

Morphological marking of in-situ focus in Mabia

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1 Overview & Claims

- We discuss the distribution of in-situ **focus markers** in two closely related Mabia languages (Gur, Northern Ghana). Focus markers behave differently in the two languages:
 1. **Dagbani** (Olawsky (1999); Issah (2020)):
The in-situ focus marker [lá] is in a separate projection and therefore in a fixed position in the clause.
 2. **Likpakpaanl** (Schwarz (2009)):
The in-situ focus markers ([là] clause-final, [lè] otherwise) are adjoined to the focused constituent and therefore variable in their position.
- The data provide evidence for focus projections at the vP-periphery (Belletti (2004); Mursell (2021)).
- Data sources if not indicated otherwise are
 - Dagbani: Samuel A. Issah
 - Likpakpaanl: Samuel O. Acheampong

2 Mabia languages

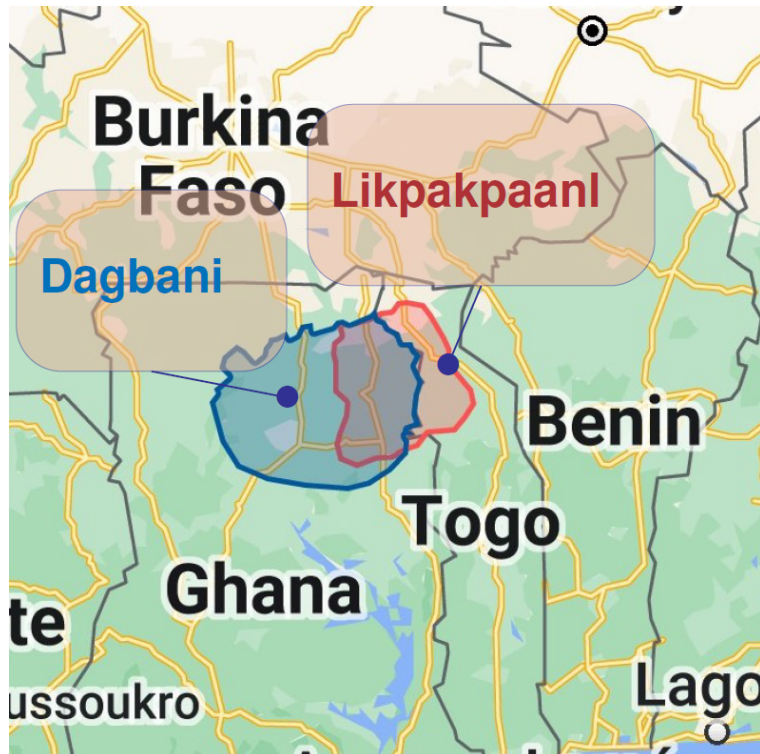


Figure 1: Map of Dagbani and Likpakpaani

- The Mabia languages (Northern Ghana, about 70 languages) belong to the Niger–Congo languages.
- This talk focuses on Likpakpaani (600,000 speakers) and Dagbani (1,160,000 speakers).

3 Background Dagbani & Likpakpaani

Basic syntax – Dagbani

- The basic word order is S-V-O with IO > DO:

- (1) a. Dawuni kú-r-í sò̀nsí máá.
 Dawuni kill-IPFV-CJ rabbits DEF
 ‘Dawuni kills the rabbits.’
- b. Páyà máá tí b́hí nyùlí zù̀ṅò.
 woman DEF give.PFV children yam today
 ‘The woman has given the children yam today.’

- Aspect is a verbal suffix, the perfective is unmarked.

- The verb indicates conjoint vs. disjoint construal by suffixes following the aspectual markers.
- Tense may be indicated by a free morpheme preceding V:

(2) Doo maa **sa** ti paya maa sima sohila.
 man DEF TNS give woman DEF groundnut yesterday
 'The man gave the woman groundnuts yesterday.'

Basic syntax – Likpakpaanl

- again, SVO with IO > DO:

(3) a. Adam **fé** kər ukola féna.
 Adam HEST.PST slaughter fowl yesterday
 'Adam slaughtered fowl yesterday.'
 b. Konja mèè Sam ki-gban din.
 Konja beg Sam NC-book today
 'Konja begged a booked from Sam today.'

- Tense (3) and also aspect (4) can be indicated by a free morpheme preceding V.

(4) Ù-píí gbààn **bī** njáál lòòr.
 CL-woman DEF IMPF drive car
 'The woman is driving a car.'

4 Ex-situ Focus in Dagbani and Likpakpaanl

Dagbani

- Object wh-questions and their corresponding answers can be in-situ or ex-situ in Dagbani.
- When ex-situ, the elements are fronted and followed by the particle *kà*.

(5) Q: **Bò** **kà** Napari dá?
 what FOC Napari buy.PFV
 'What did Napari buy?'
 A: **Búá** **kà** Napari dá.
 goat FOC Napari buy.PFV
 'Napari bought a GOAT.'

Likpakpaanl

- Object wh-questions and their corresponding answers present a superficially similar picture in Likpakpaanl.
- They can be in-situ or ex-situ.

- When ex-situ, they are followed by a particle *lè*.

- (6) Q: **Ba** lè Adam nan kɔr?
 what FOC Adam PST slaughter
 'What did Adam slaughter?'
 A: **Ukɔla** lè Adam nan kɔr.
 fowl FOC Adam PST slaughter
 'Adam slaughtered FOWL.'

5 In-situ Focus in Dagbani and Likpakpaanl

Dagbani

- Clause-medially, focus is marked differently than in the left periphery.

- (7) Q: Napari dá lá bó?
 Napari buy.PFV FOC what
 'What did Napari buy?'
 A: Napari dá lá búá.
 Napari buy.PFV FOC goat
 'Napari bought A GOAT.'

- The same marking in the same position is used for different focused constituents, e.g. verbal focus.

- (8) Q: A **vɔ-r-í** lá búŋlɔ́yú máa bée a **dáa-r-í** lá búŋlɔ́yú máa?
 2SG pull-IPFV-CJ FOC wagon DEF or 2SG push-IPFV-CJ FOC wagon DEF
 'Are you pulling the wagon or are you pushing the wagon?'
 A: N **vɔrí** lá búŋlɔ́yú máa.
 2SG pull.IPFV FOC wagon DEF
 'I am PULLING the wagon.'

Likpakpaanl

- Likpakpaanl uses the particles *lè* and *là* to mark in-situ focus. The particle immediately follows the focused constituent.

- (9) Q: Konja mɛ̀ɛ **ŋma** ki-gban?
 Konja beg who NC-book
 'Who did Konja beg a book from?'
 A: Konja mɛ̀ɛ **Sam** lè ki-gban (din).
 Konja beg Sam FOC NC-book today
 'Konja begged a book from SAM (today).'
- (10) Q: Konja mɛ̀ɛ Sam **ba**?
 Konja beg Sam what
 'What did Konja beg from Sam?'

A: Konja mɛ̀ɛ Sam **ki-gban** lè din.
 Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC today
 ‘Konja begged a BOOK from Sam today.’

- The choice of the particle depends on whether the focus particle is followed by an overt constituent or not.

(11) Q: Konja mɛ̀ɛ Sam **ba**?
 Konja beg Sam what
 ‘What did Konja beg from Sam?’

A1: Konja mɛ̀ɛ Sam **ki-gban** là.
 Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC
 ‘Konja begged a BOOK from Sam.’

A2: Konja mɛ̀ɛ Sam **ki-gban** lè din.
 Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC today
 ‘Konja begged a BOOK from Sam today.’

- Interestingly, the focus particle has to follow a phrase in the spine of a finite clause (i.e. a VP or an argument DP).
- This also means that it cannot follow the verb, for example (unlike what we have seen in Dagbani).

(12) *in-situ possessor focus in Likpakpaanl*

Q: Mary kɔ̀r **ɲma** aa-kɔ̀la?
 Mary kill who POSS-fowl
 ‘Whose fowl did Mary kill?’

A: Mary kɔ̀r [_{NP} **Peter** (*lè) aa-kɔ̀la] *(là)?
 Mary kill Peter FOC POSS-fowl FOC
 ‘Mary killed PETER’S fowl?’

(13) *in-situ V focus in Likpakpaanl*

Q: Adam nan ɲa ukɔ̀la **ba**?
 Adam PST do fowl what
 ‘What did Adam do to a fowl?’

A: Adam nan [_{VP} **kɔ̀r** (*lè) ukɔ̀la] *(là).
 Adam PST slaughter FOC fowl FOC
 ‘Adam SLAUGHTERED a fowl.’

(14) Q: À kan [_{NP} u-ja u lèn kè Peter kɔ̀r ukɔ̀la na] àà?
 2SG see NC-man REL say COMP P. slaughter fowl REL.DEF Q
 ‘Did you see the man that said that Peter slaughtered fowl?’

A: Aayi, n kan [_{NP} u-ja u lèn kè **John** (*lè) kɔ̀r ukɔ̀la na]
 no I see NC-man REL say COMP J. FOC slaughter fowl REL.DEF

*(là)

FOC

‘No, I saw the man that said that JOHN slaughtered fowl.’

6 Observations

Dagbani

1. The focus marker in Dagbani appears in a fixed position in the clause, independent of what is focused:
2. The focus marker follows the verb, which is marked for tense and aspect.

- (15) a. ... V-TAM **lá** **object**_[FOC]
 b. ... **V-TAM**_[FOC] **lá** object

3. Ex-situ focus is marked by a different focus marker **ká**.

Likpakpaanl

1. The focus marker in Likpakpaanl can vary its position.
2. It is right-adjacent to the constituent in the clause that is focused or contains the focused element.

- (16) a. ... V-TAM IO **DO**_[FOC] **lè**
 b. ... V-TAM **IO**_[FOC] **lè** DO

3. Ex-situ focus is marked by the same focus marker **lè**.

7 Analysis

Focused constituents need to agree with a focus head.

Dagbani

- Dagbani has a low focus projection (in addition to a high focus position marked by **ká**) that contains the focus marker **lá** and that the in-situ focused constituent agrees with. Therefore, the focus marker is in a fixed position.
- The verb undergoes head movement first to the focus head and then to the aspect head.

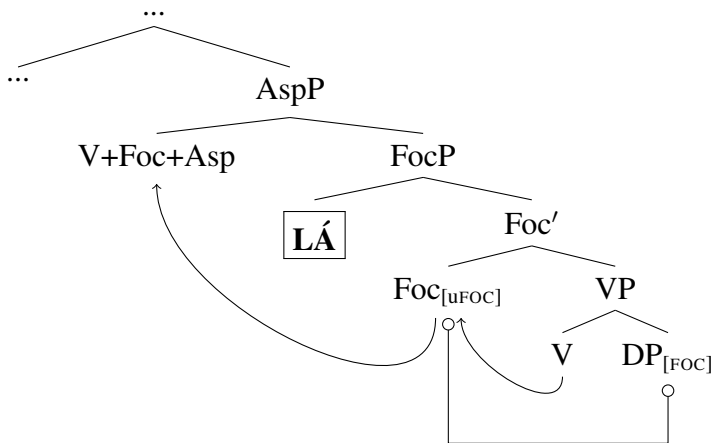
Likpakpaanl

- Likpakpaanl has only a high focus position that the in-situ focused constituent agrees with. There is no evidence for a low focus projection. That is why there is only one focus marker.
- The focus marker **lè** is right-adjoined to the focused element. Therefore, it has a variable position.
- Furthermore, the marker is expected not to appear to deeply embedded for reasons of locality.

Focus in Dagbani

Assumptions for in-situ focus:

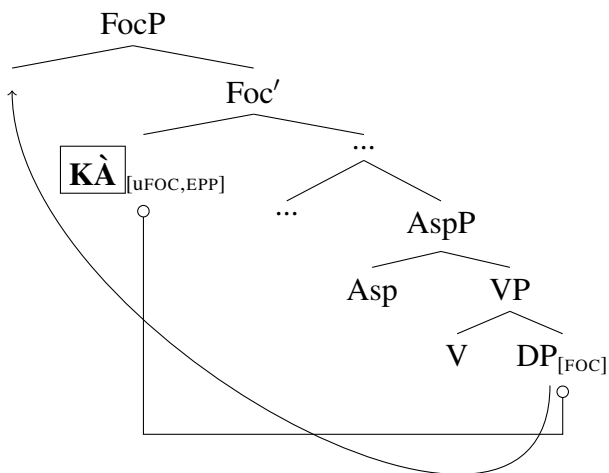
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Focus in Dagbani

Assumptions for ex-situ focus:

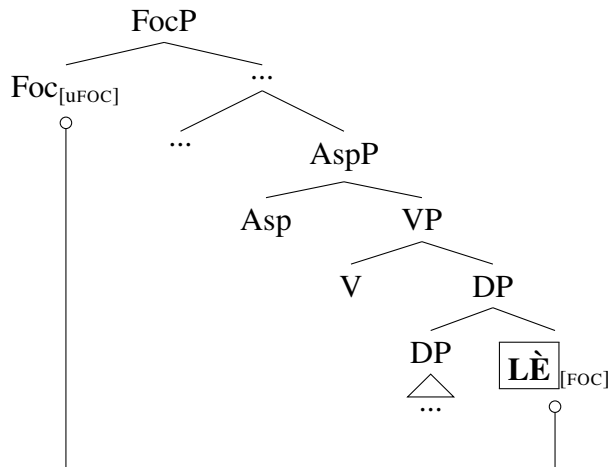
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Focus in Likpakpaanl

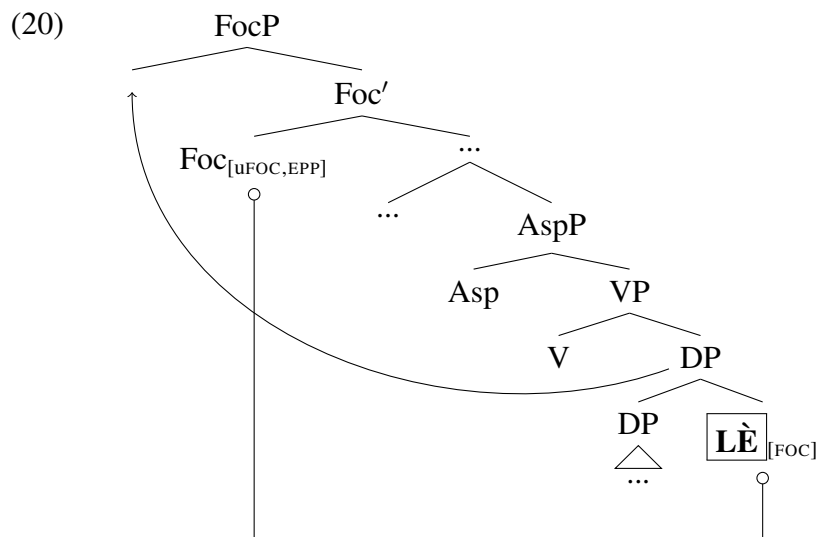
Assumptions for in-situ focus:

(19)



Focus in Likpakpaanl

Assumptions for ex-situ focus:



8 Summary

- **Dagbani:**

- The left peripheral particle is *kà*, different from the clause-medial focus particle.
- The clause-medial particles are obligatory and are realized right-adjacent to the verb irrespective of what is focused.

- **Likpakpaanl:**

- The left peripheral particle is *lè*, just like the clause-medial focus particle.
- The clause-medial particles are obligatory and are realized as *lè* non-clause-finally and *là* clause-finally.

- **Theoretical claims:**

- Dagbani has a high and a low focus projection; the focus particles are realized as high / low focus heads.
- Dagbani ex-situ focus moves due to an EPP-feature in high Foc; in-situ focus stays in-situ.
- In Likpakpaanl, the focus particle is attached to the focus constituent, which is either realized in-situ or ex-situ, depending on the presence of of an EPP-feature in Foc.
- Likpakpaanl does not have a low FocP.

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