

Focus marking in Dagbani

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the semantics of focus marking in Dagbani, a Gur language spoken in Ghana, arguing that the language marks two kinds of focus: contrastive and presentational focus. It further argues that contrary to previous analysis of Dagbani such as Olawsky (1999), the particles *ka*, *n*, *la*, and *mi* all mark focus in the language. Typologically, Dagbani is unlike many languages, as contrastive focus is marked only by the presence of one of these focus markers, while constituents that are not marked by any focus particle are presentational focus positions. The analysis is presented using mainly Kiss's (1998) distinction between the two types of focus and a test of contrastivity devised by Szabolcsi (1981). While Szabolcsi's test can be used to show exhaustive identification of constituents focused by *ka*, *n*, and *la*, it fails to show exhaustivity in verbs that are focused by the particle *mi*.

Keywords: Dagbani; Gur; focus marking; contrastive focus; presentational focus; exhaustivity

1 Introduction

Even though previous account of Dagbani (Olawsky 1999) discusses focus marking in the language, the role of the particles *ka*, *n*, *la*, and *mi* as focus markers has not been fully explored. Of these particles, *ka* has received the most attention as a focus marker, as it marks focus through movement of the focused element into initial position at LF, or positioning of the particle clause-initially. *la* has not received a detailed analysis as a focus marker in Dagbani. Olawsky (1999), for instance, includes it among aspectual markers but notes a number of problems with such an analysis, and presents the evidence suggesting its role as a focus marker. He also treats *mi* only as an emphatic marker added to the imperfective marker *di* when no object follows, to form *di-mi*. But the particle *n* has not been identified as a focus marker. This paper argues that all these particles are focus markers. It further shows that each of them marks contrastive focus, while focused constituents that are not marked with any particle are presentational focus positions. In many languages, the focus type of a constituent depends on its structural position in the sentence. (See Kiss 1998 for a review of languages that show this pattern, including English, Hungarian, Italian, Rumanian, Catalan, Greek, Arabic, and Finnish). But in Dagbani, a constituent can not mark contrastive focus unless it has a focus particle. This makes Dagbani different from these languages.

The analysis makes use of Kiss (1998)'s distinction between these two types of focus (contrastive and presentational focus), which she refers to as identificational focus and information focus. Contrastive focus does not convey new information but expresses exhaustive identification as the specifier of a functional projection; differing from presentational focus which marks new non-presupposed information and involves no movement. Details on the distinction between the two types of focus including their distributional features are discussed and applied to Dagbani focus markers.

While all the particles mark focus in situ, *ka* additionally marks focus through movement to initial position, forming a cleft construction. *n* also creates a cleft; but unlike *ka*, it focuses sentence-initial constituents while the other particles focus non-initial elements. The particles also mark positions with different grammatical and thematic roles. *ka* focuses objects and other constituents that are underlyingly in post-verbal position, *n* focuses the subject that is also the agent or experiencer, and *la* goes with the object that performs the role of goal, theme or destination. *mi*, on the other hand, focuses the action, event, or state encoded by the verb in the sentence. An example for each particle is shown in (1); with pairs showing none contrastively focused variants of each position. In this paper, contrastive focus is shown in bold type while presentational focus is presented in small capital fonts. Note that the perfective marker becomes zero in a sentence when it has an object or when the verb is followed by a focus marker¹.

(1) Dagbani focus particles.

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. i. n zaŋ-∅ AMINA na.
1sg. take-∅ Amina loc.
I brought AMINA | ii. Amina ka n zaŋ-∅ na
Amina foc. 1sg. take-perf. loc.
It is Amina that I brought |
| b. i. N zaŋ∅ Amina na.
1sg. take-perf. Amina loc.
I brought Amina | ii. mani n zaŋ∅ Amina na
1sg.emph. foc. take Amina loc.
It is me who brought Amina |
| c. i. Abu tʃaŋ∅ DA: ni.
Abu go-perf. market loc.
Abu went to the MARKET | ii. Abu tʃaŋ∅-la da: ni.
Abu go-perf.-foc market loc.
Abu went to the market |
| d. i Adam DA-∅ (li)
Adam buy-perf (3sg.inanim.)
Adam BOUGHT (it). | ii. Adam da -∅ (li) mi
Adam buy-perf (3sg.inanim.) foc.
Adam bought (it). |

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper include: 1, 2, and 3 = first, second and third person respectively, anim. = animate, conj. = conjunction, emph = emphatic, foc. = focus, fut. = future, imperf = imperfective, inanim. = inanimate, loc. = locative, neg. = negative morpheme, perf = perfective, pl. = plural, sg. = singular, TD = time depth marker.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: In the next section, features of the two types of focussed constituents are presented and the distinction between them shown. Section 3 discusses the particles further and shows how they mark contrastive focus. In section 4, one of these features is used to show the distinction between the two focus notions in Dagbani, demonstrating that all these mark contrastive focus. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2 Contrastive and presentational focus

Kiss's (1998) account of the difference between the two focus notions hinges mainly on exhaustivity and movement. She defines contrastive focus semantically as one that represents the value of the variable bound by an abstract operator expressing exhaustive identification, and syntactically as the constituent that acts as an operator moving into scope position and binding a variable. Contrastive focus 'represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds' (Kiss 1998 246). Since some sentences are not marked for it, this focus type is non-obligatory.

This contrasts with presentational focus which is obligatorily expressed in every sentence and marked by a pitch accent. It is expressed by a phrase that conveys new and non-presupposed information without any movement, and that does not express exhaustive identification on given entities. The two focus notions also differ in that whereas presentational focus places no restriction on constituents that mark it, some constituents such as universal quantifiers and *also*-phrases can not express contrastive focus. The differences between the two types of focus can be summarised in (2).

(2) Differences between contrastive and presentational focus (Kiss 1998).

Contrastive focus	Presentational focus
expresses exhaustive identification	marks non-presupposition
restriction on some constituents, e.g. universal quantifiers, <i>also</i> -phrases etc	no restriction on constituents
takes scope	does not take scope
moved to spec position	no movement involved
always co-extensive with an XP available for operator movement	either smaller or larger
can be iterated	can project
may not be in a sentence	present in every sentence

The next section presents a detailed discussion on the focus markers showing mainly contrastive focus is marked.

3 Dagbani focus Markers

3.1 *ka*

This particle focuses post-verbal constituents by pre-posing them into initial position and forming a cleft construction. Subjects and other preverbal constituents can only be clefted with the use of *n* focus marker, as discussed in below. Constituents that can be focused include noun phrases, emphatic pronouns and adjuncts. These are shown in (3).

(3) Focusing with *ka*.

- | | | | |
|----|---|---|--|
| a. | n zaŋ-Ø AMINA na
1sg. take-perf. Amina loc.
I brought AMINA | > | Amina ka n zaŋ-Ø na
Amina foc. 1sg. take-perf loc.
It is Amina that I brought (not Adam) |
| b. | Baba ŋa-Ø DO SO ŋUN BE DU: MA:
B. see-perf. man.sg. who be room def.
Baba saw THE MAN IN THE ROOM | > | do so ŋun be du: ma: ka Baba ŋa-Ø
man.sg. who be room def. foc. B. see.perf.
It is the man in the room that Baba saw,
(not the man standing behind me) |
| c. | ti da:tfaŋ tiŋ BOBGU
1pl. TD go city several
We went to SEVERAL CITIES | > | tiŋ bobgu ka ti da:tfaŋ
city several foc. 1pl. TD go
It is to several cities that we went, (not only
Accra) |
| d. | ji so ŋa-Ø do: ma: SOHILA
3pl. TD see-perf. man def. yesterday
You saw the man YESTERDAY | > | sohila ka ji so ŋa do: ma
yesterday foc. 3pl. TD see man def.
It is yesterday that you saw the man,
(not earlier today) |
| e. | bi juri MA
3pl. love 1sg.obj.
They love ME | > | mani ka bi jura
1sg.emph. foc. 3pl. love
It is me that they love, (not my daughter) |

Adverbials of time display an exceptional pattern in that they can be pre-posed and focused in initial position without the use of *ka*. Thus (3d) could be expressed as it would normally be done in English, (4a), just like the adverbial *pumponjo* in (4b). The only exception is when they occur in WH questions, in which case the use of *ka* becomes obligatory, as shown in (4c and d). When these adverbials are pre-posed without the use of *ka*, the contrastive reading we get with the use of *ka* is lost.

(5a ii) occurs as an imperative given by a hunter to his son in a context where the latter spots a bird within a reasonable distance, and informs his father. In this context, a number of options the boy might be considering, which the father should be aware of, include calling on the father to kill the game, shooting the bird, or throwing his stick at it. The question in (5a ii) is thus not one that demands an answer, but focuses one of these options in his instruction to the young hunter on what action to take, a feature that is lacking in (5a i). The hunter is thus instructing the son to forget about any other option and take what he has chosen for him². A similar context could be imagined for (4b iii). Thus the focus value of *ka* in (5) depends on shared knowledge of the context that the speaker has with the listener.

(5b i) shows that pre-posing *ka* in initial position of a non-negative sentence changes the grammatical function of this morpheme into a conjunction. And as was already noted in the previous examples, the second reading of (5a i) and (5b ii) each presents a meaning similar to (5a ii) and (5b iii) respectively, the only difference being the lack of focus in the former.

Another difference between focusing entire clauses with *ka* and focusing pre-posed elements with the same is that the former is achieved only with the pitch accent unique to questions that begin with the person pronoun, as shown in the second readings of (5a i) and (5b ii). Without this accent, *ka* in (5a ii) and (5b iii) loses its focus value, rendering the sentences a simple negative statements. Keeping much of the context already sketched out that gives *ka* its focus value in (5a ii), (see footnote 2 and preceding discussion) a different context could emerge where *ka* would lose its focus value. If the hunter had seen his son looking at the bird and never made an attempt at killing it, or drawing his (hunter's) attention until the bird flew away, the hunter might narrate the story to his son later on thus: *I saw you from a distance looking at a bird. ka a bɪ labɪ-rɪ o* (And I noticed) that you were not throwing/making an attempt to throw (your stick) at it until it flew away. In this context, *ka* is being used as a conjunction between the two clauses.

(5b iii) could also occur in a context where a person who is sick or under some condition and refuses to eat is told: *you are sick and (I observe that) you are not eating*. In the two contexts sketched here, there is a sense of disapproval, although it may not always be present, as the person addressed failed to do what was expected under the circumstance. This second focus function of *ka* (focusing whole clauses) will not be discussed any further in the rest of this paper. Any reference to *ka* as a focus marker will be restricted to its use after constituents have been moved into initial position.

3.2 *n focus*

*n*³ focuses the noun phrase or emphatic pronoun in subject position. It produces a cleft construction and differs from *ka* only in that no overt surface movement is involved. Where the sentence has a non-pronominal subject, the only measure that is taken to focus the subject is the insertion of the focus marker, as in (6a, b and c). But where the subject is pronominal, it becomes emphatic when focused, as (6d and e) show.

² In the larger folk story in which this imperative occurs, the reply of the son's is: 'there is no hunting stick'. Then the father responds: 'come for one'. Then the child says "the bird has flown".

³ The place of articulation of this nasal changes due to nasal place assimilation, as shown in the examples below.

- (6) Focusing with the particle *n*.
- a. i. AMINA tcaŋ-∅ da: ni
Amina go-perf. market loc.
AMINA went
- ii. **Amina** n tcaŋ-∅ da: ni
Amina foc. go-perf. market loc.
It is **Amina** who went, (not Asana)
- b. i. kum mali Abu
Hunger has Abu
Abu is HUNGRY
- ii. **kum** m mali Abu
hunger foc. has Abu
It is **hunger** that Abu feels (not sickness)
- c. i. DA:ni tʃAN-di mali Amina
market go-imperf. has Amina
A. has the desire to GO TO THE MARKET. It is **the desire to go to the market** that
- ii. **da:ni tʃan-di** m mali Amina
market go-imperf. foc. have Amina
Amina has (not the desire to shop)
- d. i. N zaŋ-∅ Amina na
1sg. take-perf. Amina loc.
I brought Amina
- ii. **mani** n zaŋ-∅ Amina na
1sg.emph. foc. take-perf. Amina loc.
It is **me** who brought Amina. (She did not come by herself)
- e. i. JI be du:
2pl. be room
YOU are in the room
- ii. **jinimi** n be du:
2pl.emph foc. be room.
'It is **you folks** who are in the room (and no one else).

3.3 Focusing with *la*

Olawsky (1999) includes *la* among aspectual markers (although he glosses it both as an aspectual and a focus marker) that marks both habitual and continuous meaning inserted between the verb and the object. He uses the data in (7) as exemplifying the process.

(7) *la* as an aspectual marker?⁴

- a. Fati bari la tʃetʃe
 Fati ride imperf.foc. bicycle
 Fati is riding a bicycle
- b. m bɔhindi la Dagbanli
 I learn imperf.foc. Dagbani
 I am learning Dagbani.

(Olawsky 1999: 38)

But he also notes the lack of relationship between tense and aspect on the one hand, and the function of this marker on the other, as well as the possibility that *la* may actually mark emphasis. For instance, in Dagbani, transitive and intransitive verbs that occur in sentence final positions (i.e. with no overt objects) are obligatorily marked for aspect, (8a and b). If *la* were an aspectual marker, we would expect it to occur in such final positions. But *la* does not occur in such positions as (8c) shows.

(8) *la* versus aspectual markers.

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. i. baa kpi-ja
dog die-perf
A dog has died/is dead | ii. baa kpi-ra
dog die-imperf
A dog dies/is dying |
| b. i. Abu da-ja
Abu buy-perf.
Abu has bought | ii. Abu da-ra
Abu buy-imperf.
Abu buys/is buying |
| c. i. *Fati di-ri-la
Fati eat-imperf-la
*Fati is eating | ii. Fati di-ri-la bindirgu
Fati eat-imperf-la food
Fati is eating food |

Olawsky further observes that since focus markers only mark emphatic constituents, the non-occurrence of *la* before non-emphatic pronouns supports its role as a focus marker, rather than a marker of aspect. This view is further strengthened by the fact that *la* is followed by constituents of different categories besides objects, whereas aspectual markers typically occur before nouns. And since *la* does not focus the verb, there is no basis to argue that it is a portmanteau morpheme expressing both focus and aspect. Besides, as shown in (9b) below, failure to focus any constituent in a sentence with *la* does not necessarily mean that the verb loses its perfective meaning.

⁴ For the purpose of consistency, the transcription of all cited data on Dagbani has been slightly changed from the original.

- (9) Focusing with the particle *la*.
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. i. Abu da-∅ la bu-a . | ii. Abu da-∅- la bo ? |
| Abu buy-perf. foc goat-sg | Abu buy-perf-foc. what |
| Abu bought a goat | Abu bought what |
| b. i. Abu da-∅ bua | ii. Abu da-∅ bo ? |
| Abu buy-perf. goat | Abu buy-perf. what |
| Abu bought A GOAT | Abu bought WHAT? |
| c. i. Abu ti-∅ la mani | ii. Abu ti-∅ la ŋuni ? |
| Abu give-perf. foc. 1sg.emph. | Abu give-perf. foc. who |
| Abu gave (it to) me . | Abu gave who ? |
| d. i. Abu chaŋ-∅ la da: ni . | ii. Abu chaŋ-∅- la ja ? |
| Abu go-perf. foc market loc. | Abu go-perf-foc. where |
| Abu went to the market | Where did Abu go? |
| e. i. *Abu da-(la o | ii. Abu da-(- la bo |
| Abu buy-perf. foc 3.sg. | Abu buy-perf.-foc what. |
| Abu bought it | Abu bought what? |
| f. i. *Abu zu-(la | ii. *Abu n∅∅-(la ? |
| Abu steal-perf. foc. | Abu do-perf. foc. what |
| Abu stole | Abu did what? |

In (9), *la* always occurs before the focussed constituent, including full NPs, (9a), emphatic pronouns, (9c), adjuncts, (9d), and WH phrases, (9a – d), but not before non-emphatic pronouns, as in (9e). And this focussed element can not be elided, as in ungrammatical (9f).

The second sentence of each pair in the examples in (9), with the exception of (9b), shows the typical focussed question to which a focussed answer, the first of each pair, could be given. (9b) shows the non-focussed counterpart of (9a) and similar examples could be generated for the rest of the examples. (9f) is important in showing that the focused element in the sentence is neither the predicate nor the subject but whatever follows the verb.

Another piece of evidence against *la* being a marker of aspect is that, where as no single clause can be marked with two aspectual markers, *la* occurs with the imperfective aspectual marker. In fact, a more detailed gloss of the data in (7), cited from Olawsky (1999), will reveal that *ri* in *bari* (7a) and *di* in *bɔhindi* (7b) are the imperfective markers while *la* marks focus in both sentences. The two verb roots can be inflected with the perfective aspectual marker (*ba-ja* and *bɔhim-ja*) when they occur in sentence final positions, and with a zero perfective morpheme when they take an object or focus marker or both (*ba-* (*la* *bul* “rode a donkey” and *bɔhɔm-* (*la* *Dagbanli* “learnt Dagbani”).

3.4 Focusing with *mi*⁵

Of all the focus markers, the most difficult to analyse is *mi*. Like the other focus markers, *mi* shows contrast in focusing the action of the verb, as the examples in (10) illustrate. However, it does not pass the standard test of contrastivity proposed by Szabolcsi (1981), as will be shown in section 4.2.4.

(10) Focusing with the particle *mi*.

- a. Adam **da-∅** (li) mi
Adam buy-perf (3sg.inanim.) foc.
Adam **bought** (it). (He did not receive it for free).
- b. Baba **kuhi-ri** mi
Baba cry-imperf. foc.
'Baba **is crying**. (He is not laughing)
- c. tɔha da: ji kuli tʃani moʔu ni, o **doli-mi**. (Yahaya 1995: 20)
hunter TD when. ever go.impf. bush loc. 3sg. follow.perf.-foc.
Whenever the hunter was going to the bush he **would follow**'. (not stay at home)
- d. Kande **ka-∅-mi-na** da: ni
Kande come-perf.-foc.-loc. market loc.
Kande **came** to the market'. (She did not wander about in the neighbourhood)
- e. Abu **yeli-∅-mi** ni kum mali o
Abu say-perf.-foc. that hunger has 3sg.
Abu **said** that he is hungry'. (he did not leave us to guess from his looks).
- f. ?Fatima **bob** bob-gi mi
Fatima wear headscarf-sg foc.
Fatima **has worn** a headscarf'. (She is not going with her head uncovered)

An alternative analysis of *mi* presented by Olawsky is that it emphasises the imperfective marker *di* or its allomorph *ri* when the sentence does not have an object in final position. If

⁵ *mi* is generally realised in a sentence phonetically as *mi* as part of the pattern of neutralisation between /i/ and /ɨ/ in the language. Following tradition, which partly the results of the lack of /ɨ/ in the orthography, I represent the particle as *mi*. In actual examples, I show the actual phonetic realisation.

this were the most accurate description of the function of this particle, we would expect only examples such as (10b), where *mi* occurs with the imperfective morpheme, to be the only context in which this particle occurs. But as shown in other examples in (10), it occurs with perfective aspectual markers (10a, c, d and e) and in the Western Dialect; it possibly occurs disjoined from the verb in a sentence that has an object, (10f). These examples weaken the view that *mi* expresses imperfective aspect rather than focusing the verb.

In the rest of the paper, exhaustivity is used to show the extent to which the focus particles discussed in section 2 are contrastive.

4 Exhaustivity in Dagbani focus marking

4.1 Exhaustivity versus non-presupposition

Kiss identifies exhaustivity as the main motive for the distinction between contrastive and presentational focus. Every focus constituent either exhaustively identifies entities given in a context or marks them as information that is non-presupposed. This is illustrated using (4a), repeated in (11).

(11) Exhaustive identification with *n*.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| a. AMINA tʃaŋ-∅ da: ni | b. Amina n tʃaŋ-∅ da: ni |
| Amina go-perf. market loc. | Amina foc. go-perf. market loc. |
| AMINA went to the market | It is Amina who went to the market (not Asana) |

The example in (11b) describes a situation where one person out of potentially many people went to the market. It presents the referent of Amina as a member of the P-set of the discourse and goes further to assert that of the many people in this set, Amina went to the market and that no other person went to the market besides her. (11b) thus exhaustively identifies Amina as the only one who went to the market. This sentence would be contradicted by any other which has a different referent in place of that of Amina, (e.g. Asana), as in (12).

(12) Contradiction of (11b).

- ASANA tʃaŋ-∅ da: ni
 Asana go-perf. market loc.
 ASANA went to the market

But (11a) lacks these features. It introduces Amina only as new and non-presupposed information. Its focus value is derived from the unique pitch accent that makes it more emphatic than the other eligible position, *market*. But because it does not contrastively

identify *Amina* as the one that went to the market, it would not contradict (12).⁶ (11a) could be derived in a context such as the discourse in (13) from which the focus value of *Amina* could be inferred, but which says nothing about the action of other participants in the discourse.

(13) Potential discourse for (11a).

- a. AMINA mini ASANA ji- Ø pu: ni na.
Amina conj. Asana leave-perf. farm loc. loc.
AMINA and ASANA have arrived from farm
- b. AMINA a tʃaŋ- Ø da: ni
Amina go-perf. market loc.
AMINA went to the market.

An important syntactic feature that further distinguishes constituents that express exhaustivity from those that do not is the structural position each occupies. Kiss claims that while presentational focus does not have a unique syntactic position, exhaustivity can only be expressed by a constituent pre-posed into preverbal slot. In other words all contrastive focus positions must be preverbal, while presentational focus positions may occur VP-internally or in situ. This feature is shown to prevail in many languages including English, Hungarian, Italian, Rumanian, Catalan, Greek, Arabic, and Finnish.

Kiss also identifies the English cleft construction and its equivalents in other languages as the relevant position where exhaustivity is expressed in these languages. She illustrates this with the Greek equivalent of “it is to Petro that they lent the book”, (14).

(14) Preverbal position of contrastive focus in Greek (Tsimpli 1994)

- a. Ston Petro dhanisan to vivlio
to.the Petro lent.3pl the book
It is to Petro that they lent the book.
- b. Dhanisan to vivlio ston Petro
They lent the book to Petro

Dagbani is not like these languages, as the focus type of a position does not depend on its structural position. As already shown, exhaustivity is marked only by the presence of a

⁶ However, it is not perfectly sound to say (12) after (11a). A more natural discourse is achieved only by conjoining the two clauses, as in *Amina tʃaŋ- Ø da: ni ka Asana gba tʃaŋ-Ø daa ni* ‘Amina went to the market and Asana also went to the market’. Nevertheless, between (11b) and (12), such a conjunction would still be unacceptable.

focus particle in a position, and a focus position can only express exhaustivity if it is in the same position as the focus particle. Since the language has no fixed position in a sentence that all contrastive focus markers must occur, there can not be a fixed position that all constituents that express exhaustivity can be found. Thus two of the contrastive focus positions, *n* and *ka*, are preverbal (15a and b) while *la* and *mi* are post verbal (15c and d).

(15) Positions of contrastive focus in Dagbani

- a. **da: ni tʃan-di** m mali Amina
market loc. go-imperf. foc. have Amina

'It is **the desire to go to the market** that Amina has, (not the desire to shop)'

- b. **do so ŋun be du: ma:** ka Baba ŋa- Ø
man.sg. who be room def. foc. Baba. see.perf.

It is **the man in the room** that Baba saw.

- c. Abu da-Ø la **bu**a.
Abu buy-perf. foc. goat
Abu bought **a goat**

- d. kɔm maa **mahi** mi
water def. cold foc.
The water is **cold**

4.2 Test of exhaustivity

So far, the claim that each of the particles expresses contrastive focus has not been put to test. In the rest of this section, the particles are tested using a test devised by Szabolcsi (1981).

In Szabolcsi's test, pairs of sentences are used; the first containing two co-ordinate DPs that are focused, and differs from the second only in that one of the coordinate DPs of the latter is dropped. Exhaustivity depends on the lack of logical consequence between the two sentences. The focus expresses exhaustive identification only if the second sentence is not among the logical consequences of the first. The test for each particle is presented and discussed below.

4.2.1 ka

- (16) a **Amina** mini **Abiba** ka ti ŋa-Ø du: ma: ni
Amina conj. Abiba foc. 1pl. see-perf room def. loc.

It is **Amina** and **Abiba** that we saw in the room

- b. **Amina** ka ti ɲa-∅ du: ma: ni
Amina foc. 1pl. see-perf room def. loc.

It is **Amina** that we saw in the room

- (17) a. ti ɲa-∅ AMINA mini ABIBA du: ma: ni
1pl. see-perf Amina conj. Abiba room def. loc.

We saw AMINA and ABIBA in the room

- b. ti ɲa-∅ AMINA du: ma: ni
1pl. see-perf Amina room def. loc.

We saw AMINA in the room

While (17a) entails (17b), (i.e. they do not contradict each other), the pair in (16) contradict each other). This shows that with *ka* no logical consequence exists between the pair in (16), as there is between those in (17).

4.2.2 n

n focussed constituents have the same effect as *ka* focussed one, (both being the equivalents of cleft construction in English). Thus the difference between (16) and (17) is exactly what is observed respectively in (18) and (19) below.

- (18) a. **kum** ni **kɔɲuri** m mali Abu
hunger conj. thirst foc. have Abu
It is **hunger** and **thirst** that Abu is suffering from

- b. **kɔɲuri** m mali Abu
thirst foc. have Abu
It is **thirst** that Abu is suffering from

- (19) a. KUM ni KɔɲURi mali Abu
hunger conj. thirst have Abu
Abu is HUNGERY and THIRSTY

- b. Kɔ-nURi mali Abu
 water-drinking have Abu
 Abu is THIRSTY

4.2.3 *la*

The use of *la* implies an assertion that the meaning expressed by the verb holds true for the entities in the focussed constituent. It thus has a similar effect as *ka* and *n*, since deletion of one of the co-ordinates will affect the truth value of the sentence. These are shown in (20) and (21).

- (20) a. Abu da-∅ la bu-a ni pɛ-ʔu
 Abu buy-perf. foc. goat-sg conj. sheep-sg
 Abu bought a goat and a sheep

- b. Abu da-∅ la bu-a
 Abu buy-perf. foc. goat-sg
 Abu bought a goat

- (21) a. Abu da-∅ BU-A ni pɛ-ʔU
 Abu buy-perf. goat-sg conj. sheep-sg
 Abu bought A GOAT and A SHEEP

- b. Abu da-∅ BU-A
 Abu buy-perf. goat-sg
 Abu bought A GOAT

(21a) entails (21b), while the pair in (20) contradict each other.

4.2.4 *mi*

Even though the examples in (10) show that actions, events and processes focused by *mi* contrast with other actions, events or processes that the speaker/listener might have in mind, it does not pass the test of exhaustivity. Just as the two sentences in (23) do not contradict each other, those in (22) do not, in spite of focusing the verb with *mi*.

- (22) a. Adam me-∅ li mi ka pili-∅
 Adam build-perf. 3sg. foc. conj. roofed-perf.
 Adam built and roofed it

- b. Adam **pi**l-∅ li mi
 Adam roof-perf. 3sg. foc.
 Adam **roofed** it
- (23) a. Adam ME-JA ka PiLi-∅
 Adam build-perf. conj. roof-perf.
 Adam BUILT and ROOFED
- b. Adam ME-JA
 Adam build-perf
 Adam has BUILT.

Unlike the other focussed conjunctions, (22a) does not give the reading that Adam built and roofed it but did nothing else. But it does give the reading that he did not acquire it as a built and roofed entity. Thus it is not contradicted by the sentence in (22b). It would only be contradicted by a sentence that has a verb different from any of the two verbs in (22a). (22a) entails (22b) in the same way as (23a) entails (23b). Thus neither of the pairs express exhaustivity as the second of each pair is among the logical consequences of the first.

What makes *mi* obviously different from the rest of the particles is that, it focuses the verb. A conjunction of two predicates such as (22a) and (23a) makes two separate and independent claims about one entity, the subject, rather than one claim about different entities. Besides, since only one focus marker can be used in one sentence (even if it is multi-clausal), the focus particle does not seem to have the same effect on both clauses. In any such conjunction, *mi* follows the first verb, which suggests that it may not even have an effect on the second of the two conjoined clauses. This means that, unlike other focused positions, Szabolcsi's test is not suited for testing exhaustivity in predicate focus. Other possible tests of exhaustivity relevant for predicates are left for future studies of Dagbani focus.

5 Conclusion

What I have done in this paper is a basic description and analysis of focus in Dagbani, with emphasis on the semantics. The argumentation focussed mainly on the focus function of the particles *ka*, *n*, *la*, and *m*. But it also has typological relevance in two respects. First, the pattern in Dagbani presents an exception to Kiss' claim of universality of preverbal position for contrastively focussed positions. Second, it challenges the effectiveness of Szabolcsi's test in showing the differences between exhaustively focused predicates and those that are not exhaustive. Future study of *mi* and how it exhaustively identifies predicates thus promises to enrich the typology of focus.

However, the analysis presented here is not exhaustive, as only one of the several features that distinguish the two focus notions, exhaustivity, has been used. For future

research, issues that require attention include the syntax of focus in Dagbani, the semantic differences between the contrastive focus markers, and the extent to which the particles exhibit the other features that characterise the distinction between contrastive and presentational focus.

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