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. Bodomo (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.1

(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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1This 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.²

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 teetcode  
Fati ride imperf.foc bicycle  
‘Fati is riding a bicycle.’

²For 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.
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).

\[(4)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{(a)} & \quad \text{Napari ku-ri bu-hi} \\
& \qquad \text{Napari kill.IMPERF goat.PL} \\
& \qquad \text{‘Napari is killing/kills goats.’}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{(b)} & \quad \text{Tiyumba di-ri bindirigu maa} \\
& \qquad \text{Tiyumba eat.IMPERF food DEF} \\
& \qquad \text{‘Tiyumba is eating/eats the food.’}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{(c)} & \quad \text{Napari ku-ri la bu-hi} \\
& \qquad \text{Napari kill.IMPERF FM goat.PL} \\
& \qquad \text{‘Napari is killing/kills goats.’}
\end{align*}\]

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.

\[(5)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{(a)} & \quad \text{Tiyumba ku-Ø la bua} \\
& \qquad \text{Tiyumba kill.PERF FM goat} \\
& \qquad \text{‘Tiyumba has killed a goat.’}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{(b)} & \quad \text{Bi-hi maa tu-Ø la Napari} \\
& \qquad \text{Child-PL DEF insult.PERF FM Napari} \\
& \qquad \text{‘The children have insulted Napari.’}
\end{align*}\]

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
The function of the post verbal la in Dagbani

pronouns and wh-phrases. 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

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 bɔ ‘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:  Bo 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. #Ø da-Ø la loori  
3SG buy.PERF FM lorry  
‘S/he bought a lorry.’

c. #Ø 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:  juni 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

   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.
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: ŋuni ŋ 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

\[Bonayo FM kill.PERF goat DEF\]
‘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 Gurun, since this paper is not a contrastive/comparative work between Dagbani and Gurun. 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. Bɔi kà nàà kú-ri chúyù pùhibú dàlí tì?
   What FM chief kill.IMPERF festival celebration day
   ‘What does a chief kill on the day of festival? ’

   b. *Bɔi nàà kú-ri chúyù pùhibú dàlí tì?
   What chief kill.IMPERF festival celebration day

   c. *Chúyù pùhibú dàlí nàà kú-ri bo?
   festival celebration day chief kill.IMPERF what

(16) a. qùnì n tì dá-Ø lòòrí?
   Who FM buy.PERF lorry
   ‘Who has bought a lorry?’

   b. *qùnì tì 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.4

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.

4For 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.
I re-state that the presence of the post verbal *la* within a sentence structure indicates that the NP object or adjunct that follows the verb is new information. As pointed out earlier, *la* could also be obligatory in cases when the entire VP is new information. Following these two hypotheses which suggest that *la* could either mark new information on the entire VP or just the NP complement and adjunct only, the tentative schemas of its function are shown in (19) and (20) below.

(19) [subject  \[ V  la  \] ]

Presentational focus
*exhaustive

(20) [subject [V \[ la  \]] ]

Presentational focus
*exhaustive

Therefore, I contend that the post verbal particle *la* encodes presentational or new information focus. Considering schemas (19) and (20) above, we can conclude that the presentational focus could be on either a post verbal constituent or on the entire predicate.

In terms of distribution it should be noted that the post verbal *la* does not occur only in positive polarity sentences as demonstrated thus far, but also in negative sentences as (21a) and (21b). Dagbani codes sentential negation by the use of preverbal negative particles, *bi* and *ku* which are used for the non-future and future tenses respectively.

(21) a. **Napari  bi  da-Ø  la  loori**

Napari  NEG  buy.PERF  FM  lorry

‘Napari has not bought a lorry.’

b. **Napari  ku  da-Ø  la  loori**

Napari  NEG  buy.PERF  FM  lorry

‘Napari will not buy a lorry.’

This means that the Dagbanipost verbal *la* differs from that of Dagaare and Birifor, which is suggested to be incompatible with negative sentences as argued in Bodomo (1997:94) and Ratcliff and Batstone (1995:7) respectively.
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. Napodooh sa tu ma la sohala.
   Napodoo TDP insult 2SG FM yesterday
   ‘Napodoo insulted me yesterday.’

   b. *Napodooh sa tu la ba sohala.
   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 pronoun objects always shift to the left of la. This pronoun object shift is what is responsible for the difference in the syntax between la and full DPs on one hand and la and weak pronoun objects on the other. Therefore, one could give two possible accounts for the relation between the la particle and pronouns in Dagbani. These are: (i) that object pronoun forms are clitics to the verb and (ii) that the weak pronouns 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.  

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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5 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 nyela 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 bo-ri la tuma maa**
   Child DEF NEG want.IMPERF FM work DEF
   ‘The child does not want the work.’
The function of the post verbal la in Dagbani

b. Bia maa ku da la loori pumpɛŋɛ
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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