

How Many Focus Markers Are There in Konkomba?

Anne Schwarz

Humboldt University, Berlin

1. Introduction

This article discusses the divergent status of the two particles *lé* and *lá* in the grammar of Konkomba. The interest in the language and these two particles arose in the course of a broader investigation into focus in several Gur and Kwa languages and the question that came up soon after the first exploration into focus in Konkomba¹ was: How many focus markers are there in Konkomba? Previous studies claim that there are two focus markers, *lá* and *lé*. I am going to argue that only the particle *lá* in Konkomba should be analyzed as focus marker whereas the use of particle *lé* is due to a bisected syntactic configuration which is required under specific focus conditions.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 gives a brief survey on the geography, speakers, genetic affiliation and linguistic documentation of Konkomba. Section 2 raises the question whether and why Konkomba should need two focus markers. Section 3 concerns the distribution and analysis of the particles *lá* and *lé*. Section 4 reanalyzes the latter and section 5 concludes with some indications where the focus system of Konkomba meets and where it diverges from that of related languages.

Konkomba (language code ISO 639-3: xon) is spoken by about 500,000 speakers (2003) in the North-Eastern parts of Ghana and by approximately 50,100 speakers in Northern Togo (cf. Gordon 2005). Konkomba, of which the self denomination is *likpakpaa-likpakpaln* is highly split into several clan dialects. Genetically, the language is classified as one of the Gurma subgroup within the Oti-Volta branch of the North Central Gur languages (Manessy 1979, Naden 1989).

Linguistic documentation of Konkomba is far from extensive as shown by the following short catalog listing general works containing some Konkomba word lists or short describing remarks as well as the few studies specifically dedicated to the language, out of which the starred forms could not be consulted for this paper.

- Abbott, Mary and Mary Steele. n.d. [1973]. *An introduction to learning Likpakpaln (Konkomba)*. Tamale: Institute of Linguistics.
- Bendor-Samuel, John. 1971. Niger-Congo: Gur. In *Linguistics in Sub-Saharan African (Current Trends in Linguistics, 7)*, eds. Jack Berry and Joseph Harold Greenberg, 141-178.
- Groh, Bernd. 1911. Sprachproben aus zwölf Sprachen des Togo-Hinterlands. *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität zu Berlin (3. Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien)* 14: 227-239.
- *Langdon, Margaret A. 1997. The place of mother tongue literacy in social development in three African contexts. *Notes on Literacy* 23(4): 1-44.
- Langdon, Margaret A., Mary J. Breeze, and others, compilers. 1981. *Konkomba-English (Likaln-Likpakpaln) dictionary*. Tamale: Ghana Institute of Linguistics.

¹ I am very grateful to my language assistant Kpaamu Samson Buwor for his interest and cooperation in this research as well as to the DFG which made the investigation into Konkomba financially possible. I would also like to thank the participants of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics at the University of Florida, March 22-25, 2007 as well as Ines Fiedler, Svetlana Petrova and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments and suggestions. A longer initial paper on the topic has been printed in the Working Papers of the SFB 632, Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure (ISIS) 8 (cf. Schwarz 2007).

- Manessy, Gabriel. 1971. Les langues gurma. *Bulletin de l'Institut Français / Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*. XXXIII, ser. B:117-246.
- Manessy, Gabriel. 1972. Les Noms d'Animaux domestiques dans les langues voltaïques. In *Langues et techniques nature et société, Bd 1*, eds. J. M. C. Thomas and L. Bernot, 300-320. Paris: Approche linguistique.
- Manessy, Gabriel. 1975. *Les langues Oti-Volta. Classification généalogique d'un groupe de langues voltaïques: Langues et Civilisations a Tradition Orale (LACITO)*; 15. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique; SELAF.
- Rattray, Robert Sutherland. 1932. *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland. Vol. I*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- *Ring, J. Andrew. 1991. Three case studies involving dialect standardization strategies in northern Ghana. In *Proceedings of the Summer Institute of Linguistics International Language Assessment Conference*, Horsleys Green, 23-31 May 1989, ed. Gloria E. Kindell, 281-87. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- *Steele, Mary and Gretchen Weed. 1967. *Collected field reports on the phonology of Konkomba*. Collected Language Notes, 3. Accra: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.
- Steele, Mary. 1977 [pr. 1976]. Konkomba Data Sheet. In *West African Language Data Sheets*, ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu, 358-364: West African Linguistic Society.
- *Steele, Mary. 1991. Translating the tetragrammaton YHWH in Konkomba. *Notes on Translation* 11(4): 28-31.
- Swadesh, Mauricio, Arana, Evangelina, Bendor-Samuel, John T., and Wilson, W. A. A. 1966. A Preliminary Glottochronology of Gur Languages. *Journal of West African Languages* 3:27-65.
- Tait, David. 1954. Konkomba Nominal Classes. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24: 130-148.
- Westermann, Diedrich. 1932. Ch. IV: Some notes on the foregoing linguistics material. In *The tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, vol. 1*, ed. R. S. Rattray, 122-129. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The language data for the focus investigation was elicited by me with a Konkomba speaker from Saboba (Likpakpaa dialect) in Northern Ghana during two short field stays in 2006. Comparison between available and my new data indicates a high degree of (sub-)dialectal variation. To summarize, the general as well as my personal knowledge about basic grammatical properties of Konkomba is rather small and the need for basic grammatical research is still very high, starting with basic phonological features.²

The general syntactic properties of the language resemble those in related languages of the Gurma subgroup and the wider Oti-Volta branch: The basic word order is SVO which in Konkomba is maintained across different clause types, polarity, and with lexical as well as with pronominal arguments.³

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------|------------|--------|--|
| (1) | mí | bà | ú-b̀̀. | |
| | 1sg | want | CL-dog | |
| | ‘I want a dog.’ | SVO | | |

²Konkomba is a tone language, but the literature differs with respect to the number of its level tones (2 or 3). As I have not systematically worked on the general principles and rules concerning tone, my tone transcription is simply based on the auditory impression. A similar urgent research need as for tone concerns the vowel system: Most sources list six short and six corresponding long oral vowels. It is not clear how appropriate the six vowel system actually is and whether there is vowel harmony in ATR or Height operating as known from related languages.

³Verb serialization can however affect the order, allowing SVOV as in several languages of the area (for example Bodomo 2002).

- (2) kí-!díí-kpòò wò.
 CL-house-old.CL collapse
 ‘The old house collapsed.’ SV

Most modifiers follow their nominal head, but associative constructions are head-final and the language has postpositions.

2. Two Focus Markers?

The primary aim of my research into Konkomba was to get a first insight into its focus system. Focus is regarded here as a semantico-pragmatic notion irrespective of its potential or requirements for overt marking. In this respect, I follow the functional definition of focus given by Dik, according to whom “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). This general notion of focus includes two major subtypes, namely assertive focus, also known as information focus or completive focus, on the one hand, and contrastive focus on the other hand, adapting Hyman & Watters (1984). For the elicitation of utterances and short texts which allow the focus identification, I mainly used the Questionnaire on Information Structure (QUIS, cf. Skopeteas et al. 2006) which was developed within our Research Group (SFB 632) to which I added some language-specific elicitation tasks.

It is known that the particles *lé* and *lá* in Konkomba provide important clues for the addressee’s pragmatic interpretation of the utterance. Accordingly, the particles are labeled as “focus markers” in the Konkomba-English dictionary by Langdon et al. (1981: 43). Two examples provided in the dictionary are given in (3a) and (4a). As the examples show, both particles follow the focal constituent of the sentence. My own data elicitation confirmed this result, cf. (3b) and (4b). In the context of an information question, the focal status of a postverbal constituent or of the sentence-initial subject respectively is reflected by the postposed particle *lá* or *lé*.

- (3) a. m cha ki-nyan ni la.
 1sg go CL-market at LA
 ‘It’s the MARKET that I am going to.’ (Langdon et al. 1981: 43)
- b. Context: What did she eat?
 ù ηmán !ηí-tùùn lá.
 CL chew CL-beans LA
 ‘She ate BEANS.’
- characteristic for complement focus (object, adjunct): SVO/A *lá*
- (4) a. min le ban n-nyək.
 1sg.DJ LE want CL-medicine
 ‘It is I who want medicine.’ (Langdon et al. 1981: 43)
- b. Context: Who ate the beans?
ú-pí wè (lé) ηmán.
 CL-woman DEM LE chew
 ‘THIS WOMAN ate them.’ ~ ‘It is THIS WOMAN who ate them.’
- characteristic for subject focus: S (*lé*) V

As indicated by the parentheses for particle *lé* in (4), there is a difference concerning the obligatoriness of the two particles: while *lá* seems to be obligatory under focus conditions, *lé* is optional.

The pragmatic interpretation of the particles as focus markers rather than their grammatical interpretation relies on the fact that neither *lá* nor *lé* are grammatically required per se. Hence, sentences lacking one or the other particle, as indicated in (1-2) above, are still well-formed, and only inappropriate in certain contexts.

For the moment we can conclude that at first sight, Konkomba seems to be equipped with two focus markers. In order to evaluate this situation, a closer look at the distribution of the particles is required.

3. Particles *lá* and *lé* in Marked Focus Constructions

3.1. Particle *lá*

With respect to the particle *lá* we can make the following observations:

First, *lá* marks focus on any single constituent placed after the verb, be it a verb argument or not. The subject, however, is excluded from this option. The focal constituent is typically found in immediate postverbal positions – though this does not seem to be obligatory – and is followed by clause-final *lá*.

- (5) a. Do you want the black cloth or the white cloth?

mí bà lí-pí!pín !lá.
1sg want CL-white LA
'I want the WHITE one.'

- b. Do you like him or me?

ń gèè sí lá.
1sg like 2sg.DJ LA
'I like YOU.'

- c. Where did the woman eat?

ù jí !ú-!dó lá.
CL eat CL-house LA
'She ate AT HOME.'

- d. When did you buy the beans?

ń dá-ŋì kpínqír !dáá lá.
1sg buy-CL "Monday" day LA
'I bought them on MONDAY.'

Second, *lá* is also used to mark focus on a part of a complex constituent, like the possessor in example (6). In this case, the particle does not intervene, but is placed after the complex phrase.

- (6) Do you want his or my car?

mí bà w-àà-lóó !lá.
1sg want CL-POSS-car LA
'I want HIS car.'

Additionally, *lá* is also regarded necessary in certain cases of wide focus, namely when focus comprises not only the postverbal complement but the selecting verb as well. This is the case in example (7) where the foregoing question triggers VP-focus.

- (7) a. What did the woman do?

ù ŋmán !ŋí-tùùn lá. = example (3)
CL chew CL-beans LA
'She ATE BEANS.'

- b. What did you do yesterday?

ń fí dá !símá lá.
 1sg yesterday buy groundnuts LA
 ‘I BOUGHT GROUNDNUTS yesterday.’

Finally, *lá* also occurs when just the verb of the utterance is in focus.

- (8) a. What did they do to the tree?

bí gà-bù lá.
 CL cut-CL LA
 ‘They CUT it’

- b. Where did they buy it?

bì sù lá.
 CL steal LA
 ‘They STOLE it’

With respect to verb focus, it has to be noted however, that in some contexts other particles (like *ya*) are regarded as appropriate while *lá* is not accepted. Such cases need more investigation⁴ and have been omitted here.

The particle can also be used in elliptic utterances, as they may occur in answers to a question or in dispute. As example (9a) illustrates, the particle is however not necessary to render the verbless utterance a predication, i.e. it doesn’t function as copula or as predicative element. Rather, it seems to add some special emphasis to the meaning conveyed by the focal constituent.

- (9) How many houses collapsed?

a. tì-wéé.
 CL-many
 ‘MANY.’

b. tì-wéé lá.
 CL-many LA
 ‘Unnecessarily MANY.’

Since the particle *lá* functioning as focus marker is not a copula itself, as is reported for some related languages (cf. Reineke 2007), it can also appear in copular constructions as exemplified in (10). The same example also demonstrates that the particle is typically absent under negation.⁵

- (10) S1: There are three yams.

S2: nà-á !yé ñì-tá, nì yé ñì-nàà lá.
 CL-NEG COP CL-three CL COP CL-four LA
 ‘It is not three yams, it is FOUR.’

It is important to set the focus marker *lá* apart from similar particles with a rather different function. These are both functioning as interrogatives: one represents a locative interrogative particle with the meaning ‘where?’ and the other one serves the formation of the specifying interrogative ‘which’, as shown in (11).

⁴ The distribution of these particles with verbs of different valence as well as the occurrence of object pronouns (cf. 8a with vs. 8b without object pronoun) needs further studies.

⁵ Whether it is completely excluded throughout negation has still to be checked.

- (11) a. \dot{u} b́ l̀à?
 CL be.LOC where
 ‘Where is he?’
- b. ḱ-!lá-dí ẁd ...?
 CL-which-house collapse
 ‘Which house collapsed ...?’

From these observations I conclude that the particle *lá* is indeed best to be analyzed as a focus marker, regardless of its restriction to the postverbal position and of the presence of competing devices in the case of narrow verb focus. The focus marking particle *lá* follows a focal constituent, whether it is new or contrastive focus, whether the focus is quite narrow or whether it is as wide as a complex VP.

3.2. Particle *lé*

Turning to particle *lé* the following observations can be obtained:

The particle *lé* always occurs in the preverbal field, which is the immediate preverbal position in case of subject focus, as can be seen in (12). Example (12b) further illustrates that narrow focus on a part of a complex subject phrase is formally not distinguished from focus extending over the whole subject constituent.

- (12) a. Who prepared the beans, the woman or the man?
 \dot{u} -pí !lé ñà.
 CL-woman LE prepare
 ‘The WOMAN cooked them.’
- b. How many tyres spoilt?
 (ñí-tà) ñì-lé lé p̀ù.
 (CL-tyre) CL-two LE spoil
 ‘TWO tyres spoilt.’

The particle *lé* may also be used when a sentence-initial constituent which is not the subject represents the focal information, as in example (13a/b). These sentences represent pragmatically more marked variants of the examples (5c) and (5d) above, where the same sentence constituent was focused in its canonical postverbal position.

- (13) a. \dot{u} -!dó, lé \dot{u} j̀ì.
 CL-house LE CL eat
 ‘She ate AT HOME.’
- b. \dot{k} p̀íngír !dáá, lé ñ dá !ñí-t̀ù̀n.
 “Monday” day LE 1sg buy CL-beans
 ‘I bought them on MONDAY.’

Note however that sentence-initial focus on non-subjects is not just triggered by a WH-question or a simple contradiction, but is subject of further requirements present in the context.

It is known that interrogative sentences are not fixed with respect to their information structure, but may linguistically reflect varying focus-background structures or different focus types (cf. Hajiová 1983: 88, Drubig & Schaffar 2001: 1087). In Konkomba, such shadings have not been confirmed so far. The particle *lá* does not show up in WH-questions at all, while similar in-situ focus markers in

related languages typically do.⁶ The particle *lé*, on the other hand, does occur with WH-questions, although not obligatorily. Its presence however does not seem to change the meaning of the utterance.

- (14) *ɲmá (lé) !ɲmán !ɲí-tùùn?*
 who (LE) chew CL-beans
 ‘Who ate the beans?’

Another difference between *lé* and *lá* concerns their behaviour in elliptic constructions. Unlike *lá*, *lé* is not even optionally allowed to be used, as illustrated in example (15b).

- (15) Who ate the beans?
 a. *àjúá lé !ɲmán ɲí-tùùn.*
 Ajua LE chew CL-beans
 ‘AJUA ate the beans.’
 b. *àjúá. *àjúá lé.*
 Ajua
 ‘AJUA’

Restrictions also exist concerning the combination of both particles within one clause. It is not allowed to use both together, as indicated in example (16).

- (16) What happened?
*ú-pí !lé ɲmán ɲí-tùùn. *úpí !lé ɲmán ɲítùùn lá.*
 CL-woman LE chew CL-beans
 ‘A WOMAN ATE BEANS.’

Multiple occurrences of *lé* on the other hand are allowed within a sentence, although not in a single clause. Furthermore, the co-occurring particles *lé* cannot all be attributed a focus marking function. The sentences in (17) provide examples for such multiple *lé*'s in a complex sentence. The first occurrence of *lé* in (17a) follows the focal subject, while the second use of *lé* joins another clause to the preceding one. Here, all conjuncts share the same subject reference, so the subject identity is expressed by *kí* in the last conjunct. In addition, in (17b), *lé* is also used in a case of subject change.

- (17) a. *ú-pí-nè-kpír lé !dá ɲí-tùùn lé !kí ɲàà.*
 CL-woman-?-old LE buy CL-beans LE SID prepare
 ‘The OLD WOMAN bought the beans and cooked them.’
 b. *ú-pí-nè-kpír !dá ɲí-tùùn, lé !kí ɲàà, lé !tí ɲmàn.*
 CL-woman-?-old buy CL-beans LE SID prepare LE 1pl chew
 ‘The old woman bought beans, cooked them and we ate them.’

⁶ Compare the focus markers in related languages (for example *lá* in Gurene and *ká* in Buli) which are typically employed in the in-situ question *and* in the in-situ answer:

Gurene:	<i>hù dà-lá bèm?</i> 2sg buy-FM what WHAT did you buy?	<i>ù dà-lá !tíyá.</i> 1sg buy-FM beans I bought BEANS.
Buli:	<i>fàà chēŋ ká bēē?</i> 2sg:IPF go FM where:INT WHERE are you going?	<i>máà chēŋ ká Sándēm.</i> 1sg:IPF go FM S. I am going to SANDEMA.

Obviously, the second occurrence of *lé* in (17a) is a conjunction that links together two related conjuncts. The same holds for all uses of *lé* in (17b). The conjunction conveys a sequential meaning, in that the actions encoded by the joined clauses never overlap and imply temporal succession. Unsurprisingly, a corresponding conjunction ‘and, and then’ is also listed in the dictionary.

The question arising here is of course: How justified is it to distinguish between a clause-initial conjunction *lé* and post-focal particle *lé* or how close might they be related?

Structurally, both *lé* occurrences can not be distinguished when the subject of the *lé*-clause has no co-referential expression in the preceding part of the sentence, i.e. when the sentence-initial focus constituent is not the subject, respectively when the subject is changed in the sequential clause. The parallel structures in both cases are illustrated in (18). The focus configuration with a sentence-initial non-subject can therefore be regarded as a structurally bisected construction which always contains a clause boundary before particle *lé*.

- (18) NP_i (predicate) # *lé* NP_j predicate
(*lé* as clausal conjunction & *lé* after non-subject focus constituent)

When there is co-referential relationship across *lé*, focus construction and sequential clause construction are however structurally different from each other, as illustrated in (19a/b). In sequential environments, the subject identity indicating particle *ki* is required to follow the conjunction *lé* (19a), but after a subject focus constituent, no additional subject indication occurs (19b). Hence, the syntactic configuration between focused subject and non-focal predicate seems different from that between sequential same-subject clauses and it is not clear, whether the bisected subject focus construction should really be regarded as extra-clausal.⁷

- (19) a. NP_i predicate # *lé* *ki* predicate (*lé* as clausal conjunction)
b. NP #? *lé* predicate (*lé* after subject focus constituent)

Despite this lack of congruence, it seems obvious that there is a close structural correspondence between *lé* as a clausal conjunction and as a post-focal particle. In most cases the particle has to be followed by a predicate provided with a subject reference. Such a reference is only missing in those cases where there is no predicate at all preceding particle *lé*, i.e. in the focus subject construction.

I conclude from these observations, that the far-going structural correspondences between particle *lé* occurrences in both functions indicate that there is indeed a close relationship between clausal conjunction and focus marking particle *lé* and that it is only the particle *lé* following a focused subject which creates difficulties for the analysis of *lé* as clausal conjunction. Therefore, it remains suspicious whether *lé* really constitutes a genuine second focus marker restricted to focus constituents in sentence-initial position, i.e. a place where it is always followed by more verbal information. I propose to analyze particle *lé* better as a connective particle that is used to link a (clausal) sentence constituent to the previous context – be that focal or not – rather than regarding it as a focus marker. Hence, particle *lé* occurs in syntactic focus marking configurations, in which the focus constituent is in sentence-initial position rather than somewhere near the verbal predicate in non-initial position.

4. Reanalysis

We have seen that focal information in Konkomba is often morphologically indicated, using particles *lé* and *lá*. Within a simple sentence, these particles exclude each other and their complementary distribution is determined by the position of the focal information within the sentence: *lé* occurs only when sentence-initial information is in focus while *lá* occurs elsewhere, as sketched in (20a/b).

⁷ The exact syntactic configuration of such focus constructions is currently pending further investigation and the descriptive term “bisected” construction has been chosen here to distinguish it from a “cleft” sentence which is typically regarded as formed by a main and a subordinate (relative) clause.

- (20) a. sentence-initial focus constituent: S *lé* V (O)
 O *lé* S V
 (focal subject or other) → connective particle
- b. non-sentence-initial focus constituent: S V (O) *lá*
 (never focal subject) → focus marker

It has been proposed here to analyze only particle *lá* as genuine focus marker and particle *lé* rather as a connective particle which is not even obligatory in sentence-initial focalization. We have also seen that focus marker *lá* is regularly applied under the respective focus conditions, but doesn't occur in WH-questions and that it is quite ambiguous as to the scope of focus which can be narrow or as wide as a complex VP. The assumed connective particle *lé*, on the other hand, represents a marked choice which can be applied in WH-questions but which is not obligatory.

As the dichotomy between sentence-initial and non-sentence-initial focus constituents in the focus marking system in Konkomba is independent from the syntactic function the focus constituent plays in the sentence, another basis for the opposition of the two focus strategies (applying either *lé* or *lá*) is required. It is widely accepted and it has been motivated by cognitive reasoning or by syntactic performance principles that the sentence-initial position is preferred for topical information (Gundel 1988, Givón 1988, Primus 1993 among others) and that the pragmatic topic function can be carried out to divergent degree by the subject of a sentence (Li & Thompson 1976 among others). Konkomba can be regarded to have the same preference for a sentence-initially placed topic, about which something is commented in the following predicate. In the unmarked case, the subject takes over the function of the sentence topic about which the rest of the sentence comments. The topical subject is often provided by material that is treated as presupposed and shared by the discourse participants, while unshared, new or even controversial information is supplied in connection with the predicate. Hence, the predicate commenting about a topical subject represents the basic domain for focus.

(21a) illustrates the assumption that in Konkomba, focus marker *lá* signals the fact that the focal information is part of the comment, while it may remain ambiguous whether the focal information comprises the verb, a postverbal complement or all together. Particle *lé* on the other hand (21b) signals the absence of a topic-comment structure based on a topical subject. Here, the sentence-initial constituent is in the realm of focus – either exclusively or the focus expands over the whole sentence. In both non-topical configurations, the predicate is linked to the sentence-initial constituent with the help of the connective particle *lé*.

- (21) a. [S]_{topic} [V (O) *lá*]_{comment=focus domain}
- b. [X]_{focus} *lé* (S) V (O)
 [X *lé* (S) V (O)]_{focus}

What appears as subject/non-subject asymmetry in the focus marking of sentence constituents in Konkomba – namely the use of connective particle *lé* but not of *lá* with focal subjects versus focal non-subjects – is according to the hypothesis in (21) just a consequence of the fact that in Konkomba the subject is restricted to the preferred sentence-initial topic position and is excluded from the comment where focus marker *lá* could apply (ruling out a configuration with sentence-final focal subject: *V(O)[S]_{focus} *lá*).

5. Comparative Remarks

Comparing the findings in Konkomba with the focus systems of some related Gur languages of the Oti-Volta group, we face several parallels, but also appealing differences to be pursued in future research. Two aspects shall be mentioned here:

First, Konkomba provides a focus marking morpheme with a structure identical to that of *lá* which is widely attested among its relatives. Several Oti-Volta languages have a particle with a similar function and some parallel, but not identical restrictions, among them Dagbani (Olawsky 1999),

Gurene (Dakubu 2000), Dagaare (Bodomo 2000), Yom (Fiedler 2006) and others. Interestingly, the position of the focus marker with respect to postverbal focus constituents differs, in that the focus marker must precede, rather than follow it in part of the languages (cf. the examples in footnote 6). Furthermore, the distribution of the assumed cognate focus marker may differ among the languages with respect to its obligatoriness in main clauses, its use under negation or in WH-questions.

Second, several related languages of the Oti-Volta group display a subject/non-subject asymmetry similar to the one we found in Konkomba, and they also require a special focus marking device for the sentence-initial focal subject. However, sentence-initial subject and non-subject constituents are often treated less homogeneously than they are in Konkomba, as demonstrated in (22). Besides Konkomba, this table also displays the particles in Buli and Dagbani which follow sentence-initial focus constituents.

(22) Focus on sentence-initial:	Subject	Non-subject
followed by		
connective particle / clausal conjunction:		
<i>Konkomba</i>	<i>lé</i>	<i>lé</i>
<i>Buli</i>	<i>lē</i>	<i>lē, tē</i>
<i>Dagbani</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>kà</i>

Interestingly, while these particles have a special distribution in Buli and Dagbani in the sense that they differentiate stronger between subject and non-subject than in Konkomba, they are also better analyzed as connective particles rather than as pragmatic markers (Fiedler & Schwarz 2005). They indicate sub- or coordination in the language and are also applied in syntactically derived focus configurations. Like *lé* in Konkomba, the nature of these particles following sentence-initial focus constituents is primarily a syntactic one and is not simply restricted to the function of focus marking.

Abbreviations in Glosses

CL	(noun) class
COP	copula
DEM	demonstrative
DJ	disjunctive pronoun
FM	focus marker
INT	interrogative marker
IPF	imperfective marker
NEG	negative marker
POSS	possessive marker
SID	subject identity

References

(others than those listed in section 1)

- Bodomo, Adams B. 2000. *Dàgáàrè*. (Languages of the world / Materials 165). Lincom Europa: München.
- Bodomo, Adams. 2002. The syntax of serial verbs in Dagaare. In *New directions in Ghanaian linguistics*, eds. Felix K. Ameka and E. Kweku Osam, 27-53. Legon: Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana.
- Dakubu, M. E. Kropp. 2000. The Particle *la* in Gurene. *Gur Papers / Cahiers Voltaïques* 5: 59-65.
- Dik, Simon. 1997. *The theory of functional grammar I. The structure of the clause*. Vol. 1 (Functional Grammar Series 20). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Drubig, H. B., and Schaffar, Wolfram. 2001. Focus constructions. In *Language typology and language universals*, eds. Martin Haspelmath et al., 1079-1104. Berlin, New York.
- Fiedler, Ines and Anne Schwarz. 2005. Out-of-focus Encoding in Gur and Kwa. In *Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure (ISIS) 3*, Working Papers of the SFB 632, eds. S. Ishihara, M. Schmitz and A. Schwarz, 111-142. Potsdam: Potsdam University.

- Fiedler, Ines. 2006. Focus expressions in Yom. *Gur Papers / Cahiers Voltaïques* 7: 112-121.
- Givón, Talmy. 1988. The pragmatics of word order: predictability, importance, and attention. In *Studies in syntactic typology*, eds. Michael Hammond, Edith A. Moravcsik and Jessica R. Wirth, 243-285. Amsterdam.
- Gordon, Raymond G., Jr., ed., 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world, Fifteenth edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online Version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
- Gundel, Jeanette K. 1988. Universals of topic-comment structure. In *Studies in Syntactic Typology*, eds. M. Hammond, E. A. Moravcsik and J. R. Wirth, 209-239. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Hajiová, Eva. 1983. On some aspects of presuppositions of questions. In *Questions and Answers*, ed. Ferenc Kiefer, 85-96. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Hyman, Larry M., and Watters, John R. 1984. Auxiliary focus. *Studies in African Linguistics, Supplement 15*:233-273.
- Li, Charles N., and Thompson, Sandra A. 1976. Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language. In *Subject and topic*, ed. Charles N. Li, 457-489. New York/San Francisco/London: Academic Press.
- Manessy, Gabriel. 1979. *Contribution à la classification généalogique des langues voltaïques*. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique; SELAF.
- Naden, Anthony J. 1989. Gur. In *The Niger-Congo languages*, ed. John Bendor-Samuel, 141-168. New York: University Press of America.
- Olawsky, Knut J. 1999. *Aspects of Dagbani grammar. With special emphasis on phonology and morphology* (LINCOM studies in African linguistics; 41). München, Newcastle: Lincom Europa.
- Primus, Beatrice. 1993. Word order and information structure: A performance-based account of topic positions and focus positions. In *Syntax. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung*, eds. Joachim Jacobs, Arnim von Stechow, W. Sternefeld and Theo Vennemann, 880-896. Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Reineke, Brigitte. 2007. Identificational operation as a focus strategy in Byali. In *Focus Strategies in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic – On the interaction of focus and grammar in some African languages*, eds. Enoch Aboh, Katharina Hartmann and Malte Zimmermann. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Schwarz, Anne. 2007. The Particles lé and lá in the Grammar of Konkomba. In *Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure (ISIS) 8*. Working Papers of the SFB 632, eds. S. Ishihara, S. Jannedy and A. Schwarz, 115-139. Potsdam: Universität Potsdam.
- Skopeteas, Stavros, Fiedler, Ines, Hellmuth, Sam, Schwarz, Anne, Stoel, Ruben, Fanselow, Gisbert, Féry, Caroline and Manfred Krifka. 2006. Questionnaire on information structure (QUIS). *Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure (ISIS) 4*. Working Papers of the SFB 632. Universität Potsdam.

Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: Linguistic Theory and African Language Documentation

edited by Masangu Matondo,
Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2009

Copyright information

Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics:
Linguistic Theory and African Language Documentation
© 2009 Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-429-4 library binding

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.
To place an order, go to www.lingref.com or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, e-mail: sales@cascadilla.com

Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at www.lingref.com. Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Schwarz, Anne. 2009. How Many Focus Markers Are There in Konkomba? In *Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Masangu Matondo, Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam, 182-192. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

or:

Schwarz, Anne. 2009. How Many Focus Markers Are There in Konkomba? In *Selected Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Masangu Matondo, Fiona Mc Laughlin, and Eric Potsdam, 182-192. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #2146.