

## THE FUNCTION OF THE POST VERBAL *la* IN DAGBANI

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This paper investigates the function(s) of the post verbal particle **la** in Dagbani, a Gur language spoken in Northern Ghana. I contend that the particle marks neither imperfective aspect nor contrastive focus on NP objects and adjuncts, as suggested by earlier researchers. Here, I refine the existing analyses and put forth an alternative proposal in which the particle **la** marks presentational focus. I suggest that **la** could mark presentational focus on NP complements, adjuncts or the entire VP. I demonstrate that full NPs follow **la**, while object pronouns precede it, suggesting that object pronouns either undergo object shift or are syntactically bound to the verb. I also discuss **ka** and **n**, which have been proposed to have functions similar to **la**. More information on the interaction of these elements will be relevant for the understanding of the latter's function. I further show that there is co-occurrence restrictions between **ka/n** and post verbal **la**, as has been claimed by earlier research. I show that although we can have **la** that co-occurs with the focus markers **ka/n**, that **la** is probably a deictic discourse particle and not the presentational focus marker. I propose that when the deictic **la** co-occurs with **ka/n**, it appears only clause finally. I conclude that the use or non-use of the post verbal **la** is due to discourse-pragmatic considerations.

### 1. Introduction

This paper explores the function and pragmatics of post-verbal **la** in Dagbani, a Southwestern Oti-Volta language in the Central Gur family spoken in Northern Ghana: Naden (1988, 1989). Although Dagbani is a tonal language, tone is not marked in this paper since it is not relevant to the current discussion. Here, we consider not only the syntactic distribution and function of the particle **la**, but also its contextual appropriateness in the language. Cross linguistically, the analysis of particles has been challenging for syntacticians. For example, post-verbal **la** has been problematic in the study of the information structure of Oti-Volta languages where a cognate form occurs. It has attracted the attention of researchers in Oti-Volta linguistics: Olawsky (1999), Fusheini (2006), and Issah (2008) for Dagbani, Dakubu (2000) for Gurene, Saanchi (2005) and Dakubu & Saanchi (1997) for Dagaare, Cahill, (1993a) for Konni and Schwarz (2007) for Konkomba.

This **la** appears with high frequency in sentences in texts and conversations. I propose that almost every main declarative sentence in Dagbani is “focus-marked presentationally” with **la**. Bodomu (1997) makes a similar observation for Dagaare, a genetically related language, and concludes that almost every main (declarative) clause in Dagaare has the “focus” particle **la**. I will argue that this particle marks presentational focus on either constituent that follows the verb or on the entire verb phrase.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. **Neindoo da-Ø buku** *canonical sentence*  
 Neindoo buy.PERF book  
 ‘Neindoo has bought a book.’
- b. **Buku ka Neindoo da-Ø**  
 book FM Neindoo buy.PERF  
 ‘It is a book that Neindoo has bought.’
- c. **\*Bukun Neindoo da-Ø**  
 book FM Neindoo buy.PERF

It is observed from the data in (1) that while in sentence (1a) **buku** “a book” occurs in clause final position, in sentence (1b) it has been moved to the clause-initial position, and followed by the **ka** particle. The major difference between (1a) and (1b) is that while (1a) has a neutral reading, (1b) has a contrastive reading in that **buku** “book” is contrasted with any other item that might have been bought by **Neindoo**. In the spirit of Kiss (1999) and Krifka (2007), we hypothesize that **buku** “a book” is exhaustively identified as the only element for which the predicate holds in this particular discourse setting. The ungrammaticality of sentence (1c) demonstrates that **n** does not focus NP objects that are front shifted. Thus, unlike **ka**, **n** encodes contrastive focus on NP subjects.

- (2) a. **Mandeeya ku- Ø bua maa** *canonical sentence*  
 Mandeeya kill.PERF goat DEF  
 ‘Mandeeya has killed the goat.’

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is a thoroughly revised version of certain portions of my MPhil thesis submitted to the University of Tromsø, Norway. I am indebted to Professor Gillian Ramchand for her extensive comments on earlier version of this paper. Thanks to Paul Schaefer and Mike Cahill for checking the paper for English. I am also grateful to three anonymous reviewers of SAL for their insightful observations which have improved this paper. I bear the blame for any remaining flaws.

- b. **Mandeeya    η        ku- Ø        bua    maa**  
 Mandeeya    FM    kill.PERF    goat    DEF  
 ‘It is Mandeeya who has killed the goat.’
- c. **\*Mandeeya    ka        ku-Ø        bua    maa**  
 Mandeeya    FM    kill.PERF    goat    DEF

We see from the data in (2) that when an NP subject is to be contrastively focused, it is done by inserting the **n** particle between the NP subject and the verb. The ungrammaticality of sentence (2c) further demonstrates that NP subjects cannot be focus marked with **ka**. This observation has driven researchers of Dagbani grammar to propose that there is a structural asymmetry between subject focus (SF) and non-subject focus (NSF): Fiedler & Schwarz (2005), Fusheini (2006), Schwarz & Fiedler (2007) Issah (2012, 2008). The main difference between **la** on one hand and **ka** and **n** on the other is that, while the former is proposed to be a marker of presentational focus, the latter particles are proposed to be markers of contrastive focus.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Earlier Analyses of *la* in Dagbani

The particle **la** has received attention from Dagbani researchers who concern themselves with information structure in the language. Among these are: Olawsky (1999), Fusheini (2006) and Issah (2008). There, however, continues to be divergent views by researchers as to the role this particle plays in the grammar of Dagbani. Olawsky (1999:38) identifies **la** as a morpheme with an aspectual function. However, he glosses the particle both as a focus marker and aspectual marker. He argues that as an aspectual morpheme, **la** marks habitual as well as continuous aspect when it follows a verb phrase. He uses the data below to support his assertion.

- (3) a. **Fati    bari    la            tɛtɛɛ**  
 Fati    ride    imperf.foc    bicycle  
 ‘Fati is riding a bicycle.’

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<sup>2</sup>For details of the marking of contrastive focus in Dagbani, readers should refer to Issah (2012) and Fusheini (2012) and references cited therein. When I speak of a sentence being “felicitous” in this paper, I mean that the sentence is contextually inappropriate in the given discourse situation; “infelicitous” means that although the structure may be grammatical, it is contextually inappropriate within a given discourse situation. The symbols “#” and “\*” are used to indicate infelicitous and ungrammatical sentences respectively.

- b. **M bəhəndi la Dagbanli**  
 I learn imperf.foc Dagbanli  
 ‘I am learning Dagbanli.’ (Olawsky 1999:38)

Olawsky (1999) also points out that **la** could just as well be marking emphasis. However, he fails to specifically identify the constituent within the sentence structure on which **la** marks focus or emphasis. His claim that **la** also has an imperfective aspectual function in the language is questionable. Skepticism as to the aspectual function of **la** is based on two observations. In the first place, it is possible to have an imperfective reading without the **la** particle as in (4a) and (4b).

- (4) a. **Napari ku-ri bu-hi**  
 Napari kill.IMPERF goat.PL  
 ‘Napari is killing/kills goats.’
- b. **Tiyumba di-ri bindirigu maa**  
 Tiyumba eat.IMPERF food DEF  
 ‘Tiyumba is eating/eats the food.’
- c. **Napari ku-ri la bu-hi**  
 Napari kill.IMPERF FM goat.PL  
 ‘Napari is killing/kills goats.’

It is worth mentioning that the example in (4a) has the same habitual reading with an insertion of the **la** particle as in (4c).

Secondly, it is also possible to have the **la** without an imperfective reading of that sentence, as in (5a) and (5b). These observations thus contradict the claim of Olawsky (1999) that the presence of **la** in a sentence structure necessitates an imperfective aspectual reading.

- (5) a. **Tiyumba ku-Ø la bua**  
 Tiyumba kill.PERF FM goat  
 ‘Tiyumba has killed a goat.’
- b. **Bi-hi maa tu-Ø la Napari**  
 Child-PL DEF insult.PERF FM Napari  
 ‘The children have insulted Napari.’

Fusheini (2006), however, addresses **la** as a contrastive focus marker in *in-situ* position. According to Fusheini, the particle marks contrastive focus on full NPs, adjuncts, emphatic

pronouns and wh-phrases.<sup>3</sup> He gives the data below to argue that question words (6a) and full NPs (6b) can be contrastively focused by **la**.

- (6) a. **Napari da-Ø la bo**  
 Napari buy.perf foc what  
 ‘Napari has bought what?’
- b. **Napari da-Ø la bua**  
 Napari buy.perf foc goat  
 ‘Napari has bought a goat.’ (Fusheini 2006:9)

However, the assertion of contrastive focus in (6b) is not a tenable analysis.

In the first place, the data provided on content questions are questionable since the data he provides in (6a-b) contain an echo question and a response, not a content question and an answer to the content question. Unfortunately, Fusheini (2006) presents these echo questions as content questions and proposes that they are focused by the **la** particle. He contends that **la** marks contrastive focus because of the generally accepted proposal that in the formation of content questions, the question words are contrastively focused. However, if the data provided are really not content questions, then it is inappropriate to make the claim that **la** focuses question words contrastively.

Issah (2013) demonstrates that Dagbani is mainly an *ex-situ* language, in that its question words are generally located in the sentence-initial position and followed immediately by the appropriate focus marker. Though I speak the Tomosili dialect of Dagbani, it does not seem the case that any of the dialects host its question words in the in-situ positions. This explains why the sentences below are ungrammatical.

- (7) a. **\*Mburidiba ku-ri bo?**  
 Mburidiba kill.IMPERF what
- b. **\*Napari chaŋ-Ø ya?**  
 Napari go.PERF where
- c. **\*Napodoo kpi-ya saha dini?**  
 Napodoo die.PERF time which

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<sup>3</sup>Except for instances when I refer to works of others, I do not use the English-centric terminology “wh-questions” or “wh-words”. Consequently, I use “question words” and “content questions” to refer to what has traditionally been known as wh-phrases/words and wh-questions.

The ungrammaticality of (7a, 7b, 7c) is because the question words **bo** ‘what’, **ya** ‘where’ and **saha dini** ‘which time’ are left in the *in-situ* positions in the formation of content questions. This presupposes that Dagbani obligatorily fronts its question words in the formation of content questions.

Besides the observation that the data in (6a-b) are not content questions, I use the question–answer adjacency test to show that a **la** sentence is not felicitous in the context of content questions, indicating that **la** is likely not a contrastive focus marker. In the study of information structure, a standard heuristic for determining the focus constituents in the world’s languages is the use of question answer-pairs: Dik (1978), Watters (1979) Lambrecht (1994), Horvath (1986), and Krifka (2007, 2004). The assumption is that when one asks a content question, importance is laid on the new information requested, more than anything else in the discourse. It is further claimed that because an answer that is provided will be a substitute for the interrogative word, it is invariably a contrastively focused constituent.

The question-answer adjacency test reveals that **la** does not mark contrastive focus, since one cannot answer a "which NP" or “which adjunct” question (e.g., Which plate did Beninya break? / When did Mburidiba buy the book?) with a **la** sentence. In answers to content questions, there is necessarily a selection between two (or more) things, which by definition is contrastive focus. This explains why in the examples below, the **la** sentences are contextually inappropriate. Consider the content question in (8):

- (8) Q: Gurundoo: **Bo ka a ba da-Ø?**  
 What FM 1SG father buy.PERF  
 ‘What has your father bought?’
- A: a. Tiyumba: **#Ø da-Ø loori palli**  
 He buy.PERF lorry new  
 ‘He has bought a new lorry.’
- A: b. Tiyumba: **#Ø da-Ø la loori palli**  
 He buy.PERF FM lorry new  
 ‘He has bought a new lorry.’
- c. Tiyumba: **loori palli ka o da-Ø**  
 lorry new FM 3SG buy.PERF  
 ‘It is a new lorry that he has bought.’

In the context of (8) above, we see that the answer in (8a) is infelicitous. This infelicity is because the sentence does not have a contrastive focus marker. However, we observe that the answer in (8b) has the **la** particle and presents **loori palli** ‘new lorry’ as new non-contrastive information is also inappropriate as an answer to the question in (8). The answer in (8c)

suggests that in answering content questions, the preverbal focus strategy that is the contrastive focus marker is chosen in favour of the presentational focus marker. The answer in (12c) therefore presents **loori palli** ‘new lorry’ as contrastive with other possibilities and so becomes the felicitous answer to question (8).

Within the theoretical assumptions of Krifka’s Alternative Semantics (2004), it is postulated that “the meaning of a question is the set of propositions that answer the question.’ Using English data as illustration to this claim, Krifka stipulates that when one has a question like: *Which student read Ulysses?*, then the meaning of the question is “a set of propositions which can be described as ‘x read Ulysses.’ His conclusion is that “the F-feature of the question must correspond to the wh-constituent of the answer.’ In the question that follows, I present data on content question that demands a contrastively focused adjunct.

- (9) Q: **Bondali ka Napari da-Ø bua maa**  
 when FM Napari buy.PERF goat DEF  
 ‘When did Napari buy the goat?’  
 IS: Subject is old, adjunct is new, and object is old.

A: a. **Sɔhala ka o sa da-Ø o**  
 yesterday FM 3SG TDP buy.PERF 3SG  
 ‘It was yesterday that he bought it.’

b. **#Sɔhala o sa da-Ø o**  
 yesterday 3SG TDP buy.PERF 3SG  
 ‘Yesterday, he bought it.’

c. **#O sa da-Ø o la sɔhala**  
 3SG TDP buy.PERF 3SG FM yesterday.  
 ‘He bought it yesterday.’

We observe in (9a) that the adjunct **sɔhala** ‘yesterday’ is placed at the sentence initial position and contrastively focus marked with **ka**. In the structure in (9a) therefore, the adjunct **sɔhala** ‘yesterday’ is contrasted with any other possible time within which the goat might have been bought by Napari. Accordingly, the meaning of the question *When did Napari buy the goat?* is the set of propositions which can be described as ‘*It was on X that Napari bought the goat?*’ The sentences in (9b, 9c) are however, contextually inappropriate, given the fact that they do not encode any contrastive focus on the adjunct which is to replace the question word. The answer in (9a) therefore, differs from (9c, 9b), in the sense that, whilst (9a) codes contrastive focus on the adjunct by placing it in sentence-initial position and introducing a focus marker to the immediate right, (9c) simply presents the adjunct **sɔhala** ‘yesterday’ as presentational focus by introducing the post-verbal focus particle **la**. Consultation with native speakers

suggests that (9b) has a surprise reading. In the data in (10), we provide further data on content questions to show that **la** does not mark contrastive focus, because one cannot answer a "Which NP" or 'Which adjunct' question with a **la** sentence.

- (10) Q: **Bɔ ka o da-Ø?**  
 What FM 3SG buy.PERF  
 'What has s/he bought?'  
 IS: subject is old, object is new, and verb is old
- A: a. **Loori ka o da-Ø**  
 Lorry FM 3SG buy.PERF  
 'It is a lorry that s/he bought.'
- b. **#O da-Ø la loori**  
 3SG buy.PERF FM lorry  
 'S/he bought a lorry.'
- c. **#O da-Ø loori**  
 3SG buy.PERF lorry  
 'S/he bought a lorry.'

In the context of (10), we observe that the only item that is new is the NP object. While (10a) has the preverbal focus marker **ka**, the sentence in (10b) has the post verbal focus marker **la**, making it inappropriate as an answer to question (10). In this case, as has been suggested, the difference between the two sentences will be that of semantics. Thus, while sentence (10a) has contrastive reading on lorry '**loori**', sentence (10b) only encodes lorry '**loori**' with presentational focus. The structure in (10c) is inappropriate in the context of (10) since it lacks the **ka** particle. In (11), we consider a question in which the NP subject is new.

- (11) Q: **ɲuni n da-Ø loori maa?**  
 who FM buy.PERF lorry DEF  
 'Who bought the lorry?'  
 IS: Subject new, verb is old, object is old.
- A: a. **Napari n da-Ø loori maa**  
 Napari FM buy.PERF lorry DEF  
 'It is Napari who bought the lorry.'

b. #**Napari da-Ø loori maa**  
 Napari buy.PERF lorry DEF  
 ‘Napari has bought the lorry.’

c. #**Napari da-Ø la loori maa**  
 Napari buy.PERF FM lorry DEF.  
 ‘Napari bought the lorry.’

We further see that when the question in (11) demands an answer that introduces a new NP subject, the answer in (11a) with the **n** particle proposed to be marking focus on NP subjects is the felicitous answer.

The data in (8), (9) and (10) shows that the post verbal *la* in the sentence structure does not indicate that the NP object or adjunct that follows it is marked with contrastive focus. Therefore, Fusheini’s characterization of *la* as a contrastive focus marker is not tenable.

Furthermore, there is evidence that goes against the claim that *la* marks presentational focus on NP objects and adjuncts in *in-situ* positions. This occurs in cases where we find this particle being obligatory in sentence structures, which are felicitous as answers to questions, or which require the entire VP to be focused as in the context of (12).

(12) Q: **Bo ka Mandeeya mini Napari niŋ-Ø zuŋɔ?**  
 What FM Mandeeya CONJ Napari do.PERF today  
 ‘What have Mandeeya and Napari done today?’  
 IS: subject is old, adjunct is old, and VP is new information

A: a. **Bɛ da-Ø la loori zuŋɔ.**  
 2PL buy.PERF FM lorry today  
 ‘They have bought a lorry today.’

A: b. #**Loori ka bɛ da-Ø zuŋɔ.**  
 lorry FM 2PL buy.PERF today  
 ‘It is a lorry that they have bought today.’

A: c. #**Bɛ da-Ø loori zuŋɔ.**  
 2PL buy.PERF lorry today  
 ‘They have bought a lorry today.’

It is observed that it is possible for *la* to occur in structures that demand an entire VP to be focused. This therefore, serves as counter-evidence to its analysis as a focus marker on NP objects and adjuncts in *in-situ* position. This observation is what has called for the suggested schema in (13) below.

- (13) [Subject [V *la* ]  
 Presentational focus  
 \*exhaustive

Schwarz (2007:126) also notes a similar particle in Konkomba and concludes that the Konkomba **la** does not mark focus on NP objects and adjuncts, but marks focus on the entire predicate as well. If it is suggested that **la** encodes presentational focus on either post-verbal constituents or the entire predicate, then one could just as well suggest that the subject is separate from the elements on which **la** encodes focus. We investigate the context of (14) to support our claim that the post verbal **la** cannot mark presentational focus on subject constituents in Dagbani.

- (14) Q:    **ɲuni ɲ       ku-Ø    bua   maa?**  
           who  FM   kill.PERF  goat  DEF"  
           'Who has killed the goat?'

IS: subject is new, verb is old and object is old

- A: a. **Bonayo n       ku-Ø    bua   maa.**  
       Bonayo  FM   kill.PERF  goat  DEF  
       'It is Bonayo who has killed the goat.'

- b. **#Bonayo ku-Ø       la bua   maa**  
       Bonayo  kill.PERF  FM goat  DEF  
       'Bonayo has killed the goat.'

- c. **#Bonayo ku-Ø       bua   maa.**  
       Bonayo  kill.PERF  goat  DEF  
       'Bonayo has killed the goat.'

It is seen from the data in (14) that when the constituent that corresponds to the *wh*-question is a subject constituent, then the felicitous answer cannot have the **la** particle in its sentence structure. The aforementioned explanation clarifies why (14c) is contextually infelicitous. Thus, there is evidence to reinforce the claim that the particle **la** cannot encode presentational focus on NP subjects. Dakubu (2000:61) identifies a phonologically and syntactically similar particle in Gurunɛ, a Gur language somewhat closely related to Dagbani, and argues that:

When **la** follows the verb, it marks Focus on the entire predicate, that is, it asserts the concreteness or factivity of the VP-the verb together with its Complement. --- it never occurs with an intransitive verb or a verb whose Complement (which may be an NP, a pronoun, a locative NP or an entire clause is not expressed.

I do not comment on the validity of the claims made by Dakubu (2000) about the *la* particle of Gurunɛ, since this paper is not a contrastive/comparative work between Dagbani and Gurunɛ. Further studies would be helpful in clarifying similarities and differences between the two post-verbal particles in the two genetically related languages.

I claim that *ka/n* is a marker for contrastive focus as proposed in Issah 2012 and Fusheini 2012). This then makes a strong prediction that all constituent questions are contrastively focused in Dagbani as proposed in Issah (2013). This data, taken from Issah (2013:48-51), illustrates the proposal that all constituent questions are marked for contrastive focus.

- (15) a. **Bɔ̃ kà nàà kú-rì chùyù pùhibù dālì t̃?**  
 What FM chief kill.IMPERF festival celebration day  
 ‘What does a chief kill on the day of festival?’
- b. \***Bɔ̃ nàà kú-rì chùyù pùhibù dālìt̃?**  
 What chief kill.IMPERF festival celebration day
- c. \***Chùyù pùhibù dālì nàà kú-rì bɔ̃?**  
 festival celebration day chief kill.IMPERF what
- (16) a. **ɲùní n t̃ dá-Ø lòòrí?**  
 Who FM buy.PERF lorry  
 ‘Who has bought a lorry?’
- b. \***ɲùní t̃ dá-Ø lòòrí?**  
 Who buy.PERF lorry

The ungrammaticality of (15b) indicates that Dagbani cannot form constituent questions without the morphosyntactic manifestation of focus markers. (15c) is also ungrammatical because the question word has been left in situ. A similar explanation is offered for (16b) where a constituent question is formed without a focus marker *n*.<sup>4</sup>

Cross linguistically, well-formed sentences of a given language are considered correct that satisfy all the syntactic, semantic, and morphological as well as the phonological patterns of that language. Accordingly, an acceptable utterance in a given language must always agree with the grammatical principles of that language; though it does not imply that utterances can be considered appropriate in any given discourse context just on the grounds that they are grammatically correct. That is, besides a given linguistic structure meeting the grammatical rules of a given language, the contextual appropriateness is crucial.

<sup>4</sup>For details on the correlation between contrastive focus marking and content questions, refer to Issah (2013).

Discourse is organized by the use of information packaging-devices, such as topic and focus. So it is usually the case that, if the information structure of a particular expression does not match the information packaging that is required in that given context, then, that particular linguistic form is unacceptable, although it might be grammatically well-formed. This presupposes that language usage is built not only on grammatical acceptance of linguistic form but also on the contextual appropriateness of a given linguistic expression in a given context. Linguistic forms thus have specific contexts in which they are judged appropriate by the users of the language.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, the presence or absence of the post-verbal **la** seems to be motivated by pragmatic factor(s) rather than grammatical ones. Consider the sentences in examples (17) and (18):

(17) a. **Napari da-Ø la loori**  
 Napari buy.PERF FM lorry  
 ‘Napari has bought a lorry.’

b. **Napari da-Ø loori**  
 Napari buy.PERF lorry  
 ‘Napari has bought a lorry.’

(18) a. **O nya-Ø la Napodoo**  
 3SG see.PERF FM Napodoo  
 ‘S/he has seen Napodoo.’

b. **O nya-Ø Napodoo**  
 3SG see.PERF Napodoo  
 ‘S/he has seen Napodoo.’

Reasons for the differences between the pairs (17a, 17b) and (18a, 18b) continue to be an issue of debate for most linguists who research Dagbani. Many native speakers, however, argue that the presence of the particle within the sentence structure of the language indicates that what is presented to the hearer is not “shared knowledge” (that is, it is known by the hearer alone; its absence implies that the information presented is shared knowledge). My native speaker intuitions, supported by opinions of other native speakers, suggest that the presence of **la** in the sentence structure asserts new information, whilst the absence of it indicates that the information conveyed is not new. Based on the premise that the absence of this particle in the sentence may only impact the pragmatic appropriateness of that sentence rather than its grammaticality, it is suggested that it probably has a pragmatic function in the language rather than a grammatical one.



#### 4. The Syntax of *la* in Dagbani

The post-verbal particle **la** has a syntactic restriction. This particle never occurs without some kind of post-verbal complement. When it is used with a verb that has no object complement, which could either be an object NP or an adjunct, the resulting structure is ungrammatical or at best incomplete. This ‘transitivity’ requirement of the **la** particle is shown in (22) and (23).

(22) a. **Napari da-ri la bu-hi**  
 Napari buy.IMPERF FM goat.PL  
 ‘Napari buys/is buying goats.’

b. **Napari da-Ø la buku**  
 Napari buy.PERF FM book.  
 ‘Napari has bought a book.’

(23) a. **O di-Ø la zuŋɔ**  
 3SG eat.PERF FM today  
 ‘S/he has eaten today.’

b. **\*Napari da-ri la**  
 Napari buy.IMPERF FM

c. **\*Napari da-Ø la**  
 Napari buy.PERF FM.

Descriptively, the sentences in (22a, 22b, 23a) are grammatical in the language because they meet a syntactic requirement of the language. For instance, they have either NP objects after the post verbal **la** as in (22a, 22b) or an adjunct as in (23a). The ungrammaticality or at best incompleteness of the sentences in (23b, 23c) is due to the fact that they do not meet the syntactic requirement of **la**, which needs an NP object or an adjunct. Note also that when the NP object that follows the **la** particle is an object pronoun, there is a different syntactic relationship between the particle and the object pronoun. This difference, I claim, exists between full NPs and object pronouns in terms of their syntactic relationship with **la** is supported by the observation that unlike the full NPs, the object pronouns precede **la** as in (24a) (25a) and (26a).

- (24) a. **Napari sa ti o la buku palli**  
 Napari TDP give 3SG FM book new  
 ‘Napari gave him/her a new book (yesterday).’
- b. \***Napari sa ti la o buku palli**  
 Napari TDP give FM 3SG book new
- (25) a. **Neindoo bu-Ø ba la kpe**  
 Neindoo beat.PERF 2PL FM here  
 ‘Neindoo has beaten them here.’
- b. \***Neindoo bu-Ø la ba kpe.**  
 Neindoo beat.PERF FM 2PL here.
- (26) a. **Napodoo sa tu ma la sɔhala.**  
 Napodoo TDP insult 2SG FM yesterday  
 ‘Napodoo insulted me yesterday.’
- b. \***Napodoo sa tu la ba sɔhala.**  
 Napodoo TDP insult FM 2PL yesterday.

The data in (24-26) show that NP object pronouns have different syntactic relations with the post verbal particle *la* within the sentence structure of Dagbani. Sentences (24b, 25b & 26b) are ungrammatical because they have pronoun objects which follow *la* rather than preceding them. I propose that object pronouns precede *la* within the syntax because the object pronouns are syntactically bound, or perhaps morphologically, as though in some sense they are suffixes. I propose that the syntactic behavior of the pronouns in relation to *la* can be explained by suggesting that pronouns are always found in the position immediately after the verb. I conclude, therefore, that object pronouns are clitics to the verb.

Hiraiwa and Bodomo (2008:249-250) also observe that in Dagaare, when *la* occurs with pronoun objects, the objects precede the *la* particle unlike full DPs which follow the *la* within the syntax. In accounting for this observation, they propose that unlike full DPs, weak pronominal objects always shift to the left of *la*. This pronominal object shift is what is responsible for the difference in the syntax between *la* and full DPs on one hand and *la* and weak pronominal objects on the other. Therefore, one could give two possible accounts for the relation between the *la* particle and pronominals in Dagbani. These are: (i) that object pronoun forms are clitics to the verb and (ii) that the weak pronominals always shift to the left of the *la* particle.

### 5. The Interaction between **ka**, **n**, and **la**.

Olawsky (1999:67) gives an account of the interaction between **ka** and **la** as information particles in Dagbani. In his work, Olawsky claims that these two particles do not co-occur. In Issah (2008), it is argued that **la** can co-occur with **ka** and **n**. Data presented in this paper will demonstrate that although there is a **la** that co-occurs with the preverbal focus markers **ka** and **n**, it is probably not the post verbal focus marker. I suggest that the **la** that co-occurs with the **ka** and **n** should be analyzed as a deictic discourse marker. If the preverbal focus markers **ka** and **n** encode contrastive focus with **la** encoding presentational focus, then their syntactic incompatibility is understandable: it is not possible to have a structure that is marked for both presentational and contrastive focus simultaneously.

This subsection is devoted to investigating the interaction among the other particles such as **ka** and **n** which have been argued to have similar functions as the **la** particle. Unlike Olawsky (1999), Fusheini (2006) is silent on any combinational permissibility of these particles. Olawsky claims that the ungrammaticality of sentence (27) is due to the co-occurrence of the particles **ka** and **la** in the Dagbani sentence structure.

- (27) \***kodu ka o bori la.**  
 banana foc 3sg want.imperf la (Olawsky 1999:67)

Perhaps Olawsky (1999) makes this argument because he does not recognize that there is homophonous **la** in Dagbani: the definite marker, the post-verbal **la**, which I suggest marks presentational focus and the **la** which is proposed is a discourse deictic marker. The data below will show that contrary to Olawsky's claims, **ka** and **la** can in fact co-occur in a grammatical sentence, the only difference being that that **la** in that context might probably not be the post verbal **la**, but the discourse deictic marker. This is illustrated in (28a-28c).

- (28) a. **Mani ka bi-hi tu-ri la**  
 1SG (EMPH) FM child.PL insult.IMPERF DM.  
 'It is me (that) children are insulting.'
- b. **Nyini ka Abu la-ri la.**  
 2SG(EMPH) FM Abu laugh.IMPERF DM  
 'It is you (that) Abu is laughing at.'
- c. **Bua ka o ku-Ø la**  
 goat FM 3SG kill.PERF DM  
 'It is a goat (that) he has killed.'

The grammaticality of the sentences in (28a-28c) indicates that it is not absolutely the case that these two particles do not co-occur, but that the **la** that occurs in the post-verbal slot is probably different from the *la* that occurs in this context. Also, the different syntactic requirement of this deictic **la** and the **la** that occurs post verbally indicates that they probably have different functions in the language. For the deictic **la**, we observe that it only occurs clause finally and so it is not possible for any material (be it NP object or adjunct) to follow this **la** within the syntax of Dagbani.<sup>5</sup>

The data in (29) also demonstrate that the deictic **la** may also occur sentence finally in those instances where it occurs with **n**.

- (29) a. **Abu n da-ri bu-hi maa la**  
 Abu FM buy.IMPERF goat.PL DEF DM.  
 ‘It is Abu who is buying the goats.’
- b. **Tiyumba n di-ri kpe la**  
 Tiyumba FM eat.IMPERF here DM  
 ‘It is Tiyumba who is eating.’
- c. **\*Tiyumba n di-ri la kpe**  
 Tiyumba FM eat.IMPERF FM here
- d. **\*Tiyumba n di-ri la bindirigu**  
 Tiyumba FM eat.IMPERF FM food

Similarly to the **ka** particle, the data in (29a-29b) show that it is possible for the **n** particle to co-occur with the deictic marker **la**. The ungrammaticality of sentences (29c, 29d) indicates that there is also a syntactic requirement that when the deictic **la** co-occurs with **n**, then the deictic **la** must not be followed by any other constituent. When **la** co-occurs with **n/ka**, the sentence is interpreted as a presentationally focused structure. Thus, the **la** here has a deictic function, meaning that this **la** is completely different from the **la** that presentationally focuses VP or a VP-internal element. However, I propose that the **la** that occurs clause finally with **n/ka** has a deictic function, and this means that this **la** is completely different from the **la** that presentationally focuses VP or VP-internal elements. Olawsky (1999) simply argues that **la** does not co-occur with **ka/n** without pointing out any possible distinction in semantic functions of **la** in Dagbani.

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<sup>5</sup>Whether the deictic **la** is completely required in a clause final position when it co-occurs with pre-verbal focus markers **ka** and **n** has still to be checked.

Thus, the co-occurrence of **ka/n** and **la** within a sentence structure, though possible in Dagbani, calls for a judgment as to whether the **la** in such constructions is the same post-verbal **la** or a homophonous **la** in Dagbani. I stipulate that this **la** is most probably not the post-verbal **la** that marks presentational focus. Judging from the native intuitions of other speakers of Dagbani, it was suggested that structures in which it is possible for these particles to co-occur usually will be in the context in which both the speakers and the hearers can be readily seen and pointed at.

It could thus, be possible that the clause final “focus” marker actually has to do with reference issues within the larger discourse structure, whereas the focus marker in the other positions have to do with information structure within the sentence itself. In such a situation, the analogous clause final form in Dagbani is a discourse deictic and not, strictly speaking, “focus.’ Whether the clause final **la** is actually a focus marker or a kind of discourse deictic particle homophonous with the focus particle **la** as per Farefari in Dakubu (2000) needs further research.

It is also worthwhile to point out that although the particle **la** is not a copula itself, it does occur in copula constructions as exemplified in (30).

- (30) a. **Suhuyini nyɛla karimba**  
 Suhuyini COP teacher  
 ‘Suhuyini is a teacher.’
- b. \***Suhuyini nyɛ karimba**  
 Suhuyini COP teacher

The absence of **la** in (30b) makes the sentence ungrammatical. This suggests that **la** is an essential syntactic particle in Dagbani copula constructions. Schwarz (2007:128) makes the same observation of a phonologically similar particle in Konkomba and concludes that the Konkomba **la** occurs in copula constructions though it is itself not a copular verb.

Furthermore, **la** can co-occur with the negation markers **ku** (future negative marker) and **bi** (non-future negative marker) of Dagbani as in (31a, 31b). This post verbal **la** of Dagbani, then, differs somewhat from that of Konkomba as reported by Schwarz (2007:128) who suggests that the post verbal **la** of Konkomba proposed to be a focus marker is “typically absent under negation.’

- (31) a. **Bia maa bi bɔ-ri la tuma maa**  
 Child DEF NEG want.IMPERF FM work DEF  
 ‘The child does not want the work.’

- b. **Bia maa ku da la loori pumpɔŋɔ**  
 Child DEF NEG buy FM lorry now  
 ‘The child will not buy a lorry now.’

The sentences in (31a & 31b) show that the post verbal **la** of Dagbani is not incompatible with negation. The sentence in (31b) furthermore suggests that the post-verbal **la** is not incompatible with the post-nominal **la** in Dagbani grammar. Following Dakubu (2000), I suggest that Dagbani has two homophonous, but lexically distinct particles.

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

This paper investigated the distribution and function of the post-verbal particle **la** of Dagbani. It was concluded that **la** does not mark contrastive focus on NP objects and adjuncts that follow it, as argued in Fusheini (2006). Neither does it mark imperfective aspect on the verb that it follows, as argued by Olawsky (1999). I thus offered an alternative analysis according to which **la** is a presentational focus marker. It has accordingly, been established that the particle **la** can 1) mark presentational focus on NP objects and adjuncts that follow the verb and 2) encode presentational focus on the entire predicate within the sentence. Thus, the conclusion is drawn that presentational focus is marked within the VP (the right) periphery in Dagbani.

It was also demonstrated, following stipulations of Schwarz (2007:124) for Konkomba, that the presence of **la** in sentences is motivated by pragmatic factors, suggesting that the particle has no grammatical function. This is borne out of the observation that the presence or absence of **la** may only affect contextual appropriateness of a given sentence but not its grammaticality.

On the interaction between **la** and pronouns in Dagbani, I observed that the pronouns do not follow the **la** particle as full NPs do, but precede **la**. Though the reason for this is not apparent, two plausible explanations may be that it is a syntactic requirement that pronouns always be found in this position immediately after the verb or that the object pronouns undergo shift to the left of **la**.

I further investigated the interaction between **la** and other particles such as **ka** and **n**, which have also been proposed to be focus markers in Dagbani. I observed that though there is a **la** particle that is compatible with the preverbal focus markers **ka** and **n**, it is probably not the post verbal **la**. This showed that there is probably a homophonous **la** that has deictic functions rather than marking focus. This analysis of presentational focus constructions in Dagbani falls in line with the claims of Kiss (1998) and Krifka (2007) that unlike contrastive focus which invariably demands movement of a focused constituent to a particular syntactic position within the clausal structure, presentational focus does not involve any form of syntactic movement.

### Abbreviations

A	answer	NEG	negative
ADJUN	adjunct	PERF	perfective
CONJ	conjunct	DM	deictic marker
COP	copular	PL	plural marker
DEF	definite	SG	singular
FM	focus marker	TDP	time depth particles
IMPERF	imperfective	1	1st Person
IS	Information structure	2	2nd Person
Q	question	3	3rd Person

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Received: 27 Nov 11  
Accepted: 12 Dec 12  
Revisions: 11 Feb 2013