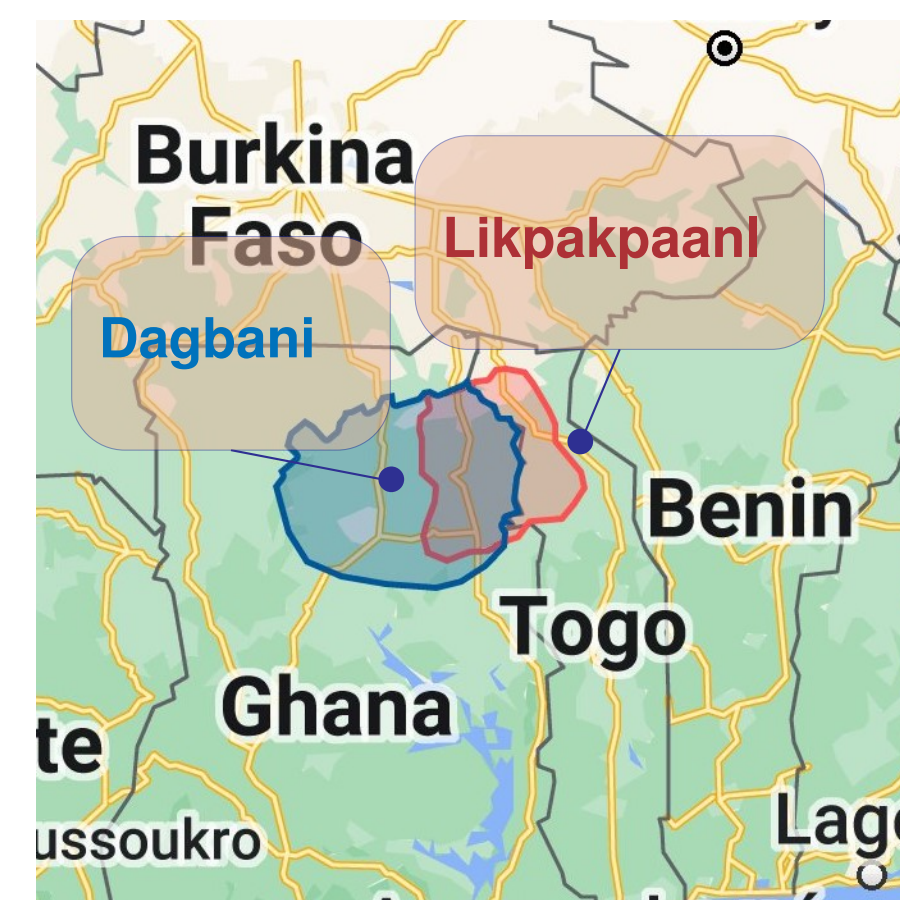


## Overview & Claims

- We discuss the distribution of in-situ **focus markers** in two closely related Mbia 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. **Likpakpaani** (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).

## Mabia languages



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

## Dagbani focus

- (1) *in-situ DO focus in Dagbani*  
 Q: 'What did Napari buy?'  
 A: Napari dá lá búá.  
 Napari buy.PFV FOC goat  
 'Napari bought A GOAT.'
- (2) *in-situ verbal focus in Dagbani*  
 Q: 'Are you pushing the wagon?'  
 A: N vóri lá búŋlɔ́yú máa.  
 2SG pull.IPFV FOC wagon DEF  
 'I am PULLING the wagon.'
- (3) *ex-situ DO focus in Dagbani*  
 Q: 'What did Napari buy?'  
 A: Búá kà Napari dá.  
 goat FOC Napari buy.PFV  
 'Napari bought a GOAT.'

## Likpakpaanl focus

- (4) ***in-situ DO focus in Likpakpaanl***  
 Q: 'What did Konja beg from Sam?'  
 A: Konja mềè Sam **ki-gban** **là**.  
 Konja beg Sam NC-book FOC  
 'Konja begged a BOOK from Sam.'
- (5) ***in-situ IO focus in Likpakpaanl***  
 Q: 'Who did Konja beg a book from?'  
 A: Konja mềè **Sam** **lề** ki-gban.  
 Konja beg Sam FOC NC-book  
 'Konja begged a book from SAM.'
- (6) ***ex-situ DO focus in Likpakpaanl***  
 Q: 'What did Adam slaughter?'  
 A: **Ukola** **lề** Adam nan kor.  
 fowl FOC Adam PST slaughter  
 'Adam slaughtered a FOWL.'

## Likpakpaani XP-internal focus

- (7) *in-situ possessor focus in Likpakpaanl*  
 Q: 'Whose fowl did Mary kill?'  
 A: Mary kər [ **Peter** **(\*lè)** aa-kɔla ] **(\*là)** ?  
 Mary kill Peter FOC POSS-fowl FOC  
 'Mary killed PETER'S fowl.'
- (8) *in-situ focus in finite RelC in Likpakpaanl*  
 Q: 'Did you see the man that said that Peter killed fowl?'  
 A: Aayi, n kan uja [ u lèn kè **John** **lè** kər ukɔla na].  
 no I see man REL say C J. FOC kill fowl DEF  
 'No, I saw the man that said that JOHN killed fowl.'
- (9) *in-situ V focus in Likpakpaanl*  
 Q: 'What did Adam do to a fowl?'  
 A: Adam nan **kər** **(\*lè)** ukɔla **(\*là)** .  
 Adam PST slaughter FOC fowl FOC  
 'Adam SLAUGHTERED a fowl.'

## Observations

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:

- (10) a. ... **V-TAM** lá **object**<sub>[FOC]</sub>  
 b. ... **V-TAM**<sub>[FOC]</sub> lá **object**

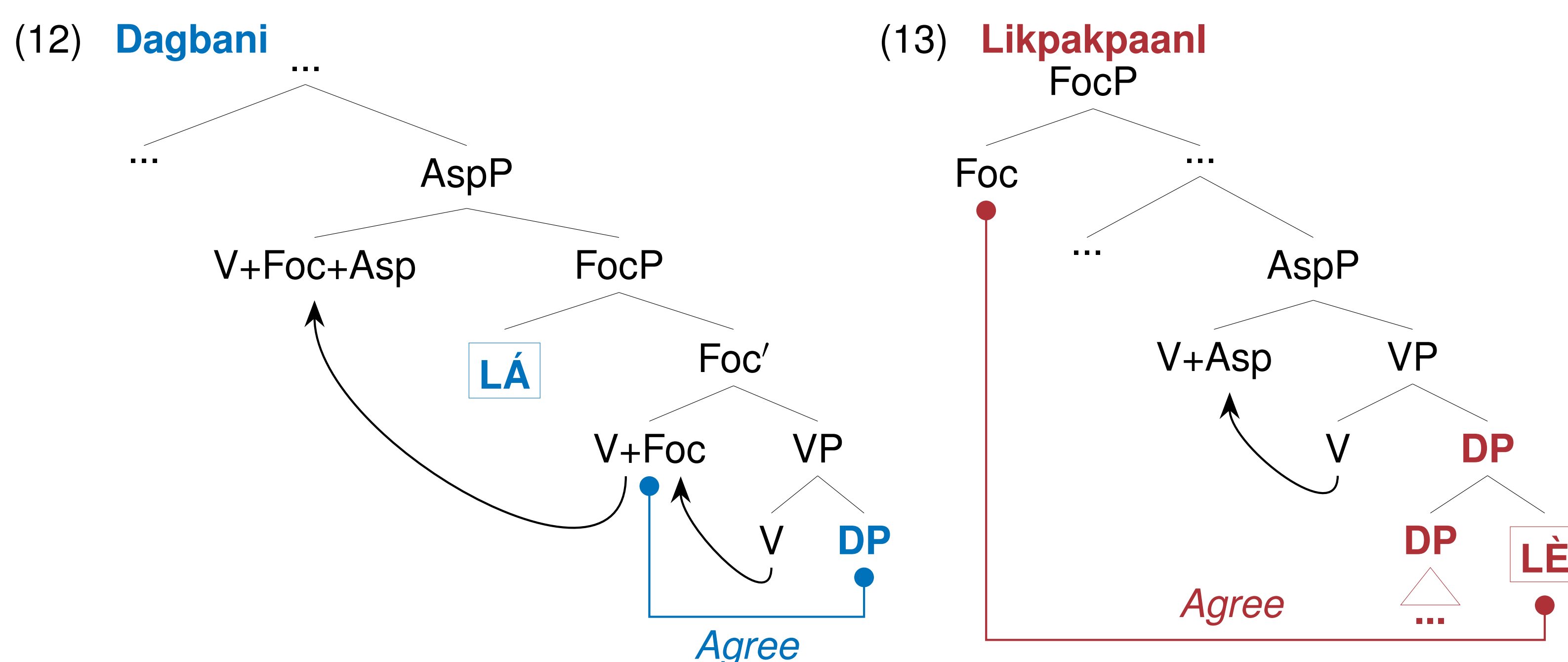
- ### 3. Ex-situ focus is marked by a different focus marker **ká**.

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

- (11) 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*.

## Analysis



## Assumptions

- **Focused constituents need to agree with a focus head.**
- 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 continues moving up.
- 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.

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