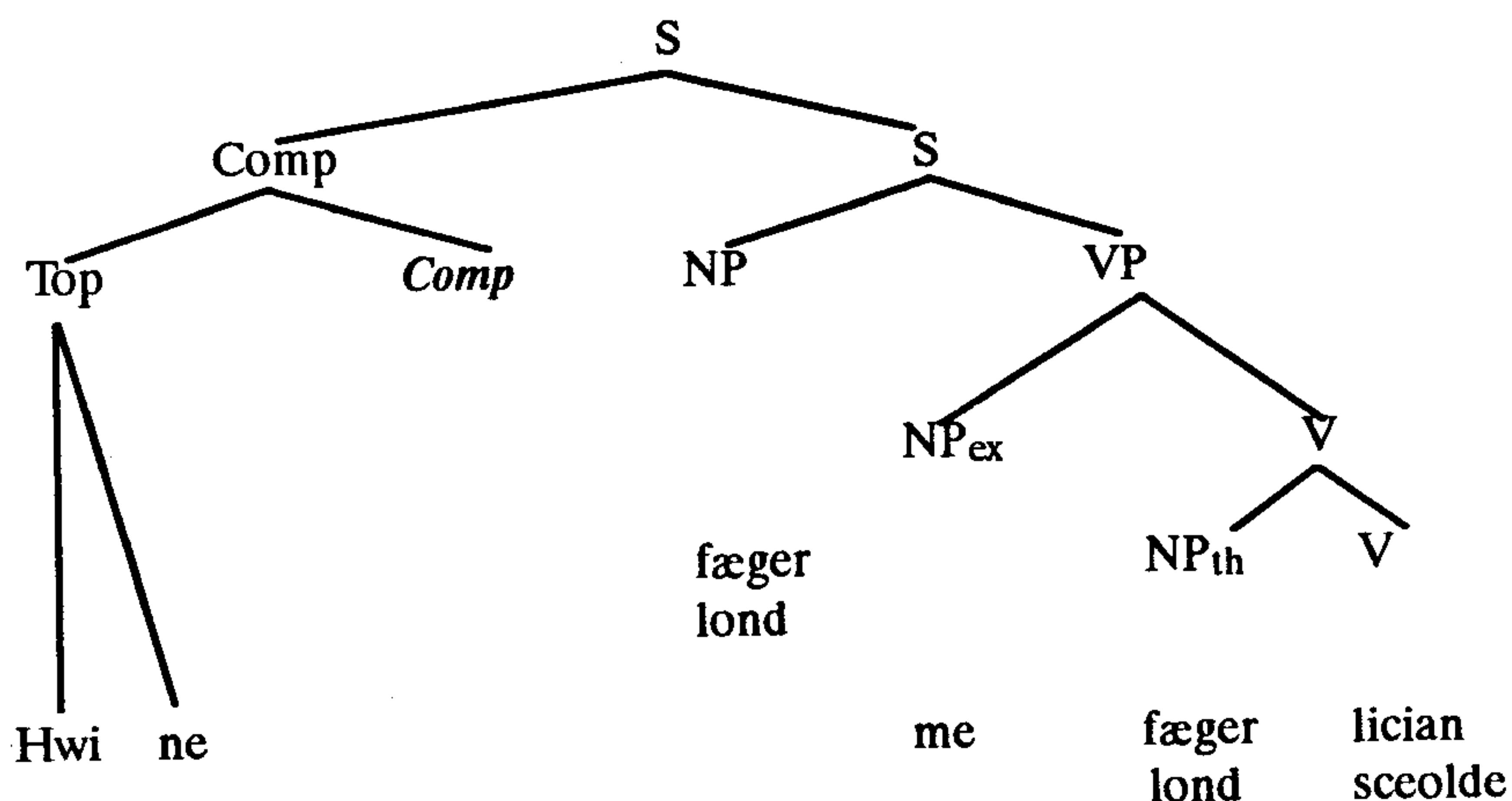


Figure 8. 'Prima facie' initial tree containing a pre-modal.

The expected result of such initial configuration should be *hwi ne sceolde fæger lond me lician?* (or with the clitic between Top and Comp). But instead we have *hwi ne sceolde me lician fæger lond?* It is generally recognized that 'pre-modals' like *sceolde* were ordinary verbs and not at all auxiliaries in the technical sense, that is, they were the main verbs of their respective sentences, and the non-finite verb they appeared with was the verb of a subordinate clause, very much as in *I want to go*, *want* is not an auxiliary and *go* the main verb. So, the initial tree should be as illustrated in the following diagram, with indication of the subsequent restructuring:

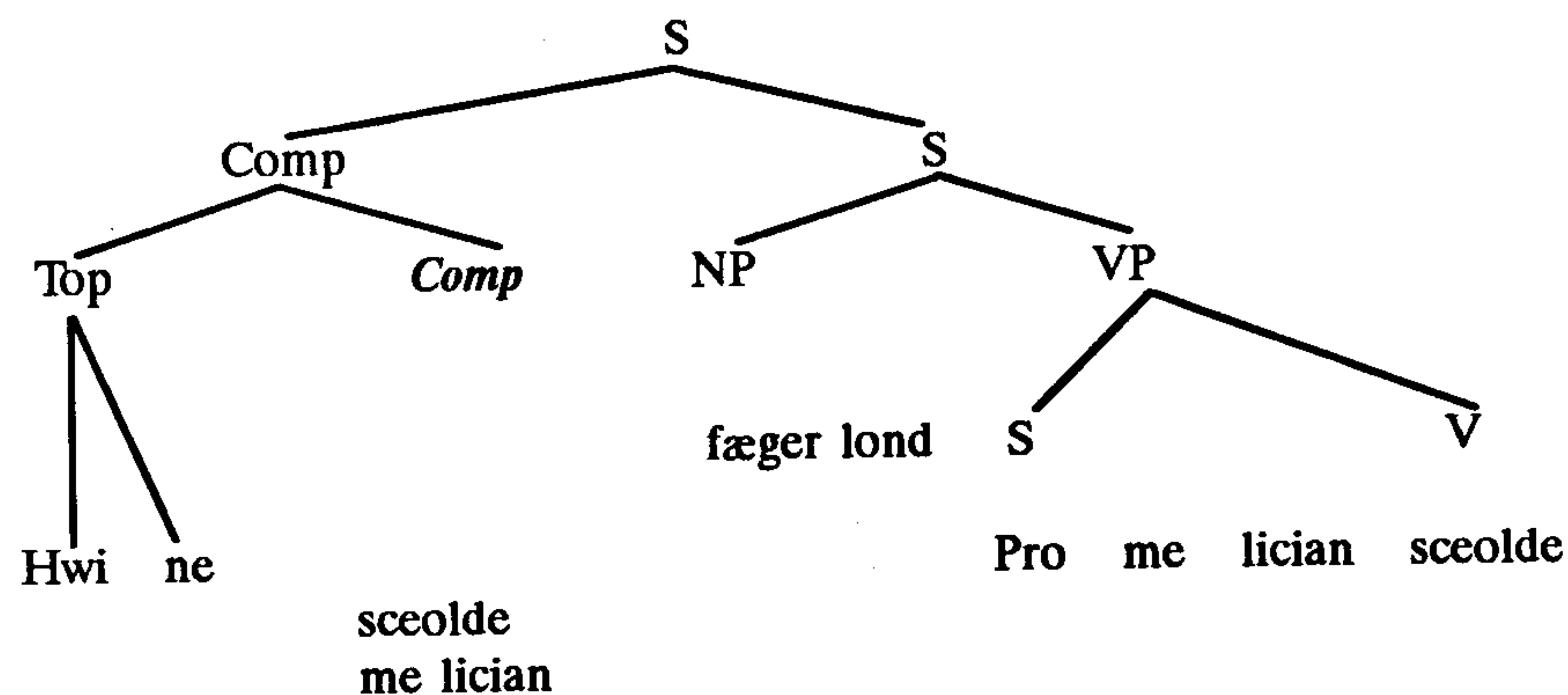


Figure 9. Initial tree with verb-raising and subsequent effects.

The verb-raising phenomenon is common in a structure of this type. The raising of *lician* to the right of *sceolde* breaks up the $S_{(2)}$ and unifies the two clauses, forming a verbal cluster. The result is *hwi ne sceolde me lician fæger lond?*

The remaining illustrations do not seem to present any syntactic problems at all. (9) of class B is a good illustration of V/2 with topicalization of *heom eallum*, a case to which I have already referred. Equally straightforward is (1) of class C, except that due to the length of the theme (a complex string modified by a relative clause), it is extraposed. As can be seen, *þære stowe swetnesse and wlite the ic þær geseah* appears after *lustfullede*, whereby the verb loses its end-position. My final observation is reserved for *ondrædan* of class D. The fact that this verb frequently, though not always, appears with a reflexive clitic of interest (in dative) does not alter in the least neither the lexical representation proposed nor its behaviour in syntax.

I have been dealing with verbs of experience positive and negative. I started by quoting Jespersen's classical and ubiquitous example about someone's liking for pears (presumably the king). I proceeded to the interesting class of *speowan*, the success-verb of good King Alfred and ended up in the dread-class! I don't know if I have caused pleasure, displeasure, if I have caused fears or allayed fears. But of one thing I am sure, recent linguistic scholarship, from the matrix of verbs to sentence parameters, can contribute substantially to the interpretation of Old English qua language in a modern sense. Much inspiration has come from the Italian workshop in recent years, which has been followed up with admirable zeal by an enviable group of young Dutch and Scandinavian linguists. Comparative syntax, an increasing attentiveness to important and crucial questions of parametric variations and, for once, empirical richness, would certainly not make Jespersen look in askance on his successors.

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