

## Copulative and Narrative Patterns in Gur Focus Constructions

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### 1 Characteristic of *ex-situ* focus constructions

- focalization of term, verb and predication is possible in canonical position (+/- morphologically marked) (cf. column 1 and 2)
- subject focus or sentence focus on the other hand are always morphosyntactically encoded (cf. column 3)
- any non-subject constituent including nominalized verb can also be focalized *ex-situ* (cf. column 4)

#### 1. Focus system in affirmation

| Scope of focus | 1. complement / complex VP | 2. verb / predication |              | 3. subject / sentence                              | 4. non-subject              |
|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Structure      | SVxO                       | SV(O)x                | SVx          | SVx(O) Konni<br>SxV(O) others                      | OS(x)V Konni<br>OxSV others |
| Buli           | <i>ká</i>                  | <i>ká-mā</i>          | <i>-y(a)</i> | <i>lē</i>  | <i>tè</i>                   |
| Konni          | <i>-wÁ, -Á<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>mìŋ</i>            | <i>-yÁ</i>   | <i>-nÁ</i>   | <i>(di)<sup>2</sup></i>     |
| Dagbani        | <i>lá</i>                  | <i>mì</i>             | <i>-ya</i>   | <i>N</i>   | <i>kà</i>                   |
|                | pure focus constructions   |                       |              | -/+ topical status of sentence-initial constituent |                             |
|                | <i>absolute pattern</i>    |                       |              | <i>copulative pattern</i>                          | <i>narrative pattern</i>    |

Focus as pragmatic and not necessarily marked notion:

“The focal information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S[peaker, A.S.] to be most essential for A[ddressee, A.S.] to integrate into his pragmatic information” (Dik 1997: 326)

<sup>1</sup> aspectually differentiated: *-wÁ* in the perfective, *-Á* in the imperfective

<sup>2</sup> only after lexical subject

Assertive and contrastive focus subtypes apply to:

(a) term focus, (b) verb focus: verb's lexical meaning, (c) predication focus: predication operators (including *verum* / auxiliary focus) (cf. Hyman & Watters 1984; Güldemann 2003)

## 2 The absolute pattern (transitive example)

- WH-diagnostics: focus on object (*What has she eaten?*) or on VP including a postverbal complement (*What has she done?*).

What has the woman eaten?

She has eaten [beans]<sub>F</sub>.

2. Buli:            ò     ηòb kà    túé.  
                    CL   eat   FM   beans

3. Konni:        ò     ηòbì-wá   túò.  
                    CL   eat-PF:TR   beans

4. Dagbani:    ò     dì-lá      túyà.  
                    CL   eat-FM    beans

Buli:            S V KA F

Konni:         S V-WA F

Dagbani:      S V-LA F

The verb shows tonal agreement with the discourse role of the subject in indicative (perfective) environments.

## 3 The copulative pattern

- WH-diagnostics: focus on subject (*Who has eaten (something)?*) or on sentence (*What has happened? What's the matter?*)

### 3.1 Structural features

Who has eaten the beans?

[Mary]<sub>F</sub> has eaten them.

5. Buli:            (ká)    mǎrỹ   àlē   ηòbī.        \*ηòb  
                       (FM)    Mary   LE   eat

6. Konni:        mǎrỹ    ηóbí-nà   hà.  
                       Mary   eat-NA   CL

7. Dagbani:     mǎrỹ    ń-dí-lì.  
                       Mary   N-eat-CL

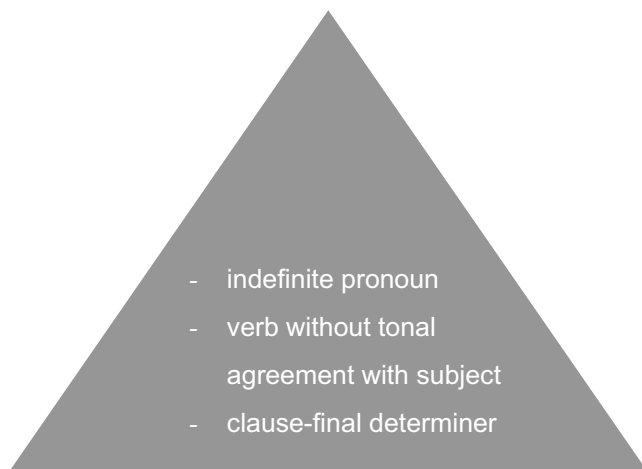
Buli:              F   LE   verb<sub>inf</sub>

Konni:            F        verb<sub>inf</sub>-NA

Dagbani:        F   N    verb<sub>inf</sub>

### 3.2 Comparison with relative clause

- structural features of relative clauses with restrictive reading shared throughout the **language sample**:





- restrictive relative clauses in **Dagbani**:

10a. **REL**    **á-n**        **!ηmé dó-só**        **máá ...**  
                  2sg-NI   hit        man-IND:CL   DET  
                  The man whom you have hit, ...

10b. **F**            **dóó máà n-dúyí-lì.**  
                  man DEF   N-cook-CL  
                  The [man]<sub>F</sub> has cooked them.

Only part of the relative clause features are shared by SF (and NSF): use of a subordinating morpheme close to the verb and occurrence of an infinite verb form without tonal subject agreement.

→ SF construction contains a hypotactic predicate which conveys background information as a non- restrictive relative clause

#### 4 The narrative pattern

- WH-diagnostics: focus on sentence-initial non-subject constituent
- The *ex-situ* focalization is however in most cases not just triggered by a simple WH-question, but requires certain ongoing debate, before the sentence-initial non-subject constituent is chosen as topic to be commented on.

##### 4.1 Structural features

11. Buli: (**ká**) **john tè mī fòb.**        **\*fòbī**  
                  (FM) John TE 1sg:I hit  
                  I have hit [John]<sub>F/T</sub>.

12a. Konni: túò,      ú      ηðbì.  
 beans      CL:H eat  
 She has eaten [beans]<sub>F/T</sub>.

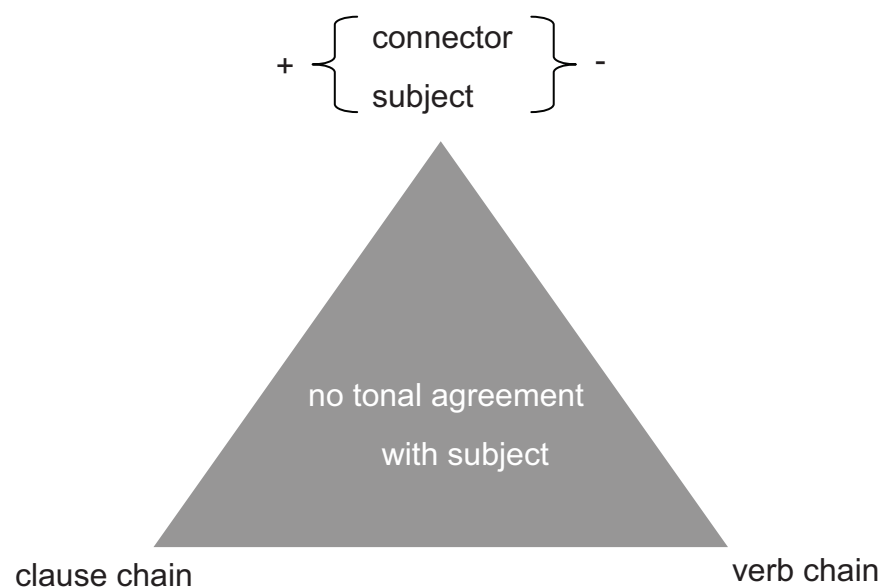
12b.      **wà, ì hògòwá dí gá.**  
 Wa 1sg wife.DEF DI geh  
 My wife has gone to [Wa]<sub>F/T</sub>.

13. Dagbani: **túyá kó-!ó dì.**  
 beans KA-CL eat  
 She has eaten [beans]<sub>F/T</sub>.

|          |     |   |   |                     |
|----------|-----|---|---|---------------------|
| Buli:    | T/F | <i>TE</i>   | S | Verb <sub>ntr</sub> |
| Konni:   | T/F | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} S_{\text{Pron:H}} \\ S_{\text{Nom}} \textit{DI} \end{array} \right\}$ |   | Verb <sub>ntr</sub> |
| Dagbani: | T/F | <i>KA</i>   | S | Verb <sub>ntr</sub> |

#### 4.2 Comparison with narrative clause

- available structures for the expression of sequential events in indicative:



- sequential clauses in narration in **Buli**:

14a. A woman had three children,  
**NAR** **tè wà yāā tòm bí-kpāgní ...**  
 TE CL then send child-head.DEF  
 and she sent the eldest child ...

14b. ... the youngest child brought the tomatoes home,  
**NAR** **tè wà dìg.**  
 TE CL cook  
 and she (mother) cooked them.

- sequential clauses in narration in **Konni**:

15a. There were a woman and her three children,  
**NAR** **ú tòn jà-kùòrí ...**  
 CL:H send thing-eldest.DEF  
 and she sent the eldest child ...

15b. to go and buy tomatoes for her to cook soup  
**NAR** **bùàwá dí nàgì síé-gáàṅ ...**  
 child.DEF DI follow road-?different  
 and the child took a different road ...

- sequential clauses in narration in **Dagbani**:

16a. A woman was standing with her three children,  
**NAR** **kà ò tòm bí-kpíám ...**  
 KA CL send child-big  
 and she sent the eldest child ...

- 16b. ... the youngest child brought the tomatoes to the mother,  
**NAR**      **kà ó má !déé kà níŋ sùhù-píèlì.**  
 KA CL mother take KA do heart-wide  
 and his mother took them and was happy.

There is complete structural identity between the “non-focal” part of NSF and a sequential clause type used in narration.

→ NSF contains a paratactic predicate which conveys the comment on a marked non-subjectival topic

## 5 Conclusion

*Ex-situ* SF and NSF constructions:

- follow information structural principles above the simple clause level and can be analyzed as topic-marking strategies (rather than simply focalizing)
- are used whenever the grammatical subject does not also represent the topic of a clause: *ex-situ* SF introduces entities as major discourse topics independent from the narrative chain of events, *ex-situ* NSF introduces entities with respect to certain events

[+ topical subject]: (a) *canonical predicate: absolute pattern*

= categorical statement

[- topical subject]: (b) *hypotactic predicate: copulative pattern*

= topiclessthetic statement, predicate provides supportive and descriptive backgrounding information (clausal topic) on which events can be based on; imperfective affinity

(c) *paratactic predicate: narrative pattern*

= marked topic followed by clausal comment, predicate provides events to develop narration further, perfective affinity



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