High and low focus strategies in the Mabia languages

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Goals of the talk

In this talk ...

- ► ... we present data from our fieldwork in Ajumako from July/August 2022.
- ► ... we present the focus strategies in 7 Mabia languages.
- ► ... we categorize the focus strategies and present the patterns.

Dagbani

Dagbani – Ex-situ focus

- ▶ Questions and their corresponding answers behave similarly in ex-situ focus.
- ▶ Dagbani makes a distinction between ex-situ objects (**ka**) (1) and ex-situ subjects **n** (2).

(1)   Q: **Bo** $\boxed{\textbf{ka}}$ **Adam kɔrigi?**
        what FOC Adam slaughter
        'What did Adam slaughter?

     A: **Noo** $\boxed{\textbf{ka}}$ **Adam kɔrigi.**
        fowl FOC Adam slaughter
        'Adam slaughtered fowl.'

(2)   Q: **ŋuni** $\boxed{\textbf{n}}$ **tum?**
        who FOC work
        'Who worked?'

     A: **Adam** $\boxed{\textbf{n}}$ **tum.**
        Adam FOC work
        'Adam worked.'

Dagbani – In-situ focus

- In-situ focus is available for objects marked with **la** (3), but not for subjects (4).

(3) Q **Adam kɔrigi** | **la** | **bɔ?**
Adam slaughter FOC what
'What did Adam slaughter?'

A: **Adam kɔrigi** | **la** | **noo.**
Adam slaughter FOC fowl
'Adam slaughtered a fowl.'

(4) Q: ***ŋuni tum (** | **la** | **)?**

A: **# Adam tum (** | **la** | **).**

Dagbani – In-situ focus

- ▶ The in-situ focus marker *la* (nearly) always follows the verb directly, independent of what is focused (5).
- ▶ Ex-situ and in-situ focus markers cannot co-occur (6).

(5) Q: **Ya ka Adam me yili?**
        where FOC Adam build house
        'Where did Adam build a house?'

  A: **Adam mɛ la yili tiŋpaŋa.**
        Adam build LA house village
        'Adam built the house in the village'

(6) a. ***Tiŋpaŋa ka Adam mɛ la yili.**
  b. ***Adam m mɛ la yili tiŋpaŋa.**

Dagaare

Dagaare – Ex-situ focus

► The focused element is fronted and followed always by the
  particle **lá** or **no** or sometimes **ŋ**, depending on the dialect.

(7) Q: **Aa** ⟨no⟩ **ŋmaa** **a** **yir?**
    who FOC build.PFV DEF house
    'Who built the house?'

  A: **Adam** ⟨(no)⟩ **ŋmaa** **a** **yir.**
    Adam FOC build.PFV DEF house
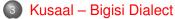   'Adam built a house.'

(8) Q: **Boo** ⟨no⟩ **Adam ŋmaa?**
    what FOC Adam build.PFV
    'What did Adam build?'

  A: **Yir** ⟨no⟩ **Adam ŋmaa.**
    house FOC Adam build.PFV
    'Adam built a house.'

Dagaare – In-situ focus

▶ In-situ focus is similar to Dagbani in that there is a fixed position for the focus particle immediately following the verb, independent of what is focused.

(9)   Q: **Boo** $\boxed{\textbf{no}}$ **Ziema wa ko Napog?**
            what FOC Ziema PST give Napog
            'What did Ziema give to Napog?'
      A: **Ziema wa ko-**$\boxed{\textbf{n}}$ **Napog yuor.**
            Ziema PST give.PFV-FOC Napog bowl
            'Ziema gave a bowl to Napog.'

(10)   Q: **Aa** $\boxed{\textbf{no}}$ **Ziema wa ko a yuor?**
            who FOC Ziema PST give DEF bowl
            'Who did Ziema give a bowl to?'
      A: **Ziema wa ko-**$\boxed{\textbf{n}}$ **Napog yuor.**
            Ziema PST give.PFV-FOC Napog bowl
            'Ziema gave a bowl to Napog.'

Kusaal – Bigisi Dialect

Bigisi Kusaal – Ex-situ focus

- ► Kusaal ex-situ object wh-elements and their corresponding answers are marked by **ka** (11).
- ► Subject questions are obligatorily ex-situ and marked by **nɛ**, whereas the answers can be in-situ and unmarked (12).

(11) Q: **Anɔʼɔn** $\boxed{\textbf{ka}}$ **Ziema tis   yʊʊr la?**
          who   FOC Ziema give pot   DET
          'To whom did Ziema give the pot?'

      A: **Napog** $\boxed{\textbf{ka}}$ **Ziema tis   yʊʊr la.**
          who   FOC Ziema give pot   DET
          'Ziema gave the pot to Napog.'

(12) Q   **Anɔʼɔn-** $\boxed{\textbf{ɛ}}$ **kɔdig   nua la?**
          who-FOC   slaughter fowl DET
          'Who slaughtered fowl?'

      A   **Adam (** $\boxed{\textbf{mɛ}}$ **) kɔdig   nua la.**
          Adam FOC   slaughter fowl DET
          'Adam slaughtered the fowl.'

Bigisi Kusaal – In-situ focus

- ▶ In-situ object wh-questions and answers are also possible, where the in-situ marker is optional with wh-elements.
- ▶ Importantly, if the in-situ marker occurs, it is always attached to the verb.

(13) Q: **Ziema tisi(-‌nɛ‌) Napog bɔ?**
          Ziema give-FOC Napog what
          'What did Ziema give Napog?'

      A: **Ziema tis-‌nɛ‌   Napog yʊʊr.**
          Ziema give-FOC Napog pot
          'Ziema gave Napog a pot.'

(14) Q   **Adam kɔdig(-‌nɛ‌)   bɔ?**
          Adam slaughter-FOC what
          'What did Adam slaughter?'

      A   **Adam kɔdig-‌nɛ‌   nua.**
          Adam slaughter-FOC fowl
          'Adam slaughtered fowl.'

Bigisi Kusaal – In-situ focus

- ▶ In-situ and ex-situ focus marking cannot be combined.

(15)　Q:　***Anɔʼɔn** $\boxed{\text{ka}}$ **Ziema tis-** $\boxed{\text{nɛ}}$ **yʊʊr la?**
　　　　　who　　FOC　Ziema give-FOC pot　DET
　　　　　'Whom did Ziema give a pot?'

　　　A:　***Napog** $\boxed{\text{ka}}$ **Ziema tis-** $\boxed{\text{nɛ}}$ **Napog yʊʊr.**
　　　　　'Ziema gave NAPOG a pot.'

(16)　Q　***Anɔʼɔn-** $\boxed{\text{ɛ}}$ **tis-** $\boxed{\text{nɛ}}$ **Napog yʊʊr-ɛ?**
　　　　　who-FOC　　give-FOC Napog pot-FV
　　　　　'Who gave Napog a pot?'

　　　A　***Adam** $\boxed{\text{mɛ}}$ **tis-** $\boxed{\text{nɛ}}$ **Napog yʊʊr-ɛ.**
　　　　　'ADAM gave Napog a pot.'

Sisaali

Sisaali – Ex-situ focus

- ▶ The focused element is fronted and followed always by the particle **lɛ/rɛ/nɛ** or **nɪ/nɛ**, depending on the dialect.

(17) Q: **Annɛ ⃞rɛ kpo gyimii ho?**
          who FOC kill fowl DEF
          'Who slaughtered the fowl?'

      A: **Adama ⃞rɛ kpo gyimii ho.**
          Adama FOC kill fowl DEF
          'Adama slaughtered the fowl.'

(18) Q: **Bekiŋ ⃞nɛ Adama kpo?**
          what FOC Adama kill
          'What did Adama slaughter?'

      A: **Gyimii ⃞rɛ Adama kpo.**
          fowl FOC Adama kill
          'Adama killed a fowl.'

Sisaali – In-situ focus

▶ In-situ focus is formed by putting the same focus marker as in ex-situ focus at the end of the clause. It cannot follow the focused constituent immediately. In-situ questions are not possible.

(19) Q: **Bekiŋ nɛ Duma tiya Luri?**
       what   FOC Duma give Luri
       'What did Duma give Luri?'

    A: **Duma tiya Luri vii rɛ.**
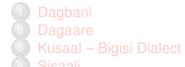   Duma give Luri pot FOC
       'Duma gave Luri a pot.'

(20) Q: **Annɛ rɛ Duma tiya vii?**
       who   FOC Duma give pot
       'Who did Duma give a pot to?'

    A: **Duma tiya Luri vii rɛ.**
       Duma give Luri pot FOC
       'Duma gave Luri a pot.'

    A: *__**Duma tiya Luri rɛ vii.**__

Gurene

Gurene – Ex-situ focus

- ▶ Gurene marks ex-situ objects with **ti** (21) and ex-situ subjects with **n** (22).
- ▶ Ex-situ subject marking is optional in many cases.

(21) Q: **Beni** $\boxed{\text{ti}}$ **Adam kõregɛ?**
  what FOC Adam slaughter
  'What did Adam slaughter?'

  A: **Nua** $\boxed{\text{ti}}$ **Adam kõregɛ?**
  fowl FOC Adam slaughter
  'Adam slaughtered fowl.'

(22) Q: **Ani (** $\boxed{\text{n}}$ **) daa mɛ yire?**
  who FOC PST build house
  'Who built a house?'

  A: **Adam (** $\boxed{\text{n}}$ **) daa mɛ yire.**
  Adam FOC PST build house
  'Adam built a house.'

Gurene – In-situ focus

- ▶ In-situ focus is also possible and actually obligatory with non-subject in-situ questions.
- ▶ In-situ focus cannot co-occur with ex-situ focus (24).

(23)   Q: **Adam kõrege-ri**   **la**   **beni?**
           Adam slaughter-IPFV FOC what
           'What is Adam slaughtering.'

      A: **Adam kõrege-ri**   **la**   **nua.**
           Adam slaughter-IPFV FOC nua
           'Adam is slaughtering fowl.'

(24)   Q   *__Ani__ **n** **da** **la** **beni?**
           who FOC buy FOC what
           'Who bought what?'

      A   *__Napari__ **n** **da** **la** **yire.**
           Napari FOC buy FOC house
           'Napari bought a house.'

Gurene – In-situ focus

▶ The in-situ focus marker always immediately precedes the
  focused constituent.

(25) Q: **Ziema bɔ   Napog $\boxed{\text{la}}$ beni?**
         Ziema give Napog FOC what
         'What did Ziema give to Napog?'

     A: **Ziema bɔ   Napog $\boxed{\text{la}}$ dukɔ.**
         Ziema gave Napog FOC pot
         'Ziema gave a pot to Napog.'

(26) Q: **Sankani $\boxed{\text{ti}}$ Adam kõrege   ni nua la?**
         when   FOC Adam slaughter NI fowl DET
         'When did Adam slaughter the fowl?'

     A: **Adam zaam   kõregɛ   nua $\boxed{\text{la}}$ zaam.**
         Adam yesterday slaughter fowl LA yesterday
         'Adam slaughtered fowl yesterday.'

Kasem

Kasem – Ex-situ focus

- ▶ The focused element is fronted and followed always by the particle **mo**.

(27) Q: **Wɔ** ⟨**mo**⟩ **lɔge**   **sɔŋɔ?**
          who FOC build.PFV house
          'Who built a house?'

      A: **Ada** ⟨**mo**⟩ **lɔge**   **sɔŋɔ.**
          Ada FOC build.PFV house
          'Ada built a house.'

(28) Q: **Bɛ** ⟨**mo**⟩ **Ada goa?**
          what FOC Ada slaughter
          'What did Ada slaughter?'

      A: **Chworo** ⟨**mo**⟩ **Ada goa.**
          fowl   FOC Ada slaughter
          'Ada slaughtered a fowl.'

Kasem – In-situ focus

▶ In-situ focus is formed by putting the same focus marker as in ex-situ focus immediately after the focused constituent.

(29)   Q: **Ziema pɛ   bɛ   mo   Napog?**
             Ziema give what FOC Napog?
             'What did Ziema give to Napog?'

       Q: **Ziema pɛ Napog bɛ   mo ?**

       A: **Ziema pɛ   kambia   mo   Napog.**
             Ziema give pot   FOC Napog
             'Ziema gave Napog a pot.'

       A: **Ziema pɛ Napog kambia   mo .**

Likpakpaanl

Likpakpaanl – Ex-situ focus

- ▶ Ex-situ object wh-elements and their corresponding answers are followed by the particle **le** (30).
- ▶ Ex-situ subject marking is impossible in wh-questions but obligatory in their corresponding answers (31).

(30)   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.'

(31)   Q: **ŋma (*lè) tun?**
             who FOC work
             'Who worked?'

        A: **Adam *(lè) fé   tun (fénna).**
             Adam FOC HEST.PST work yesterday
             'Adam worked yesterday.'

Likpakpaanl – In-situ focus

- ▶ In-situ object wh-questions are also possible.
- ▶ The in-situ wh-element remains unmarked but the corresponding answer constituent is followed by **le** or **la**.
- ▶ The choice depends on whether the marker is sentence final or not.

(32) Q: **Konja mèè Sam ba?**
          Konja beg Sam what
          'What did Konja beg from Sam?'

      A1: **Konja mèè Sam ki-gban** $\boxed{\text{là}}$ **.**
          Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC
          'Konja begged a book from Sam.'

      A2: **Konja mèè Sam ki-gban** $\boxed{\text{lè}}$ **din.**
          Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC today
          'Konja begged a book from Sam today.'

Likpakaanl – In-situ focus

▶ The focus marker must immediately follow the focused
   constituent.

(33) Q: **Konja mèè ŋma ki-gban?**
          Konja beg who NC-book
          'Who did Konja beg a book from?'

      A: **Konja mèè Sam │lè│ ki-gban (din).**
          Konja beg Sam FOC NC-book today
          'Konja begged a book from SAM (today).'

(34) Q: **Konja mèè Sam ba?**
          Konja beg Sam what
          'What did Konja beg from Sam?'

      A: **Konja mèè Sam ki-gban │lè│ din.**
          Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC today
          'Konja begged a BOOK from Sam today.'

Likpakpaanl – In-situ focus

- ▶ the particle must follow a phrase in the spine of a finite clause (i.e. a VP or an argument DP).
- ▶ it cannot occur inside larger DPs (35) or after the verb (36)

(35) Q: **Mary kɔr ŋma aa-kɔla?**
          Mary kill who POSS-fowl
          'Whose fowl did Mary kill?'

      A: **Mary kɔr [_NP Peter (*lè) aa-kɔla] *(là)**
          Mary kill   Peter FOC POSS-fowl FOC
          'Mary killed PETER'S fowl.'

(36) Q: **Adam nan ŋa ukɔla ba?**
          Adam PST do fowl what
          'What did Adam do to a fowl?'

      A: **Adam nan [_VP kɔr (*lè) ukɔla] *(là).**
          Adam PST   slaughter FOC fowl   FOC
          'Adam SLAUGHTERED a fowl.'

Generalizations

Generalizations I

1. In all languages a focused constituent in the left periphery (ex-situ focus) is followed by a focus particle.

   (37)   [XP_F **foc** ...]

2. The languages differ mainly in their in-situ focus strategy:

Generalizations

▶ In **Dagbani**, the focus marker always follows the verb, independent of what is focused.

(38) a. ... T V-A | **lá** | **object**[FOC]
      b. ... **T V-A**[FOC] | **lá** | object

▶ In **Dagaare** also, the focus marker follows the verb, independent of what is focused.

(39) a. ... T V-A | **no** | **object**[FOC]
      b. ... **T V-A**[FOC] | **no** | object

▶ In **Kusaal**, the position of the focus marker is also fixed: it follows the verb for direct and indirect object focus.

(40) a. ... T V-A | **nɛ** | IO **DO**[FOC]
      b. ... T V-A | **nɛ** | **IO**[FOC] DO

▶ In **Sisaali**, the position of the focus marker is also fixed: it follows the VP for direct and indirect object focus.

(41) a. ... T A V IO **DO**[FOC] | **rɛ** |
      b. ... T A V **IO**[FOC] DO | **rɛ** |

Generalizations

▶ In **Gurenε**, the position of the focus marker varies: it immediately precedes the focused constituent.

(42)

		T V-A	**la**	**object**$_{[FOC]}$		adverb
a.	...	T V-A	**la**	**object**$_{[FOC]}$		adverb
b.	...	T V-A		object	**la**	**adverb**$_{[FOC]}$

▶ In **Kasem**, the position of the focus marker varies: it immediately follows the focus constituent.

(43)

		T A V	**IO**$_{[FOC]}$	**mo**	DO	
a.	...	T A V	**IO**$_{[FOC]}$	**mo**	DO	
b.	...	T A V	IO		**DO**$_{[FOC]}$	**mo**

▶ In **Likpakpaanl**, the focus marker is right-adjacent to the constituent in the clause that is focused or contains the focused element.

(44)

		T A V	IO		**DO**$_{[FOC]}$	**lè**
a.	...	T A V	IO		**DO**$_{[FOC]}$	**lè**
b.	...	T A V	**IO**$_{[FOC]}$	**lè**	DO	

Outlook

- ▶ The focus strategies in the Mabia languages provide an excellent testing ground for hypotheses of the syntactic structure of focus.
- ▶ The fact that focus markers can occur inside or at the edge of the VP provides overt morphological evidence for the idea of a low focus phrase in the vP phase (see Belletti 2004)).

Theoretical questions we try to investigate

▶ Are there two focus projections in all the Mabia languages (a high one for ex-situ and a low one for in-situ focus) or do the languages differ structurally?

▶ The data we have gathered so far, suggest interesting interactions of (ex-situ) focus and aspect. This is surprising given that they are separate syntactic categories. If this is true, how can it be derived?

Literature on the Languages

Here, we can only provide a brief excerpt of literature on the languages. More literature can be found on our website (it is constantly growing):

http://mabia-vp.com

Dagbani: Olawsky 1999; Issah 2020

Dagaare: Bodomo 1997; Ali et al. 2021

Kusaal: Abubakari 2018

Sisaali: Moran 2006

Gurene: Nsoh 1997; Atintono 2006, 2011

Kasem: Awedoba 1996

Likpakpaanl: Schwarz 2009; Acheampong prep

Thank you

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Gurene: Theresa Anamolga Salma, Daniel Asom Akolgo

Kasem: Addah Fedelix, Adda Samboh

Likpakpaanl: Samuel Acheampong

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