

# Morphological marking of in-situ focus in Mabia

Johannes Mursell, Katharina Hartmann, Anke Himmelreich  
[j.mursell | k.hartmann | himmelreich]@lingua.uni-frankfurt

31st Colloquium on Generative Grammar  
Palma, June 1-3, 2022

## 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

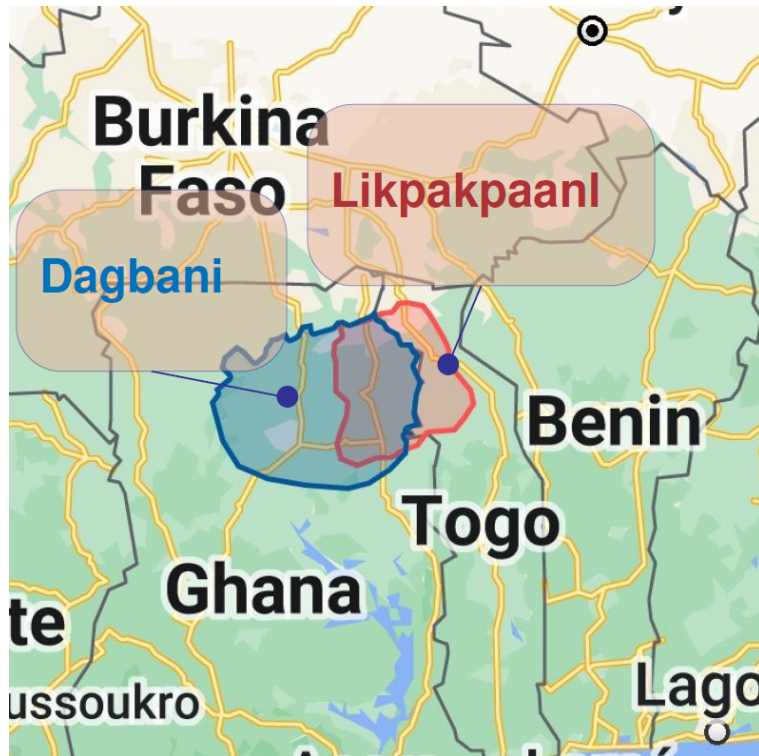


Figure 1: Map of Dagbani and Likpakpaanl

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

## 3 Background Dagbani & Likpakpaanl

### Basic syntax – Dagbani

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

- (1) a. Dawuni kú-r-í sòðnsí máá.  
Dawuni kill-IPFV-CJ rabbits DEF  
'Dawuni kills the rabbits.'
- b. Páyà máá tí bíhí nyùlí zùṅò.  
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 fénnà.  
 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) Û-píí gbààn **bī** ɲáál 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 búŋlòyú máa bée a **dáa-r-í** lá búŋlòyú 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 búŋlòyú 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 mềè 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 mềè Sam **ba**?  
 Konja beg Sam what  
 ‘What did Konja beg from Sam?’

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

A2: Konja mềè 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 kɔr **ɲma** 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?’

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

Q: Adam nan ɲa 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.’

(14) Q: À kan [NP u-ja u lèn kè Peter kɔr ukɔla 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)** kɔr ukɔla 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**<sub>[FOC]</sub>  
 b. ... **V-TAM**<sub>[FOC]</sub> 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**<sub>[FOC]</sub> lè  
 b. ... V-TAM **IO**<sub>[FOC]</sub> 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

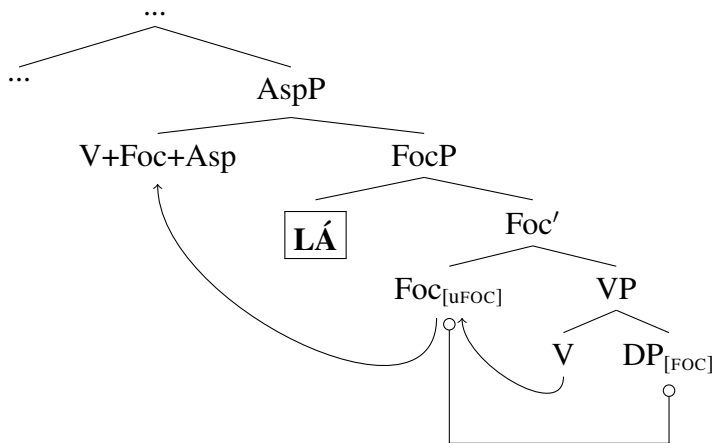
- Dagbani has a low focus projection (in addition to a high focus position marked by ká) that contains the focus marker lá and that the in-situ focused constituent agrees with. Therefore, the focus marker is in a fixed position.
- The verb undergoes head movement first to the focus head and then to the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

### Likpakpaanl

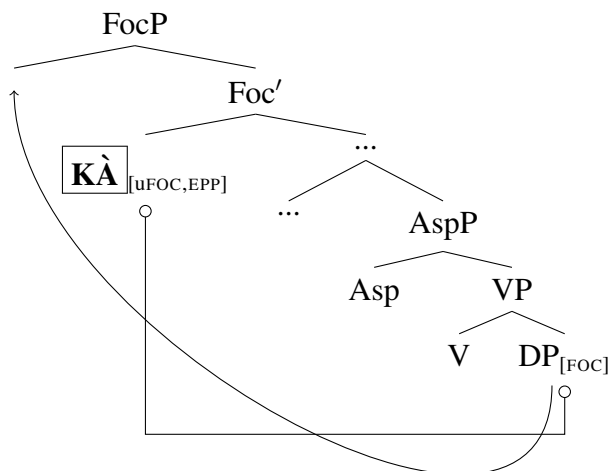
- Likpakpaanl has only a high focus position that the in-situ focused constituent agrees with. There is no evidence for a low focus projection. That is why there is only one focus marker.
- The focus marker lè is right-adjointed to the focused element. Therefore, it has a variable position.
- Furthermore,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

**Focus in Dagbani****Assumptions for in-situ focus:**

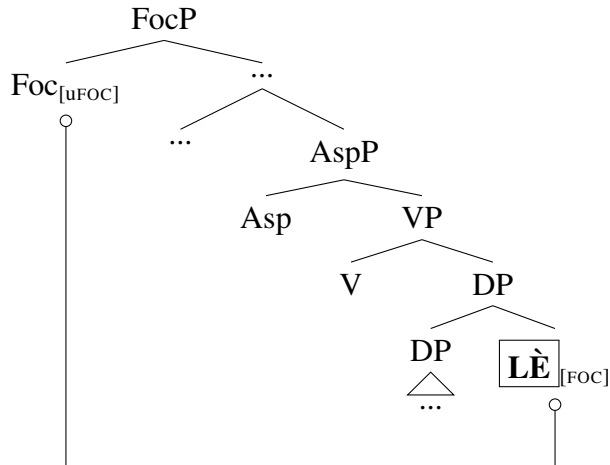
(17)

**Focus in Dagbani****Assumptions for ex-situ focus:**

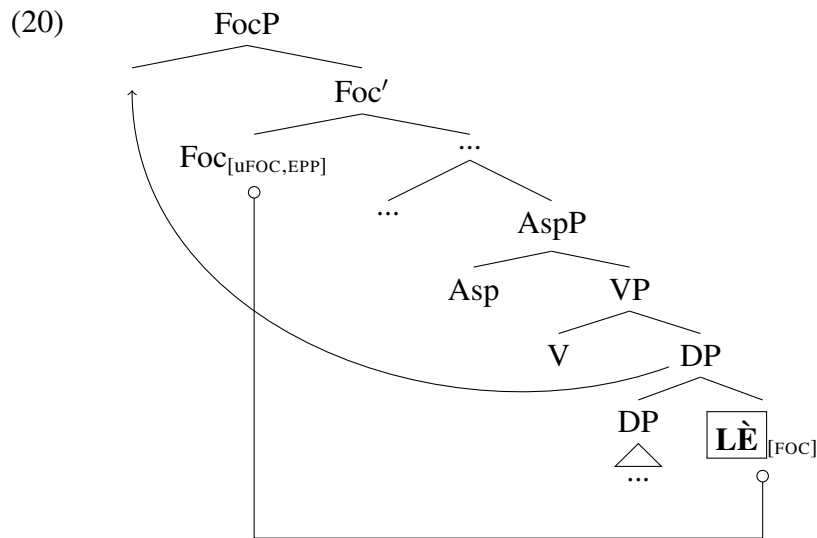
(18)

**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.

## References

- Belletti, A. (2004). Aspects of the low IP area. In L. Rizzi (Ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*, pp. 16–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Issah, S. A. (2020). *On the structure of A-bar construction in Dagbani*. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Mursell, J. (2021). *The Syntax of Information Structural Agreement*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Olawsky, K. J. (1999). *Aspects of Dagbani grammar*. Munich: Lincom.
- Schwarz, A. (2009). How many focus markers are there in Konkomba? In M. Matondo (Ed.), *Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, Sommerville, pp. 182–192. Cascadia Proceedings Project.