

## Focus Marking Strategies in Kusaal

Hasiyatu Abubakari

University of Vienna

Previous attempts have discussed issues relating to focus constructions in selected Mabia (Gur) languages (Fiedler et al 2010; Issah 2012). However, little can be said of a comprehensive analysis of focus marking strategies in Kusaal, a Mabia language spoken in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo although this language combines several strategies that will enhance discussions in both descriptive and theoretical linguistics.

Kusaal combines morphological, syntactic and prosodic focus marking strategies for focus related information packaging. Focus constructions in Kusaal are also not considered entirely as cleft sentences. Unlike languages like English, the biclausal element is not obligatory in Kusaal. Focus constructions are translated into cleft for naturalness in English (examples 1-4).

Morphologically, Kusaal does not have a default focus marker. However, it has three focus particles: *kà*, *ń*, and *né* that are mainly associated with an interpretation of exhaustivity and contrast. Whilst the notion of ‘exhaustivity’ is used, here, to refer to (A and not B and NOTHING ELSE), ‘contrast’ is used, here, to refer to (A and not B). The particle *ń* is used for in-situ subject focus whilst *né* is for in-situ non-subject and *kà* is used for ex-situ non-subject focus.

Assuming a background where the identity of a pupil who bought a book is being sought, among others who bought other items.

1. Q: Who bought the book?

Àdúk dā' gbán lá.  
Aduk buy book DEF  
'Aduk bought the book.'

2. a. Àyéí, Àyípóká ń dā' gbán lá.  
no Ayipoka FOC buy book DEF  
'No, it is AYIPOKA who bought the book (not Aduk and not any other person).'

- b. Àdúk dā' né pénsírí lá.  
Aduk buy FOC pencil DEF  
'Aduk bought THE PENCIL'  
'It is the pencil that Aduk bought (not the book and nothing else).'

- c. Pénsírí lá kà Àdúk dā'.  
pencil DEF FOC Aduk buy  
'It is THE PENSIL that Aduk bought (not the book and nothing else).'

Syntactically, it is also possible to move focused constituents to sentence initial positions followed by the focus particle *kà* in Kusaal as in (2c) unlike in (2b) where the focused

constituent is left in-situ after the focused particle *né*. Focused predicates can as well be fronted for contrastive interpretation (Abubakari 2011) as in (3b).

3. a. Pú'á      lá      dàà      kva'ā      dáam.  
       woman    DEF    PAST    brew    alcohol  
       'The woman brewed alcohol.'
- b. (Li ànè)    kva'àb      kà      pu'á      lá      dàà      kva'ā      dáam.  
       (it is)    brew.Nml    FOC    womanDEF    PAST    brew    alcohol  
       'It is brewing that the woman did of dam (as opposed to e.g. selling it).'

Prosodically, Kusaal uses suprasegmental means including stress and prominence in marking a constituent as focused<sup>1</sup>. All types of focus constituents in the language are pronounced with extra prominence compared to other constituents in the same construction.

4. a. Who bought the book?
- b. Àdúk      dā'      gbán      lá.  
       Aduk      buy      book    DEF  
       '**Aduk** bought the book.'
- c. Àyéí,      Àsíbí-íń      dā'      gbán      lá.  
       no      Asibi    FOC    buy      book    DEF  
       'No, it is Asibi who bought the book (not Aduk).'

For contrast and exhaustivity, Kusaal further uses vowel lengthening and vowel insertion alongside prominence in marking focus. The last vowel of the name *Asibi* is lengthened as in (4c) for emphasis and exhaustivity.

Generally, it is hypothesized that Kusaal combines morphological, syntactic, and prosodic focus marking strategies for focus related interpretations.

## References

- Abubakari, Hasiyatu. (2011). *Object-Sharing as Symmetric Sharing: Predicate Clefting and Serial Verb Constructions in Kusaal* (M.Phil. Thesis, University of Tromsø, Norway). Retrieved from <http://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/3539/thesis.pdf?sequence=1>.
- Issah, S. Alhassan. (2012). Dagbani Focus Particle: A Descriptive Study. *Journal of West African Languages* XXXIX.1
- Fiedler, Ines., Hartmann, Katharina., Reineke Brigitte., Schwarz, Anne & Malte Zimmermann. (2010). Subject Focus in West African Languages. In Malte Zimmermann & Caroline Féry (eds.), *Information Structure: Theoretical, Typological, and Experimental Perspective*, (234-257). New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>1</sup> The use of intonation for similar function is not observed in Kusaal.