

DAGBANI FOCUS PARTICLES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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This paper describes focus marking in Dagbani, a Gur language of Ghana, with emphasis on the particles that are used to mark focus. It presents evidence that contrary to previous analyses of Dagbani (e.g. Olawsky 1999, Issah 2008) the particles **ka**, **n**, **la**, and **mi** all mark contrastive focus in Dagbani. These particles mark a range of focus types including subject focus, non-subject focus, predicate focus and clausal focus. Part of the discussion is devoted to the need to distinguish between these particles and homophones that are a subject of confusion in the literature. The particles are also subjected to several tests of exhaustivity used in the literature to determine contrastive focus. The approach adopted here is mainly descriptive. The goal is to present the bare descriptive generalisations on these particles with little recourse to the detailed assumptions of any specific syntactic or semantic theoretical approach.

Cet article décrit le marquage du focus en dagbani, une langue Gur du Ghana, avec une emphase sur les particules utilisées pour marquer le focus. Il présente des preuves qui vont à l'encontre des analyses précédentes de dagbani (voir p.ex. Olawsky 1999, Issah 2008) en démontrant que les particules **ka**, **n**, **la** et **mi** marquent toutes le focus contrastif en dagbani. Ces particules marquent une série de types de focus qui incluent le sujet focalisé, le focus des éléments qui ne sont pas sujets, le focus prédicatif et le focus propositionnel. Une partie de l'analyse concerne le besoin de distinguer ces particules de leurs homophones qui prêtent souvent en confusion dans la littérature. Ces particules ont été soumises dans l'article à plusieurs tests d'exhaustivité utilisés dans la littérature pour déterminer le focus contrastif. C'est sous une approche purement descriptive que le sujet a été abordé. Le but était en effet de présenter les généralisations descriptives saillantes de ces particules sans avoir recours à des hypothèses détaillées d'une approche théorique spécifique de syntaxe ou de sémantique.

0. INTRODUCTION

Dagbani is a Gur language spoken in the north-eastern part of Ghana. Syntactically, it has SVO word order. Even though previous account of Dagbani (e.g. Olawsky 1999, Issah 2008, Fiedler and Schwarz 2005) discuss focus marking in the language, the role of the particles **ka**, **n**, **la**, and **mi** as focus markers has either not been fully explored or muddled in controversy. Of these particles, **ka** and **n** have received the most recognition and attention as focus markers (Olawsky 1999; Fiedler and Schwarz 2005; Issah 2008). Yet as shown below, while **ka** marks non-subject and clausal focus, only the former has been noted in the literature. The position of **la** as a marker of contrastive focus has not been universally accepted. While Fiedler and Schwarz (2005) and Issah (2008) recognise it as a focus marker, Olawsky (1999) includes it among aspectual markers. At the same time, Olawsky notes a number of problems with analysing **la** as an aspectual marker and presents evidence supporting its role as a focus marker. Olawsky describes **mi** only as an emphatic marker added to the imperfective marker **di** when no object follows, to form **di-mi**. A similar treatment is suggested for **mi** in Purvis (2007), who glosses it as an aspectual/emphatic marker.

This paper argues that each of these particles marks focus. The data in (1) show how they mark focus. The clauses on the left column have no focus particles. Those on the right column have focused constituent marked by the focus particles. The constituents focused by the particles are underlined.

(1) Dagbani focus particles

- | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| a. Abu da-Ø | bua | <u>bua</u> | ka | Abu da-Ø |
| Abu buy-PERF. | goat | goat | FOC. | Abu buy-PERF. |
| Abu bought a goat | | It is a <u>goat</u> | | that Abu has bought |

- b. **n di-Ø dukunu mani n di-Ø dukunu**
 1SG. eat-PERF. kenkey 1SG.EMPH. FOC. eat-PERF. kenkey
 I ate kenkey It is me who ate kenkey
- c. **Adam cha-ni daa ni Adam cha-ni la daa ni**
 Adam go-IMPERF. market LOC. Adam go-IMPERF. FOC. market LOC.
 Adam goes/is going to the market Adam goes/is going to the market
- d. **Samata gbihi-ra Samata gbihi-ri mi**
 Samata sleep-IMPERF. Samata sleep-imperf FOC.
 Samata is sleeping Samata is sleeping

The paper further shows that each of the particles marks contrastive focus, unlike focused constituents that are not marked with any particle. Part of the challenge in understanding the focus value of some of these particles is the existence of homophonous particles with similar distributional properties. I show that understanding the differences between these particles and the focus markers is essential to understanding how the particles mark focus. While this paper is restricted in scope to the description of the particles **ka**, **n**, **la**, and **mi**, it does not make the claim that focus in Dagbani can only be marked with the use of these particles. Indeed, there is evidence that pitch accent and intonation are also focus markers in Dagbani.

In research on focus, the distinction between contrastive and presentational focus, expressed and formalised in slightly different ways has been noted (e.g. Halliday 1967, Szabolcsi 1981, Rochemont 1986, Erteschik-Shir 1997, Kiss 1998, Kratzer 2004). Central to the distinction between them is the notion of exhaustivity. For instance, according to Kiss (ibid) 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 ibid:246). This is illustrated in (2).

(2) Exhaustive identification with the particle **n**.

- a. **Napari n cha-ni daa ni**
 Napari FOC. go-IMPERF. market LOC.
 It is Napari who is going to the market.
- b. **Napari cha-ni daa ni**
 Napari go-IMPERF. market LOC.
Napari is going to the market.

Consider the Dagbani sentence in (2a) or the English cleft sentence it translates into, both of which express contrastive focus. This sentence describes a situation where one person out of potentially many people, are going to the market. The potential number of people implied in the discourse constitute the presupposition set (P-set) (Rooth 1985, Büring 2005). However, the action of the verb does not hold for every member of this P-set. (2a) presents the referent of *Napari* as a member of this P-set of the discourse and goes further to assert that of the many people in this set, *Napari* is going to the market and that no other person is going to the market besides her. (2a) thus exhaustively identifies *Napari* as the only one who is going to the market. This feature is lacking in (2b), which expresses presentational focus. Contrastive focus is not required in every sentence and thus not obligatory. In Dagbani, contrastive focus

requires a contrastive focus marker such as **ka**, **n**, **la**, or **mi**.¹ Presentational focus differs in that it is expressed by a phrase that conveys new, non-presupposed information. In describing Dagbani focus, the notion of exhaustivity is key to identifying the particles as contrastive focus markers.

The data used in this paper are based mainly on my intuitions as a native speaker. The sources of data from the literature are acknowledged. Given my exposure to both the Western and Eastern dialects of the language, the generalisations on focus cannot be said to be dialect-specific. However, because I speak the Eastern Dialect natively, any aspects of the data that is not representative of all dialects is likely to reflect that Eastern Dialect. What is not covered here is the Nanuni Dialect, spoken by the Nanumba ethnic group. Where there are differences between Nanuni and the other dialects on any aspects of Dagbani focus, the claims here may not hold for the Nanuni Dialect.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: the next section is devoted to a description of **ka** and how it marks focus. It shows that **ka** marks both focus through movement (Section 1.1) and in-situ clausal focus (Section 1.2). A significant part of the discussion (Section 1.3) concerns the distinction between the focus marker and several homophones. Section 2 deals with the use of **n** and **la** to mark subject and post-verbal focus. Previous analyses against **la** as a focus marker are reviewed, arguing that the focus value of **la** becomes uncontroversial once it is made distinct from its homophones. In Section 3, **mi**, the particle that has received the least attention of all in the literature is argued to also mark focus. Section 4 looks at various crosslinguistic tests that are used to test for contrastive focus are applied to the particles. Section 5 concludes the paper.

1. FOCUS MARKING WITH **ka**.

The particle **ka** marks focus in two ways. The first involves movement of a non-subject constituent to clause-initial. The second involves focusing whole clauses without any movement. These are discussed in turn below.

1.1 NON-SUBJECT FOCUS BY FRONTING

When **ka** focuses non-subject constituents, the focused constituent which otherwise would be in post-verbal position is moved to sentence-initial (or clause-initial) position. This particle is thus described as a marker that focuses constituents by pre-posing them into the initial position of a clause (Olawsky 1999; Issah 2008). The use of **ka** shows that the preceding (clause-initial) constituent stands out in contrast to any other alternative that might be true. The data in (2) show how this particle marks contrastive focus.

(3) **ka** as a contrastive focus marker.

- a. **N wum-ya ni a di-Ø dukunu**
 1SG. hear-PERF. that 2SG. eat-PERF. kenkey
 I heard that you ate *kenkey*.
- b. **aayi, banku ka n di-Ø**
 no, banku FOC. 1SG.SUBJ. eat-PERF.
 No, it is banku that I ate.

¹ In this paper, all contrastive focused constituents are underlined, presentational focus positions are italicised.

- c. #aayi, n di-Ø banku
 no, 1SG.SUBJ. eat-PERF. banku
 No, I ate *banku*.

In (3b), the speaker asserts that she did not eat kenkey or any other food except *banku*. The contrast with *banku* is more prominent because *kenkey* is assumed in (3a). However, the assumed alternative does not have to be explicitly stated. For example, (3b) could be an answer to a WH question (see examples in (4)). Alternatively, it could be an answer to a question in which two or more alternatives are stated. In any such context, the answer in (3c) is infelicitous. In addition to full nouns, **ka** also focuses pronouns and adjuncts, as shown in (4).

(4) Constituents focused with **ka**.

a. Adjuncts:

Ti di-ri daa begu kam
 3PL. spend-IMPERF. market day every
 We do business in the market *every day*

begu kam ka ti di-ri daa
 day every FOC. 3PL. spend-IMPERF. market
 It is every day that we do business in the market.

b. Emphatic pronouns

bi yu-ri ma
 3PL. love-IMPERF. 1SG.OBJ.
 They love *me*

mani ka bi yu-ra
 1SG.EMPH. FOC. 3PL. love-IMPERF
 It is me that they love

Added to the above is the use of **ka** to mark WH questions in a pattern where only the WH marker appears in subject position preceding the focus particle. The WH markers in Dagbani that are focused in this way are the third person markers **ɲuni** (who.sg.animate), **dini** (which.sg.in-animate), **banima** (who.pl.animate), **ya** (where) and **bo** (what). Some examples are shown in (5).

(5) WH markers in focus position with **ka**.

- a. **a yu-ri ɲuni** → **ɲuni ka a yu-ra**
 2SG. love-IMPERF. who who FOC. 2SG. love-IMPERF.
 You love *whom*? Whom do you love?
- b. **a yen da bo** → **bo ka a yen da**
 2SG. FUT. buy what what FOC. 2SG. FUT. Buy
 You are going to buy *what*? What are you going to buy?
- c. **Abu bo-ri dini** → **dini ka Abu bo-ra?**
 Abu like-IMPERF. which Which FOC. Abu like-IMPERF.
 Abu likes *which one*? Which one does Abu like?

It is important to point out that pre-posing a constituent into initial position does not necessarily make it a focused constituent, as it may take place without focus

considerations. For instance, unlike NPs which always require **ka** when fronted, adverbials of time do not require the use of **ka** when pre-posed. This is the case as long as it is not used to mark a WH question. The examples in (6) illustrate this. When fronted adverbials are used to mark WH questions, the use of **ka** becomes obligatory, as shown in (6c, d).

(6) Fronting adverbials of time.

- a. **a sa nye-Ø doo maa sohila** → **sohila a sa nye-Ø doo maa**
 2SG. TD see-PERF. man DEF. yesterday yesterday 2SG.TD see-PERF. man DEF
 You saw the man yesterday Yesterday you saw the man
- b. **ti kpe-Ø duu pumpongo** → **pumpongo ti kpe-Ø duu**
 1PL enter-PERF. room now now 1PL enter-PERF. room
 Now we've entered the room Now we have entered the room
- c. **ti yen paai bon-dali** → ***bon-dali ti yen paai**
 1PL FUT. arrive what day what day 1PL FUT. arrive
 We are arriving when (what day)? When (What day) are we arriving?
- d. **bi dogi a yuun dini** → **yuun dini ka bi dogi a**
 3PL. bear 2SG. year which year which FOC. 3PL. bear 2SG
 They bore you *which year*? In which year were you born?

The fact that the pre-posed adverbials in (6a-b) are not focused implies that they can be followed by other constituents that are focused, as shown in (7).

(7) Fronting adverbials and focusing NPs.

- a. **a sa nye-Ø doo maa sohila** → **sohila doo maa ka a sa nye-Ø**
 2SG. TD see-PERF. man DEF. yesterday Y'day man DEF. FOC. 2SG. TD see-PERF.
 You saw *the man* yesterday Yesterday it is the man that you saw
- b. **ti kpe-Ø duu pumpongo** → **pumpongo duu ka ti kpe-Ø.**
 1PL enter-PERF. room now now room FOC. 1PL enter-PERF.
 We've entered a *room* now Now it is in a room that we have entered.

1.2 IN-SITU CLAUSAL FOCUS

Ka focuses whole clauses in a way that does not involve movement of any constituent. This is where the particle is placed in sentence-initial position of a rhetorical question in which the predicate has the negative particle **bi** or **ku**. In such a construction, the speaker uses **ka** to focus the entire clause and present it to the listener as a polite imperative or request. The focused clause is thus contrasted with any other alternative that the speaker and listener may share as part of the discourse. Two examples are shown in (8).

(8) **Ka** as a focus marker conveying polite imperative or request





- a. **ka a bi labi-ri o**
 FOC. 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG
Why not throw (your stick) at it?
- b. **ka a bi dira**
 FOC. 2SG.NEG. eat
Why not eat?

(8a) is an example of an imperative while (8b) presents a request. (8b) could be used

to persuade a sick person to eat as a way of helping in his recovery. The context for (8a) is discussed in details below.

It is important to note that **ka** only marks in-situ focus when it is accompanied with a falling intonation. Without a falling intonation, this particle becomes a different discourse marker, discussed further in Section 1.3. In (9), the example in (8a) is repeated along with similar sentences that lack a focus **ka**. The data are elicited from an adult male speaker of the Eastern Dialect.

(9) Use of **ka** as a polite imperative.

- a.  **ka a bi labi-ri o**
 FOC. 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG
Why not throw (your stick) at it?
- b.  **ka a bi labi-ri o**
 Ka 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG
 And you (were) not throwing (your stick) at it.
- c.  **a bi labi-ri o**
 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG.
 You are not throwing at it/ you don't throw at it
- d.  **a labi-ri o**
 2SG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG.
 You throw at it

In (9a), the use of **ka** makes the entire sentence a focused constituent. Without **ka**, they would otherwise be simple statements with a rising intonation, as shown in (9c). The sentence in (9b), which does not mark focus, lacks a falling intonation in spite of having a **ka** particle. This particle is different from the **ka** that marks focus, as discussed further below. The sentence in (9d) is also useful in further understanding of **ka** as a focus marker. This is the only sentence that does not have the negative marker **bi**. It is also the only sentence that has a falling intonation, like (9a). This shows that the negative marker generally results in a rising intonation (as in 9c) except when the sentence begins with a clausal focus **ka** (9a), in which case it gets a falling intonation.

(9a) occurs in a folk story involving a hunter and his son during their hunting activity. The sentence comes as an imperative given by a hunter to his son in a context where the son spots a bird within a reasonable distance and draws his father's attention. In this context, a number of options within the P-set shared by both father and son include calling on the father to kill the game, shooting it, or throwing his stick at it, among others. Thus the question in (9a) is not one that demands an answer, but focuses one of these options in his instruction to the son on what action to take. It asserts that of all these options, the only one the son should consider is to throw his stick at it. All the other options should be ignored. This feature is lacking in the

remaining sentences in (9).² Thus the focus value of **ka** in (9) depends on shared knowledge of the context that the speaker has with the listener, just like other cases of contrastive focus.

It is important to stress that the focus value of **ka**, just discussed, comes from its combination with the falling intonation. This is what makes the account here different from alternative analyses of **ka** (e.g. Issah, this issue), who is silent on the role of intonation in Dagbani focus marking. Issah considers many uses of **ka** in sentence-initial position as a clausal conjunction. While there is no controversy about the point that **ka** can be used to conjoin two clauses, (see the discussion that follows shortly), a descriptively more accurate account requires that a distinction be made between similar particles that play different discourse function. In this case, intonation, which is attested crosslinguistically as a focus strategy (e.g. Ameka 1992, Van Vallin and LaPolla 1997, Ishihara 2007), is shown to contribute towards focus marking in Dagbani. One of Issah's reasons for rejecting the role of **ka** as a focus marker in clause-initial position is that, the context in which it is used here does not demand all new information. However, the folk story from which the sentence in (9a) is derived provides evidence to the contrary. The sentence is given in response to the son's request or expectation of direction from his father. This direction will not come as one word or phrase. It has to be a whole clause. In Section 4.3, it is further shown that this use of **ka** can not combine with any other focus particle in Dagbani. As argued in that section, such a combination is crucial for arguing against any particle as a focus marker.

1.3 OTHER **ka** PARTICLES IN DAGBANI

One challenge to understanding **ka** as an in-situ focus marker is that there are other **ka** particles with similar distributional properties as the focus **ka** but do not mark focus. The potential thus exists for these homophonous but distinct particles to be confused. This confusion is seen in Fiedler and Schwarz (2005). They argue that "the so-called 'focus marker' is in fact just a conjunction at the beginning of a narrative clause..." (ibid:135). The discussion here presents a different analysis in which a focus **ka** is distinguished from three homophones. These are (i) a general discourse **ka**, (ii) a clause-negating **ka** and (iii) a compound-forming verb **ka**. The next sections discuss this distinction. Given that this paper is not about discourse particles or negation in general, the discussion is limited to details that are sufficient to understand the distinction between these particles and the focus marker.

1.3.1 General discourse particle **ka**

In Dagbani, there is a general discourse particle, **ka**. Among its functions, this particle links a clause to what precedes it and may be considered a clausal conjunction. However, contrary to Issah (this issue), who simply labels it as a conjunction, I hesitate to label it as a conjunction because it has a broader function beyond simply conjoining two clauses. Issah's own discussion suggests this broader use of the particle. For instance, even though he calls it a conjunction, he also notes that clauses that are preceded by this particle are subordinate clauses. Certainly both claims can not hold at the same time for one particle since conjunctions do not produce subordinate clauses.

² The following is the full exchange between the hunter and his son: son calls out to father. Father responds, asking: 'What is that?' Son: 'A bird'. Hunter: 'Why not throw (your stick) at it?' Son: 'There is no hunting stick.' Hunter: 'Come for a hunting stick.' Son: 'It has flown away.'

What is certain is that this particle is common in discourse contexts where a series of related events are recounted or where one clause builds on a preceding one. Thus its typical position is clause-initial position. A prominent discourse type where this particle is used is folk tales. In addition to the differences in the meaning they convey, this particular use of the discourse **ka** differs significantly from focus **ka** in that it lacks a falling intonation. Thus keeping much of the context already sketched out that gives **ka** its focus value in (9a), a different context could emerge with **ka** devoid any focus function. 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 could narrate the story to his son later on thus: 'I saw you from a distance looking at a bird.' **ka a bi labi-ri 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 simple discourse particle joining the two clauses. It shows that the first clause preceded the second one temporally.

A similar context can be sketched for a sentence like **ka a bi dira** translated roughly as 'and you are not eating.' Notice that this sentence is similar to the sentence in (9b), the only difference being that the latter has a focus **ka**. The sentence without a focus **ka** could be told to a sick person who has no appetite for food: 'you are sick and (yet) you are not eating.'

In the two contexts sketched here, there may be a sense of disapproval as the person addressed failed to do what was expected under the circumstance. In such a usage, **ka** may be preceded by another particle **to**. This is illustrated in (10).

(10) Discourse **ka** preceded by **to**.

Context: Abu complains to Hawa about the worsening of his condition. Hawa thinks that Abu's condition is worsening because he has not been eating lately.

Abu: **N doro maa mii ma pam**
 1SG.POSS sickness DEF. pain 1SG. OBJ. much
 My sickness is very painful

Hawa: **To ka a bi di-ra**
 TO KA 2SG. NEG. eat-IMPERF.
 (What do you expect given that) you do not eat.

In (10), Hawa's use of **to ka** conveys the message that Abu's worsening condition is a consequence of his failure to eat. It is important to note that when **to** combines with **ka** the "blame" is not necessarily a negative one. For instance, imagine that a lady gets a lot of attention from men. This issue is being discussed and one person among the discussants thinks she is getting the attention due to her exceptional beauty. The person could say **to ka o veli mi pam** (**to ka** she is very beautiful).

The final illustration of a discourse **ka** comes from a commonly used exchange that usually takes place when a surprise is about to be introduced. It is common especially among young people that when one of them wants to give a story about a special event that has taken place, she will first ask her colleague to guess what that special news is. This typically results in an exchange of at least five sentences. The overall goal is to increase the excitement that follows the mention of the special news by first creating a suspense. In such an exchange, three of the sentences begin with a discourse **ka**. This is probably the best case of **ka** serving as a clausal conjunction. An example is shown in (11).

(11) Discourse **ka** in a two-way exchange.

Context: Neena's father just bought her new shoes. She is so excited about it and wants to tell the news with excitement to her friend Samata.

Neena: **A nina a-la?**
 2SG.POSS. eyes numb-many
 Your how many eyes (How many eyes do you have)?

Samata: **N nina a yi**
 1SG.POSS. eyes numb-two
 My two eyes (I have two eyes)

Neena: **Ka a nye bo?**
 KA 2SG. see what
 KA you see what? (KA what do you see)

Samata: **Ka n nye sogu ni do-ya**
 KA 1SG. see broom TEMP. lie-PERF.
 KA I see a broom lying down.

Neena: **Ka m mii nya ka m baaba da-Ø namda palli ti ma.**
 KA 1SG. otherwise see that 1SG.POSS dad buy-PERF. shoe new give SG.OBJ.
 KA I see that my dad has bought new shoes for me.

In this exchange, the first three sentences are typically fixed³. However, after the first sentence, the second person in the discourse (Samata, in this case) gets to know that a pleasant surprise is on the way. The second question by Neena is asking Samata to guess what the surprise is, which she already would have been doing after listening to Neena's first question. Samata's second answer would typically be preceded by a moment of silence during which she would try to guess what the surprise is. A right guess would be a disappointment to Neena, since that would mean that the information is no more new and that she didn't convey it early enough. After failing to guess it, Samata would settle for something obvious she sees around. The final sentence presents the surprise. The three sentences with **ka** become infelicitous without the use of the discourse **ka**. However, this **ka** lacks the falling intonation of focus **ka**, and obviously does not mark focus.

The above examples all illustrate the use of discourse **ka** at the beginning of a sentence. The particle may also appear in the middle of a long sentence, beginning another clause in a sentence with more than one clause. Thus within one sentence, there can be two or more discourse **ka** particles. The last sentence in the exchange in (11) provides an example of a discourse **ka** in the middle of a sentence beginning a clause. Other examples are shown (12). The sentence-initial clause-negating **ka** is discussed in the next section.

³ However, sometimes a different sense may be invoked if thought to be more appropriate than the visual sense. For instance, if the good news was heard and there is nothing physical to show for it, the two questions could be **a tiba a-la** 'How many ears do you have' and **ka a wum bo** 'ka you heard what.'

(12) Discourse **ka** particle in the middle of a sentence

- a. **ka baa n dogi ka bua leli** (Lange 2006:184)
 NEG. dog FOC. bear KA goat lick
 A puppy is not born for a goat to lick it clean.
 (It did not happen that a dog gave birth to a puppy while a goat licked clean the puppy)
- b. **kam-na ka ti di**
 come-LOC. KA 1PL eat
 Come let us eat
- c. **ka Alizimba zaa ka saa mira** (Lange 2006: 184)
 NEG. Friday every KA rain fall
 It is not on every Friday that it rains
- d. **Bo n ning-Ø a ka a kuhi-ra?**
 what FOC. happen-PERF. 2SG. KA 2SG. cry-IMPERF.
 What happened to you and you are crying (What causes you to cry)?

1.3.2 Clause-negating **ka**

In Dagbani, there is a **ka** particle that is used to negate an entire clause, producing what typically looks like the equivalent of a negated cleft construction in English. This particle is commonly used in proverbs. For instance, in a compilation of Dagbani proverbs produced by Lange (2006), there are 28 proverbs that begin with a **ka**, none of which is a focus **ka** or a general discourse **ka**. 15 of these proverbs have the clause-negating **ka** while the remaining 13 have the compound-forming **ka**, discussed in the next section. Some of the examples from Lange are shown in (13). In these examples, (also in (14)) the first and third lines of each proverb are from Lange while the interlinear glosses are mine. I have also included some morpheme breakdowns and slight changes in spellings to conform to the orthography used in this paper as well as additional line of translation of proverbs in parenthesis.

(13) Clause-negating **ka** particle (Lange 2006: 184-185)

- a. **ka Alizimba zaa ka saa mira**
 NEG. Friday every COMP rain fall
 It is not on every Friday that it rains
- b. **ka baa n dogi ka bua leli**
 NEG. dog FOC. bear then goat lick
 A puppy is not born for a goat to lick it clean.
 (It did not happen that a dog gave birth to the puppy while a goat licked clean the puppy)
- c. **ka kum tim n nye bindi kpagisi-bu**
 NEG. hunger medicine FOC. be faeces store-IMPERF.
 Not going to toilet is not the medicine against hunger.
 (It is not failure to go to toilet that solves the problem of hunger).

1.3.3. The verb **ka** in clause-initial position

Unlike the other **ka** particles discussed here, the compound-forming **ka** is not a particle. It is a lexical word which means ‘not have’, the antonym of the verb **mali**

‘have’. Also, while the other two **ka** particles are restricted to clause-initial position, this **ka** may occur in either clause-initial or non-initial positions. In clause-initial position, it is realised in a compound word with a noun. In non-initial position it may be part of a compound or surface alone as a verb. The clause-initial distribution is the only one that is of interest here given the potential to confuse it with the focus marking **ka**. In (14) below, I show examples again from Lange (2006).

(14) The verb **ka** in clause-initial position (Lange 2006: 186, 188)

- a. **ka-lagifu dang daa, ka daa ti kpe-ri**
not.have-money go.early market then market TEMP enters-IMPERF.
ka o yi-ra
then 3SG. leave-IMPERF.
A person without money is the first one to go to the market, she/he leaves before the sellers come. (The penniless has gone to the market early, but leaves before business starts)
- b. **ka-nuu ni kong simli andunia ni**
not.have-hand LOC. lose friendship world LOC.
A poor person does not have even one friend in the world.
(One who lacks anything in hand (poor) loses friendship in the world).
- c. **Ka-nyaan zaana ni baligi noli**
not.have-back stander FUT. limit mouth
The person who does not have supporters will speak softly
(One who lacks someone to stand behind him (supporter/defender) will speak less).

In the sentences shown in (14), the verb **ka** forms a nominal compound with a noun. The meaning that is conveyed is someone who lacks the noun with which it forms the compound. Thus unlike the examples in (13), **ka** is a part of a compound rather than just a negative marker in the traditional sense.

To sum up, **ka** marks two types of focus: non-subject constituents moved to clause-initial position and entire clauses presented as polite imperatives or requests. As a non-subject focus marker, it follows the constituent that is marked. As a clausal focus marker, it precedes the marked clause. This particle is distinct from other **ka** particles with very similar distributional properties. Among other differences, clausal focus **ka** is accompanied by a unique falling intonation that its homophones lack.

2. SUBJECT AND POST-VERBAL FOCUS MARKERS

This section describes two focus markers: the pre-verbal **n** and post-verbal **la** focus markers. While there is no controversy regarding the position of **n** as a focus marker, the function of **la** is a subject of much debate. I will show that part of the difficulty in understanding **la** is because like the particle **ka**, **la** is often confused with other similar-sounding particles in Dagbani.

2.1 IN-SITU SUBJECT FOCUS MARKING

N focuses constituents in subject position. It differs from **ka** only in that no overt surface movement is involved. Consider the exchange in (15).⁴

⁴ (15a) is only of interest because it is the first sentence in the exchange, and WH-questions

(15) Focusing with the particle **n**.

- a. **ya ka Baba nya namda palli?**
Where FOC. Baba get shoe new
Where did Baba get a new shoe?
- b. **bi ti o mi**
3PL. give 3SG.OBJ. FOC.
They gave it to him (it was given to him)
- c. **nyini n ti o**
2SG.EMPH. FOC. give 3SG.
You gave him? (Is it you who gave it to him?)
- d. **aayi, Abu n ti o**
no, Abu FOC. give 3SG.OBJ.
No, it is Abu who gave him
- e. **#aayi, Abu ti o**
no, Abu give 3SG.OBJ.
No, *Abu* gave him

(15c) may be necessary if the questioner suspects that the answerer in (15b) is the one who bought the shoe to Baba but does not want to admit it. Such a sentence requires **n** to focus the subject. Thus (15e) is not felicitous. The subject in each of (15c) and (15d) is picked out as the only entity that holds as far as the giving of the shoe is concerned. (15d) in particular shows that it is neither the subject in (15c) nor any other person that may potentially come to mind who is responsible for the giving of the shoe except Abu. This contrastive reading does not exist in a clause like (15e) that lacks the particle **n**.

In focusing a non-pronominal subject with **n**, the only measure that is taken is the insertion of the focus marker, as in (15d). Where the subject is pronominal, it becomes emphatic when focused, as (15c) shows. The data in (16) show that like **ka**, **n** focuses a wide range of constituents. Notice in (16) that the place of articulation of this nasal is always homorganic to the following consonant.

(16) Focusing with the particle **n**.

- a. **Baba da-Ø namda palli** → **Baba n da-Ø namda palli**
Baba buy-PERF. sandal new Baba *FOC.* buy-PERF. sandal new
Baba bought new sandals It is Baba who bought new sandals
- b. **namda palli pa kugu zugu** → **namda palli m pa kugu zugu**
sandal new be.on seat LOC. sandal new FOC. be.on seat LOC.
A new sandal is on the seat It is a new sandal that is on the seat
- c. **Adam yu-ri o paga** → **Adam n yu-ri o paga**
Adam like-IMPERF 3SG.POSS wife Adam FOC. love-IMPERF. 3SG.POSS. wife
Adam loves his wife It is Adam who loves his wife
- d. **Ko nyu-ri mali Abu** → **Ko nyu-ri m mali Abu**
water drink-NOM. have Abu water drink-NOM. FOC. have Abu
Abu is *thirsty* It is thirst that Abu feels (not hunger)

require the use of focus **ka**. The use of the focus **ka** is not of interest to the discussion here.

The translations of the examples on **n** focus and those on **ka** focus suggest that both focus markers produce cleft constructions in Dagbani. However, this is controversial. Among previous comments on whether Dagbani has cleft construction are Issah (2008) and Fiedler and Schwarz (2005). Fiedler and Schwarz suggest a biclausal analysis of some clauses in Dagbani, a proposal which could make way for accepting cleft constructions. Issah on the other hand presents detailed arguments against a bi-clausal analysis of the subject and non-subject focus markers discussed here. He also argues that Dagbani does not have clefts. In the translations presented here, the clefts are used for convenience. Indeed the use of cleft construction provides the best translation of these sentences. However, I do not make the claim that Dagbani has clefts.

2.2 THE PARTICLE **la**

La occurs with transitive verbs and verbs that are followed by adjuncts and precede an obligatory object or adjunct. Olawsky (1999) and Issah (2008) have also noted the point that **la** requires an NP, as shown in (17). (17a-b) are from Olawsky (1999) with further details on morpheme breakdown.

(17) The distribution of **la**.

- a. **Fati ba-ri** **la** **cheche**
 Fati ride-IMPERF FOC. bicycle
 Fati is riding a bicycle
- b. **m bohin-di** **la** **Dagbanli**
 I learn-imperf FOC. Dagbani
 I am learning Dagbani
- c. **Abu gbihi-ri** **la** **song zugu**
 Abu sleep-IMPERF. FOC. mat on
 Abu is sleeping on a mat.
- d. **m ba yu-ri** **la** **bindirigu din nyagsa**
 1SG. father like-IMPERF. FOC. food that delicious
 My father likes delicious food.
- e. **Lahiri chang-Ø** **la** **daa ni**
 Lahiri go-PERF. FOC. market LOC.
 Lahiri has gone to the market.
- f. ***Fati diri-la**
 Fati eat-la
 *Fati is eating

Another syntactic property of this particle is that, when the NP it precedes in a sentence is a pronoun, this pronoun surfaces in its emphatic form, as illustrated in (18).

(18) **La** with emphatic object pronouns

- a. **n ti-Ø** **a**
 1SG. give-PERF. 2SG.
 I have given *you*

- b. **n ti-Ø la nyini**
 1SG. give-PERF. FOC. 2SG. EMPHATIC
 I have given you (and no one else).
- c. ***n ti-Ø la a**
 1SG. give-PERF. FOC. 2SG.
 I have given you.

While **la** requires an object or adjunct, these post-**la** constituents do not require **la**. Thus all the sentences in (17a-e) remain grammatical when **la** is removed from the sentences. I argue that **la** is a contrastive focus marker. The data in (19) provide a discourse context within which **la** marks contrastive focus.

(19) Focusing with the particle **la**.

- a. **Napari da-Ø bo?**
 Napari buy-PERF. what
 Napari bought what?
- b. **Napari da-Ø bu-a**
 Napari buy-PERF. goat-SG.
 Napari bought *a goat*
- c. **Napari da-Ø la bo?**
 Napari buy-PERF-FOC. what
 Napari bought what
- d. **Napari da-Ø la bu-a.**
 Napari buy-PERF. FOC. goat-sg.
 Napari bought a goat

A typical answer to the question in (19a) is (19b). Here, the object is in presentational focus. It is given as a new non-presupposed information. Assuming that the listener does not hear this answer well and wants the speaker to repeat it, the particle **la** would be needed to focus the object, as in (19c). The answer to (19c), would also require **la** to focus the object, as in (19d). (19b) is not felicitous as an answer to (19c). However, the use of **la** is not limited to echo questions, as demonstrated in the following discussions.

As a focus marker, **la** picks out only one of many possible alternatives that may be in the mind of the speaker. For instance, the sentence in (17a) does not simply communicate the information that Fati is biking. That is what would be communicated if the sentence had no **la**. With the particle **la**, the focus is on the NP **cheche**. The information conveyed is that, what Fati is riding is a bicycle and no other means of transport such as a motor cycle or a horse.

The particle **la** is similar to **ka** in the sense that what is focused belongs to the post-verbal position in the deep structure. The difference between them is that, **ka** marks focus by moving the post-verbal constituent into clause-initial position while **la** marks focus in-situ. Thus the answer to any question that ends in a WH word such as (19a) can make use of a presentational focus, (19b), contrastive in-situ focus (19d), or a contrastive focus via movement, as in (20) below. However, (19d) is more felicitous than (20) as an answer to (19c) because (19c) has **la** focusing the object.

(20) **ka** in place of **la**.

Bu-a ka Napari da-Ø
 goat-SG. FOC. Napari buy-PERF.
 It is a goat that Napari bought

There are two major arguments in support of **la** as a focus marker. First, the focussed element cannot be elided, as shown in the ungrammaticality of (17f). Since the use of any focus particle assumes that a constituent is being focused, the expression of the focused constituent is a condition for the use of a focus particle. In other words, the focused constituent must be conveyed to the listener once the speaker provides an indication (with the use of a focus particle) that a constituent is being focused. This is the case for the well noted focus particles **ka** and **n**. The second piece of evidence supporting the position of **la** as a focus marker is the realisation of pronouns in post-**la** position as emphatic, (18b). This particle does not precede non-emphatic pronouns, as in (18c). This is another pattern observed for the uncontroversial focus markers, **ka** and **n**. Further arguments supporting **la** as a focus marker are presented in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

This conclusion is also supported by Olawsky (1999), Fiedler and Schwarz (2005) and Purvis (2008). Purvis describes **la** as a focus marker realised as a verbal suffix that focuses a following complement. Fiedler and Schwarz do not discuss **la** in detail but gloss it as a focus marker. Olawsky, on the other hand, includes **la** among aspectual markers but glosses it both as an aspectual and a focus marker. He claims that **la** marks both habitual and continuous meaning inserted between the verb and the object. However, he also notes that there is no relationship between tense and aspect on the one hand, and the function of this marker on the other. 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. If **la** were an aspectual marker, it would occur in such final positions. Olawsky concludes that **la** "...rather functions as a kind of emphasis marker to what follows the verb..." (Olawsky 1999:38). He 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. Further support for this view comes from the fact that aspectual markers typically precede nouns, unlike **la**, which precedes nouns and other constituents.

Another piece of evidence against **la** as an aspectual marker is that, whereas no single clause can be marked with two aspectual markers, **la** occurs with the imperfective aspectual marker, as shown in the examples in (21).

(21) **La** versus aspectual markers.

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| a. | i. baa kpi-ya
dog die-PERF
A dog has died/is dead | ii. baa kpi-ra
dog die-IMPERF
A dog dies/is dying |
| b. | i. Wumbei da-ya
Wumbei buy-PERF.
Wumbei has bought | ii. Wumbei da-ra
Wumbei buy-IMPERF.
Wumbei buys/is buying |
| c. | i. * Fati diri-la
Fati eat-la
*Fati is eating | ii. Fati diri-la bindir-gu
Fati eat-la food-SG
Fati is eating <u>food</u> |

The verb roots in these sentences can be inflected with the perfective aspectual marker (e.g. **ba-ya** ‘has ridden’ and **bohim-ya** ‘has learned’) when they do not take objects or adjuncts; and with a zero perfective morpheme when they take an object or focus marker or both (**ba-Ø la bunga** ‘rode a donkey’ and **bohim-Ø la dagbanli** ‘learned Dagbani’). A possible analysis that could go in favour of **la** as an aspectual marker would be to posit it as a portmanteau morpheme expressing both focus and aspect. For this analysis to be valid, **la** needs to focus the verb. However, the fact that the use of **la** requires an object (21c) shows that it is indeed the object that controls it, not the verb. Besides, as shown in (21b), failure to focus any constituent with **la** does not necessarily mean that the verb loses its perfective meaning.

2.2.1 Alternative analysis of **la**

A different analysis is offered by Issah (2008) and Issah (this issue), who presents a detailed arguments against **la** as a contrastive focus marker. Issah (2008) argues that the differences between sentences with **la** and those without it depends on whether the information conveyed in the sentence is shared with the listener or not. To him, the presence of the particle in a sentence indicates that what is presented by the speaker is not shared knowledge. It is known by the speaker but new to the listener. Its absence, he argues, implies that the information presented is shared knowledge. He uses the sentences in (22) to illustrate this argument.

(22) **La** marking non-shared knowledge? (Issah 2008: 65)

- a. **Abu da-Ø la loori**
Abu buy-PERF. LA car
Abu (has) bought a car.
- b. **Abu da-Ø loori**
Abu buy-PERF. car
Abu (has) bought a car.
- c. **O nya-Ø la Anna**
3SG see-PERF. LA Anna
S/he saw Anna.
- d. **O nya-Ø Anna**
3SG see-PERF. Anna
S/he saw Anna.

According to Issah, saying (22a) and (22c) implies that the information is not known to the listener, in contrast with (22b) and (22d) which are shared knowledge. However, considering that **la** always requires an object or adjunct, Issah's analysis implies that conveying shared information is not only conditioned by the presences of **la**, it is also conditioned by the presence of an object. In other words, Issah's analysis implies that the information conveyed in any sentence that lacks a post-verbal constituent must be shared knowledge. For instance, all the sentences in (23) would have to convey shared information.

(23) Sentences with no object NPs or adjuncts

- a. **Adam gbihi-ya**
Adam sleep-PERF.
Adam has cried.

b. **Abu kuhi-ra**

Abu cry-IMPERF.

Abu cries.

c. **Samata dogi-ya**

Samata bear-PERF.

Samata has given birth.

On the contrary, any of the sentences in (22) and (23) could be used whether the listener shares the knowledge of the information expressed by the verb or not. In fact, announcing the birth of a baby, which is a new information, is typically done without the use of any focus marker, similar to the sentence in (23c). The only time a focus marker is needed is when the listener requests to know the gender of the new born baby, or when the speaker decides to provide that information without being asked to. The discourse typically has at least four sentences, shown in (24).

(24) Discourse involved in announcing child birth

Hudu: a. **m** **paga** **dogi-ya**
 1SG.POSS. woman bear-PERF.
 My wife has given birth.

Issah: b. **taali**
 Excellent
 What excellent news!

c. i. **bo** **ka** **o dogi?** / ii. **doo bee paga**
 What FOC. 3SG bear male or female
What did she bear? A boy or a girl?

Hudu: d. i. **doo** **ka** **o dogi** / ii. **doo**
 male FOC. 3SG bear male
 It is a baby boy that she has born a boy

Issah: e. **taali.** **ni** **ti** **zugu sung**
 excellent CONJ. 3PL. head good
 Excellent news. Congratulations

Notice that the listener could decide to skip (24b) and go ahead to enquire the gender of the baby, in (24c). This is more likely if the listener is aware of the pregnancy or the expected date of delivery. If on the other hand the listener is not aware that the woman is pregnant, the surprise and joy that comes after listening to the news from the husband is likely to elicit the exclamation in (24b). (24c) could take the form of a Wh-question ('what did she bear?') or a simple phrase ('boy or girl?').

The discourse could be shorter if the announcer of the good news decides to provide the information on the gender of the baby without waiting for the listener to demand it. In that case the speaker could add the information in a second sentence before the listener responds. Thus the speaker would use (25a i), followed by (25b). Alternatively, (25a ii) could be used without any need for a separate sentence to indicate the gender. This is more likely if the two sides involved in the dialogue are not going to engage in a long conversation.

(25) Discourse involved in announcing child birth

Hudu: a. i. **m** **paga dogi-ya** / ii. **m** **paga dogi-Ø doo**
 1SG.POSS. woman bear-PERF. 1SG.POSS. woman bear-PERF. male
 My wife has given birth. My wife has given birth to a boy

b. **o dogi la doo**
 3SG. bear FOC. male
 She bore a baby boy

Issah: c. **taali. ni ti zugu sung**
 excellent CONJ. 3PL. head good
 Excellent news. Congratulations

It is significant to note that both (24d i) and (25b) are used to convey information that is not shared. However, they are typically preceded by other sentences that lack any focus markers and yet also provide un-shared information. Thus the particle **la** is not needed to convey un-shared information.

Another argument Issah (2008) advances against the position of **la** as a focus marker is that, it is obligatory in sentence structures that are felicitous as answers to questions that require the entire VP to be focused. The sentences Issah uses to illustrate his argument are cited in (26) (with some changes to glossing)⁵.

(26) **La** required in questions focusing entire VPs. (Issah 2008: 69)

Q: a. **bo ka Mary mini Abu sa ning-Ø sohala?**
 what FOC. Mary CONJ. Abu TD do-PERF. yesterday
 What did Mary and Abu do yesterday?

A: b. **bi sa da-Ø la loori.**
 3PL. TD buy-PERF. LA. car
 They bought A CAR.

c. **#loori ka bi sa da-Ø.**
 car FOC. 2PL. TD buy-PERF.
 It was car they bought (yesterday)

Issah observes, rightly, that (26c) is not felicitous as an answer to the question in (26a). He argues that this is an indication that focusing the post-**la** constituent may not always take place. Issah then remarks that “the observation that it is possible for **la** to occur in structures that demand an entire VP be focused serves as counter-evidence to its analysis as a focus marker on NP object and adjuncts in in-situ position” (Issah 2008: 70). In effect, Issah is arguing that if there is evidence that one particle occurs with different syntactic positions in focus, that particle can not be described as a focus marker.

However, what Issah regards as counter-evidence to the position of **la** as a contrastive focus marker does not support his conclusion. Issah has not considered the fact that the question in (26) is not neutral with regards to focus. It has **ka** focusing the initial WH word **bo** which is moved to the initial position. A felicitous answer to this

⁵ The time depth marker **sa** is required to indicate a time reference one day removed from the day of utterance. When combined with perfective aspect, it points to what happened a day before; when combined with the future marker **ni**, it refers to what will happen a day after the utterance. In either case, the words **sohila** ‘yesterday’ or **beguni** ‘tomorrow’ is optional, as shown in (26a) versus (26b, c). Other examples are shown in (27), (30) etc.

question requires that the WH phrase remains in its original position and gets focused, as in (26b). A question without a focus marker would not require **la** in the answer, as shown in (27).

(27) **La** not required in questions focusing entire VPs.

Q: a. **Mary mini Abu sa ning-Ø bo sohala?**

Mary CONJ Abu TD do-PERF. what ADJUN

Mary and Abu did what yesterday?"

A: b. **Bi sa da-Ø loori.**

2PL. TD buy-PERF. car

They bought a car yesterday.

Thus the reason **la** is felicitous in (26) is not because of the supposed focusing of the entire clause. It is because the question, by the use of **ka**, requires an answer in which the moved object is focused in-situ. In a question that has an in-situ subject focus, **la** would not be felicitous. For instance, imagine a context in which a car has crashed into a tree and people gather to watch what happened. A questioner approaches the crowd and poses the question in (28a). In that context, the answer is felicitous with either **n** or **ka**, depending on what the answerer considers the spectacle.

(28) Focusing noun phrases with **ka** or **n**.

a. **bo n ning-Ø?**

What FOC. happen-PERF.

What (has) happened?

b. **loori n to-Ø tia**

lorry FOC. hit-PERF. tree

A car has crashed (into) a tree

c. **tia ka loori to-Ø**

tree FOC. lorry hit-PERF.

It is a tree that a car hit

#d. **loori to-Ø la tia**

lorry hit-PERF. FOC. tree

A lorry hit a tree

(28b) would be the most felicitous answer if the lorry got destroyed or people in the lorry got hurt. However, if no injuries or damages were recorded on the lorry or its occupants, or if the lorry drove away and left the tree destroyed, the more felicitous answer would be (28c).

Consider a different scenario in which the answer to the question in (28a) does not contain an object or adjunct. Imagine the questioner asked this question after seeing a woman weeping due to the death of her dog. In (29), the only felicitous response to (29a) is (29b).

(29) An answer with no object or adjunct

a. **bo n ning-Ø?**

what FOC. happen-PERF.

What (has) happened?

b. **m baa n kpi-Ø duu**

1SG. dog FOC. die- PERF. room

(What happened is that) my dog has died in the room.

- c. #**m baa kpi-Ø la duu**
 1SG. dog die-PERF. FOC. room
 my dog has died in the room
- d. #**duu ka m baa kpi-Ø**
 room FOC. 1SG. dog die-PERF.
 It is in the room that my dog has died

Issah (2008, this issue) also rejects **la** as a contrastive focus marker raising arguments that border on difficulties in distinguishing focus-**la** from its homophones and the possibility of coordinating post verbal constituents focused with **la**. These are discussed in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

2.2.2. Distinguishing **la** from homophonous particles

Part of the challenge in analysis of **la** is the existence of homophonous particles, a point already noted for **ka**. The failure to make this distinction in the literature has led to claims that **la** co-occurs with other focus markers such as **n** and **ka** (e.g. Issah 2008). Purvis on the other hand acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between focus-**la** and another **la** which is a determiner (Purvis 2008: 193). In this section, I show that Dagbani has at least three distinct **la** particles. These are (i) focus-**la**, already discussed in detail, (ii) determiner-**la** and (iii) deictic-**la**. I demonstrate that understanding the distinction between these homophones is crucial to understanding of **la** as a contrastive focus marker.⁶

Distributionally, a determiner-**la** immediately follows the noun phrase. The preceding NP must have a full noun. It does not follow pronouns, as shown in (30d). It occurs in a wide variety of contexts, including preverbal and postverbal positions, simple nouns and complex NPs. Purvis (2008) labels the determiner-**la** as a determiner marking shared/inferable knowledge. Further discussion of the determiner-**la** is presented in Wilson (1972), Olawsky (1999), and Issah (2008). The data in (30) contrasts sentences with **la** with those without it.

(30) Determiner-**la**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a. i. bia la be duu
 child DET. be room
 The/that child is in the room</p> | <p>ii. bia be duu
 child be room
 A child is in the room</p> |
| <p>b. i. bi so ti ni bori la ka-Ø na
 child some 3PL. TEMP. want DET. come-PERF. DEIC.
 The child we are looking for has come</p> | |
| <p>ii. bi so ti ni bori ka-Ø na
 child some 3PL. TEMP. want come DEIC.
 A child we are looking for has come</p> | |
| <p>c. i. ti sa nya-Ø bia la
 3PL. TD see-PERF. child DET.
 We saw the child yesterday</p> | <p>ii. ti sa nya-Ø bia
 3PL. TD see-PERF. child
 We saw a child yesterday.</p> |

⁶ It is worth noting that these particles are non-lexical items, and so do not receive lexical tone. The tone they bear depends on the context in which they occur.

- d. i. ***ɲuni la chang-ya**
 3SG.EMPH.DET. go-PERF
 *The she has gone

The Deictic-**la**, on the other hand, points to an NP that is temporally or physically away from the utterance location. It can be loosely translated into the English word ‘that/there’. In some contexts, it is used in contrast with the particle **ɲo** ‘this’, which indicates that the entity spoken about has the same temporal or physical location as that of the utterance. Unlike the determiner-**la**, the deictic-**la** occurs postverbally. It typically occurs clause-finally, but may be followed by the locative **sa** ‘yonder’. The clauses in (31) illustrate this distribution.⁷

(31) Deictic-**la**.

- a. i. **ɲuni m ba la** ii. **ɲuni m bo ɲo**
 3SG.EMPH. FOC. be DEIC. 3SG.EMPH. FOC. be DEIC.
 Who is that/ who is there? Who is this?
- b. i. **m bia m ba la** ii. **m bia m bo ɲo**
 1SG.POSS. child FOC. be DEIC 1SG. POSS. child FOC. be DEIC
 That is my child This is my child
- c. i. **Adam n do-ya la** ii. **Adam n do-ya**
 Adam FOC. lie-PERF. DEIC. Adam FOC. lie-PERF.
 There lies Adam. It is Adam who is lying down
- d. i. **niriba maa n cha-ni la sa**
 people DET. FOC. go-IMPERF DEIC. yonder
 There/those are the people, going
- ii. **niriba maa n cha-ni ɲo**
 people DET. FOC. go-IMPERF. DEIC
 Here/these are the people, going

Table 1 presents a summary of all the three **la** particles and their features.

Table 1: Dagbani **la** particles and their features.

Particles Features	Focus-la	Determiner-la	Deictic-la
Preceding constituent	verb	noun/NP	verb
Following constituent	noun phrases/ adjuncts	varied	optional locative
Requirements/restrictions on contiguous constituents	post- la pronoun must be emphatic	preceding NP cannot be a pronoun	subject must be focused with n focus marker
Contrasting particles	none	none	ɲo

The analysis presented here crucially makes a number of predictions regarding the possible combination of the various **la** particles in Dagbani. First, given that the determiner **la** occurs in a position different from that of the other homophones, it

⁷ Preceding **la** and **ɲo**, the vowel of the verb **be** ‘to be/ exist’ assimilates completely to that of the deictic particle.

should be possible to combine it with the determiner-**la** or the deictic-**la**. This prediction is borne out, as shown in (32) and (33).

(32) Combination of deictic-**la** with determiner-**la**.

- a. **bia la m ba la**
child DET. FOC. be DEIC
That is the child
- c. **ti zo la n do-ya la**
3SG.POSS. friend DET. FOC. lie-PERF. DEIC.
There lies our friend
- d. **niriba la n cha-ni la**
people DET. FOC. go-IMPERF DEIC
There/those are the people, going

(33) Combination of focus-**la** with determiner-**la**.

- a. **bia la be la duu la ni**
child DET. be FOC. room DET LOC.
The/that child is in that room
- b. **ti sa nya-Ø la bia la**
3PL. TD see-PERF. FOC. child DET.
We saw that child yesterday
- c. **ti zo la cha-ni la daa la ni**
3SG.POSS. friend DET. go-IMPERF. FOC. market DET. LOC.
That friend of ours is going to that market.

The second prediction is that a combination of a focus-**la** and a deictic-**la** should not be possible because (i) both occur post-verbally, and (ii) the deictic-**la** already requires a focus particle, and thus cannot take another focus particle. This is illustrated in (34).⁸

(34) No combination of focus-**la** with deictic-**la**.

- a. ***bia m be la la duu**
child FOC. be DET. FOC. room
A child is the child in the room
- b. ***ti sa nya-Ø la la bia la**
3PL. TD see-PERF. FOC. DEIC. child DET.
That is the child we saw yesterday
- c. ***ti zo n cha-ni la la daa ni**
3SG.POSS. friend FOC. go-IMPERF. FOC. DEIC. market LOC.
That is our friend going to the market

The second co-occurrence restriction just noted has been observed by Olawsky (1999). In support of **la** as a focus marker, Olawsky observes that focus-**la** does not co-occur with the other focus particles. Issah (2008) argues to the contrary. He uses the examples in (35) and (36) to illustrate his argument that focus-**la** co-occurs with **ka**

⁸ There is a particle **lala** that marks sameness, specificity, among others. (34b) may be marginally acceptable to some speakers when the two **la** particles in the sentence are interpreted as the particle **lala**.

and **n** focus markers.

(35) **La** with **ka** in one sentence (Issah 2008:76)

- a. **man ka bi-hi tu-ri la**
 1SG.EMPH FOC. child-PLU insult-IMPERF. LA.
 It is me that children are insulting
- b. **nyin ka Abu la-ri la.**
 2SG EMPH FOC. Abu laugh-IMPERF. LA
 It is you (that) Abu is laughing at
- c. **bua ka o ku-Ø la**
 goat FOC. 3SG. kill-PERF. LA
 It is a goat that he has killed

(36) **La** with **n** focus marker in one sentence? (Issah 2008:77)

- a. **Abu n da-ri bu-hi la**
 Abu FOC. buy-IMPERF. goat-PL. LA.
 It is Abu who is buying goats
- b. **Ama n di-ri la**
 Ama FOC. eat-IMPERF. LA
 It is Ama who is eating

In his analysis, these sentences still maintain the contrastive reading attributable to the focus particle **ka** or **n**. He uses this to support his analysis that what precedes **la** is backgrounded information and serves as a counter-argument to **la** as a contrastive focus marker. Having **la** and a contrastive focus marker in one sentence suggests that **la** marks something other than focus.

The analysis presented here is that, this is not a counter-argument to **la** as a focus marker. The sentences in (35) and (36b) each contains a deictic-**la**. (36a) is ambiguous, as the **la** used could be a deictic or a determiner. As a deictic, the sentence would be translated as ‘there/that is Abu buying goats’. As a determiner, the sentence would be translated as ‘it is Abu who buying the goats. The strength of the current analysis is that, by recognising the existence of these three different **la** particles, the distributional generalisation of the focus-**la**, the obligatory presence of a post-**la** NP or adjunct, as observed by previous researchers including Issah (2008), remains unchanged. By contrast, failure to recognise the distinctions between these particles results in positing a new distributional pattern for this particle without sufficient motivation.

2.2.3 Coordination of post-**la** constituents

Issah (this issue) also cites the possibility of coordinating two constituents in post-**la** position as an argument against **la** as a contrastive focus marker. Issah uses the data in (37) to support his arguments.

(37) Coordinate structures and contrastive focus (Issah: this issue).

- a. **Napari da-Ø la namda**
 Napari buy-PERF. FOC. sandals
 Napari has bought sandals
- b. **Napari da-Ø la namda mini buku.**
 Napari buy-PERF. FOC. sandal CONJ. book
 Napari has bought a pair of sandals and a book
- c. **Namda ka Napari da-Ø**
 Sandals FOC. Napari buy-PERF.
 It is a pair of sandals that Napari has bought
- d. ***Namda ka Napari da-Ø mini buku**
 sandal FOC Napari buy-PERF. CONJ. book
- e. **Abu m bu-ri bia maa**
 Abu FOC. beat-IMPERF. child DEF.
 Abu beats/is beating the child
- f. ***Abu m bu-ri bia maa mini Napari**
 Abu FOC. beat-IMPERF child DEF. CONJ. Napari

(37b) shows that the post-**la** position can take a coordinate structure. This, in Issah's account, contrasts with the sentences in (37c-37f). He argues that "once **ka** and **n** show contrast and select a particle identity as the only member that holds for a particular context, then it becomes unacceptable for these particles to be compatible with coordination..." (Issah: this issue).

However, Issah's analysis does not capture a crucial difference between the focus particles: **la** on the one hand, and **ka** and **n** on the other. The particle **la** precedes constituents that it focuses while **ka** and **n** follow such constituents. As such, the use of coordination as a test of contrastivity must respect these differences. In other words, using coordination to test whether these two types of focus markers mark contrastivity requires that the coordinate structure focused by **la** follows the particle while the coordinate structures focused by **ka** and **n** precede these particles. The data in (37) show that Issah is only half right: he is accurate in his use of coordination to test contrastivity in the case of **la** but inaccurate in using the same diagnostic to test the contrastivity of **n** and **ka**. While both constituents in the coordinate structure in (37b) follow the particle **la**, in (37d), one of the constituents in the coordinate structure precedes **ka** while the other follows it with many words intervening between the constituents. Similarly, in (37f) Abu, one of the constituents in the putative coordinate structure begins the sentence while Napari, the other element ends the sentence. Thus the data in (37) does not test what it is supposed to test.

When the difference between these two types of focus markers is considered, it becomes obvious that **ka** and **n** do focus coordinate structures just as **la** does. The data in (38a-c) show such examples, repeating (37b) for ease of comparison.

(38) Coordinate structures and contrastive focus.

- a.. **Napari da-Ø la namda mini buku.**
 Napari buy-PERF. FOC. namda CONJ. book
 Napari bought sandals and a book

- b. **namda mini buku ka Napari da-Ø**
 namda CONJ. book FOC. Napari buy-PERF
 It is sandals and a book that Napari bought
- c. **Abu mini Napari n da-Ø namda**
 Abu CONJ. Napari FOC. buy-PERF. sandal
 It is Abu and Napari who bought sandals
- d. ***Napari da-Ø namda la mini buku.**
 Napari buy-PERF. sandal FOC. CONJ. book
 Napari has bought a pair of sandals and a book

Thus the sentences in (37d) and (37f) are ungrammatical for reasons independent of focus considerations. They are similar to the sentence in (38d), which is ungrammatical because the two constituents in the coordinate structure are separated by the focus particle.⁹

A more fundamental point worth noting here is that, contrastively focused constituents are not restricted to non-coordinate structures. This is because a coordinate structure is treated as one constituent for focus considerations and does not constitute a test of contrastivity in focus. Thus contrary to Issah's claims, whether a focused constituent can be a coordinate structure or not is not a test of contrastivity.

3. **Mi** AS A PREDICATE FOCUS MARKER

The particle **mi** has received a relatively less attention than the other particles discussed here. Purvis (2008) glosses it as a marker of emphasis, without detailed discussion. Olawsky has a more detailed discussion which I return to shortly. I argue that **mi** is a predicate focus marker. Like the other focus markers, **mi** shows contrast in focusing the action or state of the verb, as the discourse in (39) illustrates.

(39) **Mi** as a contrastive focus marker.

- a. **Adam piri namda palli**
 Adam wear shoe new
 Adam is wearing *a new shoe*.
- b. **ya ka o nya-Ø li**
 where FOC. 3SG.ANIM. get-PERF. 3SG.INANIM.
Where did he get it from?
- c. **#O da-Ø li**
 3SG.ANIM. buy-PERF. 3SG.INANIM.
 He bought it.
- d. **O da-Ø li mi**
 3SG.ANIM. buy-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. FOC.
 He bought it.

In (39), the questioner in (39b) may assume a number of possible sources of the new shoes that Adam is wearing. This may include Adam having it as a gift, buying it, inheriting it, borrowing it for use etc. What is required as a felicitous answer is to give an indication that none of these holds true as a source of Adam's shoes except one,

⁹ This sentence is only ungrammatical when **la** is interpreted as a focus particle. It is grammatical only when **la** is interpreted as a deictic particle, in which case it means 'Napari has bought that sandal and a book.'

which is that Adam bought it. The answer in (39c) is not felicitous because it is not sufficient to rule out the other possible sources of the new shoes. (39d) would also be the needed answer if the question were to assume one of the other sources, as shown in (40).

(40) **Mi** as a contrastive focus marker.

- a. **nuni n ti-Ø o li**
Who FOC. give-PERF. 3SG.ANIM. 3SG.INANIM.
Who gave it to him (as a gift)?
- b. **so bi ti-Ø o, o da-Ø li mi**
one NEG. give-PERF. 3SG.ANIM. 3SG.ANIM. buy-PERF. 3SG.INANIM.FOC.
No one gave it to him, he bought it.
- c. **# so bi ti-Ø o, o da-Ø li**
one NEG. give-PERF. 3SG.ANIM. 3SG.ANIM. buy-PERF. 3SG.INANIM.
No one gave it to him, he bought it.

However, if there is no demand to pick out only one source of the shoes, the particle **mi** is not required. Thus a simple sentence like **Adam da-Ø namda** (Adam has bought shoes) is felicitous only as providing new non-presupposed information.

The range of distributional possibilities for **mi** is wide. It can follow intransitive verbs, (41a), or transitive verbs in which the object may be left out, as in (41b). (41c-d) also show that **mi** may be followed by an adjunct or a clause.

(41) **Mi** as a contrastive focus marker.

- a. **Baba kuhi-ri mi**
Baba cry-IMPERF. FOC.
Baba is crying. (He is not laughing)
- b. **toha daa yi kuli cha-ni mogu ni, o doli-Ø mi.**
hunter TD when ever go-IMPF. bush LOC. 3SG. follow.PERF. FOC.
Whenever the hunter was going to the bush he would follow.
(he would not stay at home) (Yahaya 1995: 20)
- c. **Napari ka-Ø mi na daa ni**
Napari come-PERF. FOC. LOC. market LOC.
Napari came to the market. (She did not wander about in the neighbourhood)
- d. **Abu yeli-Ø 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).

Olawsky's analysis is that, **mi** emphasises the imperfective marker **di** or its allomorph **ri** when the sentence does not have an object in final position. What Olawsky's analysis accurately captures is that **mi** never occurs with an overtly marked perfective morpheme **ya**. This particle thus has a similar effect as an object in a sentence. As noted earlier, the imperfective marker is not overtly marked when the verb has an object or adjunct. However, Olawsky's analysis crucially predicts only examples such as (41a), where **mi** occurs with imperfective aspect, as the only context in which this particle occurs. The other examples in (41) show that **mi** has a wider distribution.

The final argument supporting the position of **mi** as a focus marker comes from its distributional restrictions in sentences. This is discussed in Section (4).

4. TESTING FOR CONTRASTIVE FOCUS FUNCTION OF DAGBANI PARTICLES

In addition to the largely language-internal evidence provided in the preceding sections, it is important to apply language-universal diagnostics to support the view that the particles are indeed contrastive focus markers. The arguments presented here supporting the particles as contrastive focus markers have been based on exhaustivity. In this section, some of the tests that are used to determine exhaustivity are applied to each of the particles.

4.1 NEGATION OF EXHAUSTIVITY

A constituent can only be negated if it is exhaustively identified. Kiss (1998) (citing Donka Farkas), uses this test to show that the cleft constructions in English and Hungarian are contrastive focus positions. This diagnostic has been noted in the discussion on **n** and **ka** focus markers, and illustrated, to some extent, with the data in (3) and (15). This section discusses the diagnostic further, illustrating it with focus-**la**.

(42) Exhaustive identification with the particle **la**.

- a. **Napari da-Ø la namda**
 Napari buy-PERF. FOC. sandal
 Napari has bought a sandal
- b. **Napari da-Ø namda**
 Napari buy-PERF. sandal
 Napari has bought *a sandal*

(42a) is contradicted by any sentence which claims that Napari bought something else besides a sandal. An example is shown in (43).

(43) Contradiction of (39a).

- aayi, Napari da-Ø bobiga gba**
 no, Napari buy-PERF. headscarf too
 No, Napari bought a headscarf too

(43) contradicts (42a) even though it does not deny that Napari bought a sandal. The contradiction stems from the fact that with the use of **la**, the claim is that Napari bought nothing besides a sandal. A sandal is thus exhaustively identified as the item that Napari bought. The sentence in (42b) lacks these features. It introduces ‘a sandal’ only as new and non-presupposed information. Because it does not exhaustively identify ‘a sandal’ as the item that Napari bought, (43) can not be used to negate it. (42b) could be derived in a context such as the discourse in (44) from which the focus value of ‘a sandal’ could be inferred, but which says nothing about the possibility that Napari bought any thing else.

(44) Potential discourse for (42b).

- a. **m bohi-Ø Napari yela**
 1SG. ask-PERF Napari matters
 I asked about Napari

- b. **ka bi yeli-Ø ma ni o ka-na daa ni**
 CONJ. 3PL. tell-PERF. 3SG.OBJ.COMP. 3SG. come-hither market LOC.

ka da-Ø namda
 CONJ buy-PERF. sandal

And I was told that she came to the market and bought *a sandal*.

In (44a), the person asking the question is in the market. The answer provided in (44b) answers the questions regarding the whereabouts of Napari and, in addition, provides the information that Napari bought a sandal. It says nothing about whether she bought anything else, nor whether buying the sandal is the purpose of her coming to the market. When applied to sentences containing the particle **mi**, similar results are obtained.

4.2 CO-ORDINATION AND ENTAILMENT

In this test, devised by Szabolcsi (1981), sentence pairs are used; the first containing two co-ordinate phrases that are focused, and differs from the second only in that one of the co-ordinate phrases 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.

When applied to a sentence with any of the focus particles **ka**, **n**, **la**, the result supports the analysis that they are indeed contrastive focus markers. For instance the sentence pair in (45) do not contradict each other because **ka** is not used. This is in contrast to (46), where the use of **ka** results in a contradiction.

(45) No contradiction without **ka**

- a. **ti nya-Ø Amina mini Abiba duu maa ni**
 1PL see-PERF. Amina CONJ. Abiba room DEF. LOC.
 We saw *Amina and Abiba* in the room
- b. **ti nya-Ø Amina duu maa ni**
 1PL see-PERF. Amina room DEF. LOC.
 We saw *Amina* in the room

(46) **Ka** results in a contradiction

- a. **Napari mini Balmini ka ti nya-Ø duu maa ni**
 Napari CONJ. Balmini FOC. 1PLSUBJ. see-PERF. room DEF. LOC.
 It is Napari and Balmini that we saw in the room
- b. **Napari ka ti nya-Ø duu maa ni**
 Napari FOC. 1PLSUBJ. see-PERF. room DEF. LOC.
 It is Napari that we saw in the room

While (45a) entails (45b), i.e. they do not contradict each other; the two sentences in (46) contradict each other.

The only particle for which this test fails is **mi**. The two sentences in (47) do not contradict each other, just as those in (48) do not.

(47) No contradiction without **mi**

- a. **Adam me-ya ka pili-Ø**
 Adam build-PERF. CONJ. roof-PERF.
 Adam *built and roofed*

- b. **Adam me-ya**
 Adam build-PERF.
 Adam has *built*.

(48) **Mi** does not result in a contradiction

- a. **Adam me-Ø li mi ka pili-Ø**
 Adam build-PERF. 3SG.INANIM FOC. CONJ. roof-PERF.
 Adam built and roofed it
- b. **Adam pil-Ø li mi**
 Adam roof-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. FOC.
 Adam roofed it

Unlike the other focussed conjunctions, (48a) does not give the reading that Adam built and roofed a structure but did nothing else. It does give the reading that he did not acquire it as a built and roofed property. Thus it is not contradicted by the sentence in (48b). It would only be contradicted by a sentence that has a verb different from any of the two verbs in (48a). (48a) entails (48b) in the same way as (47a) entails (47b). Thus neither of the pairs expresses exhaustivity as the second of each pair is among the logical consequences of the first.

What makes **mi** different from the rest of the particles is that, it focuses the verb. A sentence with co-ordinate clauses such as (47a) and (48a) makes two separate and independent claims about one entity, the subject, rather than one claim about different entities. As in the other multi-clausal constructions, there can be only one **mi**, being a focus focus marker, within a sentence, (49a). However, unlike focusing co-ordinate structures with other focus particles, **mi** has an effect only on the first clause, not the second. Thus focus marker must be located right after the first verb, (48a), not after the second (49b).

- (49) a. ***Adam me-Ø li mi ka pili-Ø li mi**
 Adam build-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. FOC. CONJ. roof-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. FOC.
 Adam built and roofed it
- b. ***Adam me-Ø li ka pili-Ø li mi**
 Adam build-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. CONJ. roof-PERF. 3SG.INANIM. FOC.
 Adam built and roofed it

The result of the co-ordination and entailment test is not sufficient to reject **mi** as a focus marker. To the contrary, the fact that only one **mi** can be found in a sentence support its focus value, as discussed in 4.3. What the result shows is that, unlike the other focused positions, the co-ordination and entailment test is not suited for testing exhaustivity in predicate focus.

4.3 COMBINATION OF PARTICLES WITHIN ONE CLAUSE

Given the feature of exhaustivity for contrastive focus positions, there can be only one exhaustively identified position within a clause. This means that in Dagbani where particles are used to mark contrastive focus, there can be only one such contrastive focus particle within one clause. The sentence in (49a) has already demonstrated that one focus particle can not be repeated within a sentence. Similarly, a combination of any two of the different particles results in an ungrammatical sentence. This is shown in the ungrammatical sentences in (50).

(50) Only one focus marker within a sentence.

a. No combination of **n** and **mi** in one sentence

***Adam n da-Ø (li) mi**
Adam FOC. buy-PERF. (3sg.inanim.) FOC.
It is Adam who bought (it).

b. No combination of **la** and **mi** in one sentence

***Adam da-Ø la bua mi / *Adam da-Ø mi la bua**
Adam buy-PERF. FOC. goat FOC Adam buy-PERF. FOC FOC goat
Adam bought a goat.

c. No combination of **ka** and **mi** in one sentence

***bu ka Adam da-Ø mi**
goat FOC. Adam buy-PERF. FOC.
It is a goat that Adam bought.

d. No combination of **n** and **la** in one sentence

***Napari n da-Ø la bua**
Napari FOC. buy-PERF. FOC. goat
It is Napari who bought a goat.

e. No combination of **n** and **ka** in one sentence

***bua ka Napari n da-Ø**
goat FOC. Napari FOC. buy-PERF.
It is a goat that Napari bought.

f. No combination of **la** and **ka** in one sentence

***bua ka Napari da-Ø la**
goat FOC. Napari buy-PERF. FOC.
It is a goat that Napari bought.

A similar restriction exists when **ka** is used to focus an entire clause. Since the entire clause is focused, it is not possible to focus any constituent within the clause. Thus no other focus particle can be found within the clause while maintaining **ka** and the accompanying falling intonation. When a focus particle is forced into such a sentence, the initial **ka** loses its value as a focus marker. This is shown in (51).

(51) No other focus marker with clause-initial focus **ka**.

a. Clause-initial focus **ka** with **n**.

ka nyini m bi labi-ri o
NEG. 2SG.EMPH. FOC. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG
Not you are not throwing at it (It is not that you are not throwing at it.)

b. Clause-initial focus **ka** with non-initial focus **ka**.

ka ŋuni ka a bi labi-ra
NEG. 3SG.EMPH. FOC. 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF.
Not it (the bird) that you are not throwing at.
(It is not the bird that you are not throwing at.)

c. Clause-initial focus **ka** with **la**

ka a bi labi-ri la noonga

NEG. 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. FOC. bird

KA do you not throw at a bird?

(Is it not the case that you throw a stick at a bird?)

d. Clause-initial focus **ka** with **mi**.

ka a bi labi-ri o mi

NEG. 2SG. NEG. throw-IMPERF. 3SG FOC.

KA are you not throwing at it?

(Is it not the case that you regularly throw at it?)

In (51a-b), the introduction of **n** and **ka** as focus markers within the sentences means that the initial **ka** is no more the focus **ka**. Instead, it is the clause-negating particle. In (51c-d), on the other hand, the initial **ka** is the general discourse particle. With the negative particle within the sentence, the sentence is a rhetorical question. However, it is not a request, as in a clause-initial focus **ka**. Rather it seems to present to the listener a fact that the listener (or someone else) seemingly does not accept. For instance, if the listener denies a blame that he is responsible for the injuries suffered by a pet, the speaker in (51d) could use the sentence to support the blame saying: ‘Is it not the case that you (regularly) throw your stick at the pet? How then can you deny being responsible for the injuries?’

It is worth noting that even though it is established that none of the particles under discussion can be combined with another within one clause, that alone may not be sufficient to conclude that they are focus markers. I am not aware of any other grammatical rule that could account for the restrictions in combining these particles. However, I do not claim that no such rule could possibly exist. The key argument here is that, such a combination is required to argue that they are not focus markers. The impossibility of such a combination weakens any argument that they are not contrastive focus markers.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

What I have tried to do in this paper is present a basic description of Dagbani focus particles. I have argued that each of the particles **ka**, **n**, **la**, and **mi** marks contrastive focus in Dagbani. Collectively, the particles are shown to mark four types of focus: non-subject focus, subject focus, predicate focus and clausal focus. It has also shown that all the particles mark focus in-situ while **ka**, additionally marks focus through movement. While **ka** and **n** have been widely acknowledged in the literature as focus markers, **la** and **mi** have been given different descriptions. In the case of **la** and **ka** a lot of arguments are presented to the effect that in order to understand their position as focus markers, these particles need to be distinguished from their homophones. The conclusions reached on these particles are premised on these arguments. This is not the first time this has been noted. Purvis (2008) and Issah (2008 and this issue) have both noted the existence of these homophones. However, the lack of detailed discussion of these homophones has hindered a thorough understanding of some aspects of Dagbani focus. The analysis has been largely based on the key feature of exhaustivity in contrastive focus. The argument is that every contrastive focus position must be exhaustively identified. The results of three test of exhaustivity serves to strengthen the conclusions drawn.

The paper has made a number of contributions. First, it is one of the existing

studies presenting a detailed discussion of Dagbani focus. Issah (2008) has been more detailed in the application of theoretical analysis to Dagbani focus. However, the descriptive details are fraught with some controversies, as already noted. This in particular represents the first description of clausal and in-situ focus for **ka**. It also presents the most detailed discussion on the distinction between focus particles and their homophones. This is not to suggest that Dagbani focus in general has been comprehensively described. Pitch accent has only received a mention while intonation has only been looked at in terms of how it complements **ka** to mark clausal in-situ focus. A more detailed study of intonation may reveal a more robust role of intonation in Dagbani focus. A comprehensive treatment of Dagbani focus certainly requires a detailed description not only of these prosodic focus markers, but also of the syntax and semantics of Dagbani focus. In spite of these limitations, the paper has met its goal of providing a descriptive detail that will also serve as an input to future theoretical studies on a larger scale.

ABBREVIATIONS

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person	FOC.	focus	PERF.	perfective
ANIM.	animate	FUT.	future	PL.	plural
COMP.	complementiser	IMPERF.	imperfective	POSS.	possessive
CONJ.	conjunction	INANIM.	inanimate	SG.	singular
DEIC.	DEICTic marker	LOC.	locative	SUBJ.	subject
DET.	determiner	NEG.	negative	TD	time depth marker
EMPH.	emphatic	OBJ.	object	TEMP.	temporal marker

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