Particles and *ex-situ* focus in Mabia languages: A grouping based on inventory

8th-11th April, 2021
ACAL 51&52,University of Florida

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The major claims of this talk

➢ particles play a crucial role in the coding of the information structural notion of focus in Mabia languages;

➢ the inventory of the particles differ among the Mabia languages of Ghana

➢ One could attempt a grouping of the Mabia languages based on the inventory of the particles

➢ based on language internal evidences, we refer to these particles as focus markers

➢ and finally within the theoretical tenets of Minimalist syntax, we contend that these focus markers head a projected functional focus phrase (FocP) within the clausal left periphery.

Outline of the talk

1. A theory of focus and pragmatic uses of focus constructions

2. The strategies employed for marking of focus in African languages

3. Basic clause structure of the sampled languages

4. The role of particles in marking focus in Mabia languages

5. The syntactic status of these particles and theoretical claims

6. Conclusions

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1. A theory of focus and pragmatic uses of focus constructions

➢ Here, we present a theory of focus since the concept has been defined differently by various scholars.

➢ The focus of an utterance generally represents a word/phrase or constituent that gets prominence.

➢ We adopt the definition of Rooth (1985) who asserts that focus on a constituent α ($[\alpha]_F$) invokes a set A of alternatives to α, indicating that members of A are under consideration.

➢ We take focus to be a universal category of information structure (IS) (Aboh 2004, 2007, Ameka 1992, 2010) among several others

➢ Rooth (1985) also asserts that focus may have varied pragmatic functions depending on the interaction of α with other alternatives in a given discourse: new information, corrections, confirmations, selective and contrastive foci usages.

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1. A theory of focus and pragmatic uses of focus constructions cont.

➢ According to Zimmermann & Onea (2011: 1663), a focus constituent X expresses new-information if α introduces an element of A into the common ground, and if the alternatives to α have not been explicitly introduced in the preceding discourse, as in (1a).

(1) a. (Which color did Peter paint his bicycle?)
    He painted it $[blue]_F$. α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink…}

➢ They further opine that a focus constituent X is used correctively if α competes with one or more elements of A for introduction in the Common Ground, where α's competitors have been explicitly mentioned in the preceding discourse (1b).

(1) b. (Peter painted his bicycle red.)
    No, he painted it $[blue]_F$ α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink…}

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1. A theory of focus and pragmatic uses of focus constructions cont.

➢ Zimmermann & Onea (2011: 1663) are of the view that a focus constituent X is said to have been used selectively if α introduces an element of A into the common ground, and α is chosen from a restricted subset of A the members of which have been explicitly mentioned in the preceding context (1c).

c. (Did Peter paint his bicycle red or blue?)
    He painted it $[blue]_F$. α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink…}

➢ Finally, Zimmermann & Onea (2011: 1663) assert that a focus constituent X is used contrastively if α is juxtaposed to one or more elements of A that are denoted by constituents Y, Z, …in the preceding discourse, where Y, Z,…are of the same syntactic category and denote into the same semantic word field as X (1d).

d. Paul painted his bicycle $[red]_F$, and Peter painted it_i $[blue]_F$. α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink…}

(Zimmermann & Onea 2011: 1663)

2. Focus marking strategies in African languages

➢ Before our discussion on the use of particles in ex-situ focus constructions, we provide a survey of the strategies that are employed for marking focus in African languages

➢ Focus as a pragmatic notion is a universal phenomenon in languages and every language has a strategy or a combination of different strategies that are employed for the coding of focus.

➢ (Lambrecht 1994; Van Vallin & LaPolla) contend that focus can be coded (i) phonologically by means of prosodic prominence; (ii) via the use of certain lexical items labelled as focus particles/markers; (iii) manipulating the unmarked word order of a particular language; and finally (iv) via the use of certain morphemes which highlight new and/or prominent constituents within an utterance.

➢ The above strategies have been categorized into phonological, lexical, syntactic and morphological means for the varied languages of the world.

Focus marking strategies in African languages con't

➢ In the discussion that follows, we outline some of these strategies and the languages in which they are employed.

➢ There are languages that employ morphological strategies for the realization of focus. One of such languages is Gùrùntùm, a Chadic; Afro-Asiatic language spoken in Nigeria as reported in the work of Hartmann and Zimmerman (2009).

➢ Whereas in (2) we have the neutral word order, which is SVO without focus reading and for that matter does not contain the morphological focus marker *á*, in (3) and (4) the data illustrate the subject and object focus respectively

(2)   *Tí   bà   wúm   kwálíngálá.*
       3SG   PROG   chew   colanut
       'He is chewing colanut.' (Hartmann and Zimmerman 2009: 1341)

Focus marking strategies in African languages con't

➢ Sentence contrasts with (3) and (4) representing the subject and direct object focus respectively.

(3)   Q: *Á   kwá   bà   wúm   kwálíngálá-ì?*
             FOC   who   PROG   chew   colanut-DEF
             'WHO is chewing the colanut?'
       A: *Á   fúrmáyò bà   wúm   kwálíngálá.*
             FOC   fulani   PROG   chew   colanut
             'THE FULANI is chewing colanut.'

(4)   Q: *Á   kãèã   mài   tí   bà   wúmì?*
             FOC   what   REL   3SG   PROG   chew
             'WHAT is he chewing?'
       A: *Tí   bà   wúm-á   kwálíngálá.*
             3SG   PROG   chew-FOC   colanut
             'He is chewing COLANUT.' (Hartmann and Zimmerman 2009: 1342)

Focus marking strategies in African languages con't

➢ Hartmann and Zimmerman (2009) contend that the particle they analyze as a focus marker, *á* interacts closely with the following content word, which it induces a focus reading into.

➢ In (3Q) and (4Q), it precedes the *wh*-words (interrogative phrases) *kwá* 'who' and *kãèã* 'what' respectively.

➢ In the corresponding answers as evident in (3A), we observe that the focus marker precedes the noun in focus *fúrmáyò* 'Fulani' whereas in (4A), the focus morpheme is cliticized to the verb, *wúm* 'chew'.

Focus marking strategies in African languages con't

➢ There are also languages that employ the lexical strategy for the realization of focus marking.

➢ This involves the use of free morphemes; usually grammatical items are assigned focus status in languages.

➢ This strategy is quite pervasive in African languages (see for instance t is in the Amfo (2010) for Akan, Akortia (2014) for Dangme, Ameka (1992) for Ewe, Bodomo (1997) for Dagaare, Atintono (2013) for Gurene, Campbell (2017) for Ga among others

➢ Brown (1989) reports that in Kresh, a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in Sudan, the item *nẽ* is required to indicate that a syntactic element is in focus as illustrated in (5).

(5)   *ũjũ   ëté   nẽ.*
       He-greeted   him   FOC
       'He GREETED him.'   (Brown 1989: 334–335)

➢ The grammatical item *nẽ* is responsible is what is responsible for the focus interpretation although interestingly, it does not immediately follow the verb that is in focus.

➤ The final strategy that African languages employ for the marking of focus is what has been termed as the mixed strategies. Amfo (2018) argues that the most common of these mixed strategies are lexico-syntactic and morpho-syntactic ones.

➤ In the Esahie (Kwa, Niger-Congo) in (6), a cleft construction is used to present the focused constituent, which in itself is a marked syntactic construction.

➤ In addition, the focused constituent 'Yaa' is immediately followed by an obligatory focus particle *yéyé*.

(6) *ɔ-te   Yaa   yéyé   ye-wo   yɛ   nyemene.*
     It-be   Yaa   FOC   3SG-REFL   be beautiful
     'It is YAA who is beautiful.' (Broohm 2014: 52)]

In summary, we have surveyed the strategies employed for focus marking in some languages, mainly. African languages.

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3. Basic clause structure of the sampled languages

➤ All the sampled languages are strictly SVO in the canonical clause structure.

➤ This predicts that in the basic clause structure, the verb must precede the indirect and direct object as well as the adverbials, see (7) through (8) for Dagbani and Kusaal respectively.

(7) a. *Dawuni kú-rí   sòònsí   máá*
        D.   kill-IPFV   rabbits   DEF
        'Dawuni kills the rabbits.'

    b. *Páɣà   máá   tí   bíhí   nyùlí   zùŋò*
        woman DEF   give.PFV   children   yam   today
        'The woman has given children yam today.'

Basic clause structure of the sampled languages

(8) a. *Adúk   kú-d   sù'omís lá*
        A.   kill-IPFV   rabbits   DEF
        'Aduk kills the rabbits.'

    b. *Púà   lá   tís   bíís   nyúur zìnà*
        woman DEF give.PFV children yam   today
        'The woman has given children yam today.'

➤ We further illustrate the word order in Sisaali (9) and Likpakpaanl in (10).

(9) a. *Baal   na   nya   kpʋ   chuon-si na*
        man   DEF   IPFV   kill   rabbit-PL   DEF

        'The man kills the rabbits.'

    b. *Haal   na   pa   hemmiisi   na   pii   die*
        Woman DEF   give.PFV children   DEF   yam   today
        'The woman has given children yam today '

Basic clause structure of the sampled languages con't

(10) a. *ù-jà   gbàan   bi   kù   sàndéé-tììb   gbàan*
         SG-man DEF   IPFV kill   rabbit-PL   DEF
         'The man kills the rabbits.'

     b. *ú-pìì   gbàan bà   tìì   m-bìm   gbàan lì-nùùl dìn*
         SG-woman DEF   PST   give.PFV PL-child DEF   SG-yam   today
         'The woman has given the children yam today.'

In each of these four languages above, we see the word order is strictly SVO and the verb precedes the indirect and direct object as well as the adverbials.

In (11), we illustrate the canonical order of Gurene and then (12) is on Dagaare.

Basic clause structure of the sampled languages con't

(11) a. *Budaa   la   ku   sɔ'ɔ-si la'*
         man   DEF   kill-IPFV rabbit-PL DEF
         'The man kills the rabbits.'

     b. *Pɔka   la   bo   kɔma   nyɔa   zina*
         woman DEF   give.PFV children yam   today
         'The woman has given children yam today.'

(12) a. *A   dɔɔ   ko-ro   a   sɔɔne*
         DEF   man   kill-IPFV DEF   rabbit-PL DEF
         'The man kills the rabbits.'

     b. *A   pɔge   ko   la   bììri   wao   zaame.*
         DEF   woman give.PFV FOC   children yam   today
         'The   woman has given children yam today'

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4. The role of particles in marking focus in Mabia languages

➤ Now, we demonstrate that particles are key in the realization of focus as shown in the question-answer pairs illustrated in (13) for Dagaare and (14) for Sisaali.

(13) Q: *Aŋ   la   da   a   gane?   DAG*
         Who   FOC   buy.PFV   DEF   book
         'Who has bought the book?'

     A: *Ayɔɔ   la   da   a   gane.*
         Ayɔɔ   FOC   buy.PFV   DEF   book
         ' Ayɔɔ has bought the book.'

(14) Q: *Aŋ   ri   yɔwi   tɛnɛ   na   SIS*
         Who   FOC   buy.PFV   book   DEF
         'Who bought the book?'

     A: *Haduon ri   yɔwi   tɛnɛ   na.*
         Haduon FOC   buy.PFV   book   DEF
         'Haduon has bought the books'

The role of particles in marking focus in Mabia languages cont:

➢ Note Dagaare has the particle *la* occurring in both wh questions (13Q) and the corresponding answer (13A) while Sisaali has *ri* with similar distribution as in (14). Now we consider Dagbani and Gurene in (15) and (16).

➢ (15) Q: *ŋuni n da buku maa?*   DGB
      Who FOC buy.PFV book DEF
      'Who has bought the book?'

    A: *Abu n da buku maa*
      Abu FOC buy.PFV DEF book
      'Abu has bought the book.'

(16) Q: *Ani n da gɔnɔ la?*   GUR
      Who FOC buy.PFV book DEF
      'Who bought the book?'

    A: *Asibi n da gɔŋɔ la.*
      Asibi FOC buy.PFV book DEF
      'Asibi has bought the books'

The role of particles in marking focus in Mabia languages cont:

➢ Dagbani and Gurene have two phonologically similar particles required in focusing matrix arguments (13) and (14). We shall soon interrogate this focus inventory. (17) and (18), exemplify Likpakpaanl and Kusaal on matrix focused elements.

(17) Q: *Anɔ'ɔn da' gbavŋ la?*   KSL
      Who buy.PFV book DEF
      'Who has bought the book?'

    A: *Asibi n da' gbavŋ la*
      Asibi FOC buy.PFV DEF book
      'Asibi has bought the book.'

(18) Q: *ŋmà lé dàà kì-gbàŋ gbààn?*   LIK
      Who FOC buy.PFV book DEF
      'Who has bought the book?'

    A: *Piigir lé dàà tìgbàŋ gbààn.*
      Piigir FOC buy.PFV book DEF
      'Piigir has bought the books'

The role of particles in marking focus in Mabia languages cont:

➢ Kusaal has n as particle which is absent in (17Q), but required in (19A). Likpakpaanl has lé which is required in both question (18Q) and answer (18A). The absense of n in (17A) is attributed to syntactic haplology (Erlewine 2012) a phenomenon that bans spell-out of identical morphemes within the matrix and embedded clauses

➢ See similar accounts where it is claimed that there is a ban on same abstract features (Hiraiwa 2010, Richards 2010) or sequential homophonous items (Neeleman and van de Koot 2006) under adjacency, that is within a certain syntactic domain.

➢ Richards (2010) also accounts for this phenomenon by proposing that spell-out of adjacent non-distinct elements is disallowed.

The role of particles beyond the matrix subject:

➢ These particles also exist in the context of adjuncts focusing as well as objects. See (19) for Kusaal and (20) for Gurene involving adjuncts.

(19) Q: *Yaane ka/*n Asibi kʊ amus la?*   KSL
      where FOC Asibi kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Where has Asibi killed the cat?'

    A: *Sian'arin ka/*n Asibi kʊ amus la*
      bush FOC Asibi kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Asibi has killed the cat in the bush.'

(20) Q: *Bɛ ti/*n Asibi ku deebia la*   GUR
      where FOC Asibi kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Where has Asibi killed the cat?'

We note in (19) and (20) that the focus marker *n* in both Kusaal and Gurene are no longer in use.

The role of particles beyond the matrix subject:

➢ A: *muɔ la puan ka/*n Asibi ku deebia la*
      Bush DEF inside FOC Asibi kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Asibi has killed the cat in the bush.'

The same pattern of the use of a unique particle in non-matrix subject position exists in Dagbani: (21)

(21) Q: *Ya ka/*n Adam ku jangkuno maa?* DGB
      where FOC A. kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Where has Adam killed the cat?'

    A: *Moguni ka/*n Adam ku jangkuno maa*
      Bush FOC A. kill.PFV cat DEF
      'Adam has killed the cat in the bush.'

NB: Note the disappearance of *n* which was identified in both languages earlier.

The role of particles beyond the matrix subject:

➢ Likpakpaanl has one focus maker and the same particle occurs in non-matrix subject positions (22).

(22) A: *Là lé Pììgìr kù jànkùùnà gbàán* LIK
      where FOC P. kill cat DEF
      'Where did Pììgìr kill the cat?'

    Q: *tìmóór nì lé Pììgìr kù jànkùùnà gbàán*
      bush in FOC P. kill.PFV cat DEF bush
      'Pììgìr killed the cat in the bush.'

➢ The same particle that was used with a matrix subject argument occurs with the adverbial constituent here as well. Let us see what pertains in Sisaali and Dagaare.
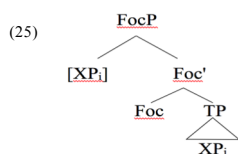
The role of particles beyond the matrix subject:

(23) Q: *Nɛɛ   ri   Haduon kpʊ   gelii   na?   SIS*
    Where   FOC   Haduon kill.PFV   cat   DEF
    'Where has Haduon killed the cat?'

A: *Giri   mi   ri   Haduon kpʊ   gelii na*
    bush   inside FOC   Haduon kill.PFV cat DEF
    'Haduon has killed the cat in the bush.'

(24) Q: *Yeŋ   la   ka   Hayɔɔ   ko   a   diebie*?   *DAG*
    Where   FOC   COMP   Hayɔɔ   ko.PFV   DEF   cat
    'Where has Haduon killed the cat?'

A: *A /moɔ poɔ   la   ka   Hayɔɔ   ko   a   diebie.*
    DEF farm inside FOC   COMP Hayɔɔ   ko.PFV   DEF   cat
    'Hayɔɔ has killed the cat in the bush.'

➢ Dagaare also has a different pattern as it adds the complementizer *ka* (Bodomo 1997) to the focus marker *la* when dealing with non-matrix subject elements.

Syntactic status of the particles and theoretical assumptions

➢ From the empirical material so far presented, a crucial question that arises is the syntactic status of the particles that are discussed in the various Mabia languages.

➢ We refer to these particles as focus markers. This claim is supported by question-answer pairs as a test for focus on syntactic elements as seen in our data.

➢ The question-answer pairs is a standard diagnostic test for determining focus elements in natural languages as shown in the literature on information structure (cf. Aboh 2007, Ameka 1992, 2010, Dik 1978, Krifka 2004, 2007 *inter alia*).

➢ For instance, Ameka (1992: 5) claims that "a felicitous answer to a content question would be a focused constituent since it would provide information that would be a substitute for the interrogative word".

➢ Ameka (1992) corroborates Boadi (1974) this assumption of Ameka when he also asserts that focus constructions are answers to an interrogative word fronting construction in a question-answer pair.

Syntactic status of the particles and theoretical assumptions con't

➢ Theoretical assumption: The requirement of these particles t be adjacent syntactic elements in question-answer pair adjacency is to establish the required Spec-Head syntactic requirement for feature checking Chomsky (1995). Thus, there is a strong uninterpretable focus feature that needs to be checked off at PF before the derivation is complete. This claim yields a syntactic structure as in (25).

(25)
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              FocP
             /    \
        [XPᵢ]      Foc'
                  /    \
               Foc      TP
                        /\
                      XPᵢ
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?

A puzzle that remain illusive

➢ When a Mabia language has two focus markers, the distribution is usually on the basis of matrix subject versus elsewhere.

➢ An interesting theoretical puzzle that arises here is what is special about the matrix subject position of these Mabia that they have a special particle that codes focus? This is unclear for now.

➢ Thus while the syntactic occurrence of two focus particle language is mutually exclusive, that of one focus marker is distributed in all syntactic positions.

6. Conclusions

➢ Particles play a crucial role in the marking of focus in Mabia languages of Ghana.

➢ The inventory of focus markers vary, manifesting as either one or two in the sampled languages

➢ These overt particles are analysed as focus markers and theoretically, assumed to be spell-outs of a strong uninterpretable focus feature.

➢ When focus markers are two in a language, the distribution is based on matrix subject versus elsewhere principles

➢ It remains a myth what might be special about the focus position of the matrix subject that it requires special focus marker in cases of two focus makers are available in a language.

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TI   PU'USIYA!

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THANK YOU!