

# Chapter 7

## Focus marking and dialect divergence in Līkpākpāln (Konkomba)

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In this paper, I discuss some salient aspects of focus marking in Likpakpaln, a Mabia (Gur), Niger-Congo language spoken mainly in the northern parts of Ghana. I compare focus marking in two dialects of Līkpākpāln, namely, Linàjùúl and Līchából. I treat the notion of focus from the angle of Dik (1981). Data draws from a multi-source corpora digitally recorded from stimuli-based elicitations and other natural discourse settings. Following the analysis of data, the study reveals that the use of focus particles constitutes the most significant means of focus marking in Līkpākpāln as that focus strategy is shared by both Linàjùúl and Līchából. Also, a common feature for both Linàjùúl and Līchából is that there are syntactic restrictions for the distribution of various focus particles in the sentence. On the question of divergences, I note that sentence final vowel lengthening also assumes a focus function with respect to Linàjùúl. Also, the focus markers in Linàjùúl (*ní, níká* and a sentence final focus particle of varied phonological shapes) differ in form from the focus markers, *lé* and *lá* in Līchából. Finally, I suggest that the focus marking differences between Linàjùúl and Līchából possibly stem from the fact that Linàjùúl appears to have innovated a complex focus system vis-à-vis focus marking in the Mabia languages of Ghana. However, more thorough investigation into focus marking in other dialects of Likpakpaln and Mabia is recommended. This will help establish whether the Linàjùúl case is an isolate system or not.

### 1 Introduction

The phenomenon of information structure (IS) and packaging is a sub-domain of linguistics that has received a generous scale of attention from linguists globally. This is as exemplified in works such as Lambrecht (1994), Krifka (2007), Schwabe



& Winkler (2007), Ameka (2010), Zimmermann & Onea (2011), and van Putten (2014). Often central in studies of information structure and packaging is the subject of focus. Paradoxically, the more that linguists try to put questions to rest regarding focus phenomena in languages, the more insatiable this topic area becomes. This observation is accentuated by the ever-increasing volumes of focus-related analyses and counter-analyses that continue to delve into the topic. For instance, the focus status of the post verbal *la* in Dagbani (a Gur, Niger-Congo language spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana) has been the source of a series of somewhat varying analyses as reflected in Olawsky (1999), Hudu (2012) and Issah (2013). Van Putten (2016: 94), similarly, notes the difficulty in attempting to find exhaustive explanations to questions on focus phenomena. She makes this observation in relation to the elusive task that linguists face in trying to determine, for instance, when and why focus marking is resorted to in non-obligatory focus languages. What the foregoing situation clearly suggests is that the need for systematic investigations into the attributes of focus is likely to remain an active area of investigation of focus for linguists, even with regard to the so-called well-researched languages.

Likpākpāln is a Gur (or Mabia<sup>1</sup>) language, whose speakers are mostly found in the Northern Sectors of Ghana. Speakers of Likpākpāln natively term themselves as Bikpakpaam, instead of the exonym, Konkomba, which has often been used as a shared tag for both the people and their language. Some specific areas of their location include Saboba District in the Northern Region, Nkwanta South and Nkwanta North Districts in (Northern) Volta. In other contexts, these areas of the Bikpakpaam location are alternatively referred to as the North-Eastern parts of Ghana (Schwarz 2009: 182). Simons & Fennig (2017) and Simons & Fennig (2018), in *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, estimate the Likpākpāln speaker population in Ghana at 831,000, besides other speakers reported of in the Republic of Togo.

Likpākpāln has a significant native speaker population, yet it is one of the very little-researched languages of Ghana. In the view of Schwarz (2009), the need for basic grammatical descriptions of Likpākpāln is still very high. This paper contributes to filling the basic knowledge gap on Likpākpāln by investigating some aspects of focus marking in the language. The study introduces into the literature new data on focus constructions in Mabia. It does so from a comparative perspective by drawing data from two clan dialects of Likpākpāln, namely, Līnàjùúł and Līchából, respectively. The following questions form the crux of this article:

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<sup>1</sup>“Mabia” is an alternative name for Gur. The former is becoming a preferred label among native linguists on the Gur languages. I adopt the term Mabia in this article with reference to Bodomo (2017) and Bodomo & Abubakari (2017: 161).

- i. What are the linguistic strategies for coding focus in *Likpākpāln*?
- ii. What are the functions of focus in *Likpākpāln*?
- iii. What are the focus marking similarities and differences between *Lìnàjùúl* and *Lìchából*?
- iv. To what extent does the focus marking system of *Likpākpāln* characterise the focus typology in the Mabia family?

## 2 Some basic grammatical features of *Likpākpāln*

As already indicated, *Likpākpāln* is a Mabia language. It is further defined as belonging to the Gurma sub-cluster of the Oti Volta family (Naden 1988, Steele & Weed 1966). This section briefly explicates some linguistic features of *Likpākpāln*.<sup>2</sup> This will provide a prerequisite for understanding discussions on focus marking in subsequent sections of the article.

*Likpākpāln* is a word order language, with the SVO typology as generally known of Mabia and Kwa languages (Schwarz 2009). A simple sentence in *Likpākpāln* can have the pattern SVO, SV or SVA, depending on whether the verb is transitive or intransitive. See the sentences in (1) below:

- (1) a. *Ú-ŋóó yá júú bī-sáá.* [SVO]  
 CL-goat DEF bite.PFV CL-food  
 ‘The goat bit the food.’
- b. *Ú-bú mór.* [SV]  
 CL-child cry.IPFV  
 ‘The child is crying.’
- c. *Nákújà wáá r̀bámóm.* [SVA]  
 Nakuja dance.PFV well  
 ‘Nakuja danced well.’

For purposes of focus, a non-subject constituent can be placed sentence initially, but the subject and the verb will remain in the fixed order of SV in the base clause as in (2b) below:

- (2) a. *Mánótì kór ú-kúló.* [canonical clause]  
 Name slaughter.PRF CL-fowl  
 ‘Manoti has slaughtered a fowl.’

<sup>2</sup>The data used in this section are based on *Lìnàjùúl*, but the same features hold for *Lìchából*.

- b. Ú-kúló n̄ká Mánótī kór.  
CL-fowl FOC Manoti slaughter.PRF  
'It is a fowl that Manoti slaughtered.'

In a ditransitive construction, the indirect object precedes the direct object as can be seen in (3a–b):

- (3) a. Nákújà tí Mánótī ú-kúló.  
Nákújà give.PRF Manoti CL-fowl  
'Nakuja has given Manoti a fowl.'  
b. Ú-nìmpū wár mē bī-sáá.  
CL-woman cut.PRF 1SG.OBJ CL-food  
'A woman has served me food.'

Likpākpāln has a noun class system based predominantly on class affixes, which also bear number semantics. Although prefixes dominate the class markers, some nouns have obligatory prefix-suffix pairs. Fewer nouns take only suffixes, which become the basis for their class assignment. Prefixes have corresponding class pronouns.<sup>3</sup>

The morphology of Likpākpāln nouns is basically agglutinating. Verbs, on the other hand, have a poor morphology as there are only a handful of aspectual markers on the verb. Tense is a function of preverbal particles. Three tones, high (´), mid (˘) and low (̀) are identified in Likpākpāln (Steele & Weed 1966: 16).

The language has an initial orthography (which is reasonably phonemic) that was fashioned based on the Lichából dialect. Any sequence of two vowels (whether representing a long vowel or not) in a word is treated as two syllable nuclei that may have the same or varying pitch levels (Bisilki & Akpanglo-Nartey 2017). Tone is generally not marked in the orthography of Likpākpāln. I, nonetheless, mark tone in this study as tone has both lexical and grammatical functions in the language and is quite relevant in an analysis such as this.

### 3 The current study in perspective

The notion of focus has been defined in many, related ways. Van Putten (2016: 92) maintains that focus is the part of a sentence that carries the common-ground update. The information that is a shared knowledge between both the speaker

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<sup>3</sup>A detailed discussion on Likpākpāln noun classes can be found in Bisilki & Akpanglo-Nartey 2017 and in Winkelmann 2012.

and the listener in an interlocution constitutes the common-ground. As speakers communicate, they try to increase their common-ground or shared knowledge by introducing and linking new information to this common ground. The new information that is introduced becomes an update to the common-ground and, for that matter, the focal point. My reservation(s) with van Putten's definition, though, is whether or not focus is always solely underpinned by what is necessarily new information. Indeed, Dik (1981: 59) argues that for the purpose of stressing the importance of a certain information or reactivating it in the addressee's memory, a speaker may place focus on such information the speaker knows is not new to the addressee. Similarly, Skopeteas et al. (2006: 3) hold that a given element may be focused. A given element, in the view of Skopeteas et al. (2006: 2) refers to information that the speaker believes the addressee already knows.

Consequently, in the present analysis, I treat the notion of focus from the point of view of Dik (1981) and as subsequently in Dik (1997). Focus represents what is relatively the most important or salient piece of information in a given discourse-context (Dik 1981: 42). Relatedly, a constituent of focus function is assumed to present information bearing upon the pragmatic information difference between the speaker and the addressee as perceived by the speaker. The foregoing conceptualisation of focus replays in Dik (1997: 326) when he sees the focal information in a linguistic expression to be the most essential or salient in a given communicative context and considered by the speaker to be the most relevant for the listener to integrate into his/her pragmatic information. From this point of view, one can say further that a focus construction is a construction in which a particular constituent (i.e., the focal constituent) is placed in relative prominence or saliency by setting it off from the rest of the sentence or utterance in one way or another (Boadi 1974, Drubig & Schäffer 2001, Marfo & Bodomo 2005: 185). In terms of the expressive devices or strategies that languages deploy in marking focus, Dik (1981: 43) stipulates four ways:

- i. Intonational prominence – extra stress or higher tone
- ii. Constituent order
- iii. Special focus markers
- iv. Special focus constructions

Focus in different languages may use some or all of these devices in different combinations. Along a functional line, Dik (1981: 60) typologises focus broadly

as either +contrast or –contrast. –Contrast focus is also termed as completive or informative focus whereas +contrast focus is also known as contrastive focus. Akrofi Ansah (2014), Schwarz (2009) and Skopeteas et al. (2006) further delineate into finer-grained focus types: selective, expanding, restricting, replacive and parallel. Focus is completive (–contrast) when it serves merely to emphasize (or make prominent) a particular constituent, but contrastive when it contrasts the information of a constituent with that of another. The Lìkpàkpáǎn (Lìnàjùúǎ) sentences in (4b) and (5b) illustrate completive and contrastive focus respectively.

- (4) a. Ú-nìnjà wé bì-trí bá?  
CL-man DEM PROG-push Q  
‘What is this man pushing?’  
b. Ú bì-trí lóól lé.  
3SG.SBJ PROG-push car FOC  
‘He is pushing a car.’
- (5) a. Ú-nìnjà bì-trí ú-táán.  
CL-man PROG-push CL-horse  
‘A man is pushing a horse.’  
b. Dábí, lóól ñká ú bì-trí.  
No, car FOC 3SG.SBJ PROG-push  
‘No, he is pushing a car.’

The discourse function of focus in (4b) is simply to lay emphasis or prominence on a car as the constituent bearing the relatively most salient information in the predication. On the other hand, the focus in (5b) serves to show the contrast that it is a car (and not a horse) that the man is pushing.

Focus can also be broad or narrow depending on whether it is assigned to the entire sentence (or its truth value) or a particular constituent or complement (Dik 1981: 44). See the Lìkpàkpáǎn (Lìchából) sentences (6) and (7):

- (6) a. Bá ñá-ní?  
Q happen-PROG  
‘What is happening?’  
b. Bū-sūb lé lír.  
CL-tree FOC fall.PRF  
‘A tree has fallen.’

- (7) a. Bá ú            trí?  
       Q 3SG.SBJ push.IPFV  
       ‘What is s/he pushing?’  
    b. Ní yí lór lá.  
       3SG is car FOC  
       ‘It is a car.’

(6b) presents an instance of broad focus where the entire sentence serves to fill the information gap in the knowledge of the listener (addressee). (7b), however, exemplifies narrow focus as a car is the only focus bearing constituent in the sentence. More on broad and narrow focus can be found in Hyman (2010: 96–97).

Additionally, this study also draws on van Putten (2016: 93) in the light of the contradistinction between a focused or in focus constituent, on one hand and, on the other hand, a focus-marked constituent. The former is applicable to a situation where an element that constitutes the most crucial point of information is only so understood pragmatically without the use of overt linguistic devices. The latter case has to do with the situation where a focal element is explicitly marked for focus by any of a possible range of linguistic devices that may have a focus configuration function in a language. Another fact worth noting is that focus-marked elements are invariably in focus whilst an element can be in focus without necessarily being focus-marked. In the present discussion, my concentration is mainly on cases of focus-marked constituents as the presentation and analysis of data will show.

As already indicated (in §1), the current analysis investigates some aspects of focus marking in *Likpākpāln* from a dialectal perspective. This is in the sense that the study does not only describe focus marking in *Likpākpāln*, but it also compares two actively spoken dialects of the language (*Lìnàjùùl* and *Lìchából*), with respect to the phenomenon in question. There has been a preliminary attempt at investigating focus in *Likpākpāln* by Schwarz (2009). Nevertheless, Schwarz’s study was limited to only *Lìchából*. Focus marking in *Lìchából* is here being re-examined and compared with focus marking as pertains in *Lìnàjùùl* (which has no such previous study).

Beyond the agenda of providing linguistic description of *Likpākpāln*, the immediate motivation for this study is also anchored in two issues. The first is to help settle some questions regarding the curiosity that is engendered by a constant, but cursory refrain in the few works on *Likpākpāln* that the language is highly split into numerous clan dialects (Schwarz 2009: 182, Hasselbring 2006:

107). Although scholars have often been quick to point out that Likpākpāln subdivides into numerous dialectal forms along clan units, the state of linguistic convergence or divergence between the supposed variants of Likpākpāln remains unexplored or, at best, little-researched. Secondly, there are currently proposals being made by the Likpākpāln speaker community in Ghana to re-design an orthography that will have a more unified outlook for various speakers of the language. I am privy to this initiative as a native speaker of Likpākpāln and member of the speaker community. Such a practical need further calls for studies that potentially reveal how similar or different the dialects of Likpākpāln spoken by various Birkpakpaam clan groupings are. I look at focus marking in Līnàjùùl (see §5) first, and then focus marking in Līchából (see §7) before proceeding to compare the focus systems of the two in §8.

## 4 Data collection method

This study is based mainly on primary data sets collected from the native speakers of Līnàjùùl in the Nkwanta North District of (Northern) Volta and Līchából speakers of Saboba in the Northern Region of Ghana. I used both observation (including participant and non-participant types) and direct elicitation techniques for data collection. The direct elicitation involved four consultants (two Līnàjùùl speakers and two Līchából speakers; one male and one female for each dialect) purposively selected. The observation data covered varied communicative domains such as during arbitration proceedings at the chief's court, religious ceremonies and family interactions.

With the direct elicitations, the prompts were a 10-minute video-clip, on one hand, and picture stimuli (some original; others adapted from Skopeteas et al. 2006), on the other hand. Chelliah (2013: 61) attests to the advantage in using non-linguistic stimuli tasks such as video-clips and photographs. As Chelliah (2013) puts it, “Non-linguistic stimuli have several advantages: speakers do not require special training to understand the tasks and responses are clearly linked to stimuli and are, therefore, less ambiguous.” The video and picture stimuli were designed based on local content in the Likpākpāln speaker environment. For instance, I took pictures of different animals at different times, pictures of people engaged in different activities (e.g., during block laying at a construction site, cooking, etc.). The essence of using familiar stimuli was to avoid the situation where culturally foreign stimuli could lead to consultant confusion. A further benefit from the use of stimuli was that by taking the responses of Līnàjùùl and Līchából speakers to the same prompts allowed for making easy contrasts between the two dialects (see Majid 2012: 56).



Using the information structure questionnaire (QUIS, Skopeteas et al. 2006) as a guide, I also sometimes posed content questions to which consultants responded based on the stimuli. The use of question-answer pairs as a standard heuristic for determining focus constituents is also well established in the literature (see for example Dik 1978, Krifka 2007, Watters 1979). Utterances were recorded with a digital video device. With the aid of Elan (4.9.4), the recorded speech was segmented and transcribed for analysis.

## 5 Focus marking in Līnàjùúł

Focus marking in Līnàjùúł requires the use of special particles dedicated for marking focal elements. The use of particles for focus marking is also sometimes described as morphological (Childs 1997, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2009, Schwarz 2009, van Putten 2016). Rochemont (1986) equally demonstrates the use of prosodic resources and syntactic means, respectively in focus assignment. The focus particles in Līnàjùúł include: *ń*, *ńká* and a sentence final focus particle that assumes varying shapes, depending on the sentence final consonantal involved (this is discussed in detail in §5.3).

### 5.1 Focus particle *ń*

The particle, *ń* is employed to focus-mark constituents in the utterances of Līnàjùúł speakers. It is worthy to note that the *ń* particle anticipatorily undergoes homorganic assimilation, giving it other variants as *ń̄* and *ń̂* in speech:

- (8) a. i. *ńmá tári kīyá?*  
           Q shout.IPFV like.that  
           ‘Who is shouting like that?’  
       ii. *Mákīnyì ń bì-síi ū-pú.*  
           Name FOC PROG-insult POSS-wife  
           ‘Mákīnyì is insulting his wife.’  
       b. *Ú-nìmpū ń̄ kpá kī-nyók.*  
           CL.SG-woman FOC have CL.SG-mouth  
           ‘A woman is talkative (in a quarrel).’  
       c. *Ú-bór ń̂ yì kī-tìŋ.*  
           CL.SG-chief FOC own.HAB CL.SG-land  
           ‘The chief owns the land.’

- d. Bimá ñ yór ñ-dàn.  
 3PL.SBJ FOC take.PFV drink  
 ‘They took (to take away) the drink.’

From the examples in (8), it can be noted that ñ is used to mark focus on sentence initial subjects. Ñ in its sentence initial subject focus constructions is restricted to the immediate post subject slot before the canonical verb. Apart from simple subject constituents (nouns and pronominals) as shown in (8) above, ñ can also be used to place focus on complex subject NPs as the sentences in (9) reveal:

- (9) a. Ú-ḡóó mén wé ñ júú lī-núúl.  
 CL.SG-goat red DEM FOC bite.PRF CL.SG-yam  
 ‘This red goat bit the yam.’  
 b. Bī-nìnkpíí-b bī-tī-ká-nà ḿ bán ñ-dàn.  
 CL.PL-elder-CL.PL 3PL-LOC-sit-DEF FOC want.IPFV CL-drink  
 ‘The elders sitting over there want a drink.’

Ñ as a focus particle cannot be placed in an intervening position in complex focal NPs, but comes immediately after the last complement of the complex NP (i.e., it is placed at the rightmost edge of the focus phrase [FocP]). The subject focus role of Lìkpákpáln ñ makes it analogous to a similar subject focus marker (ñ) in Dagbani and Gurene (Kropp Dakubu 2003: 4, Issah 2013: 169, Issah & Smith 2018: 5, Akrofi Ansah 2014: 169). The Dagbani and the Gurune data in (10a) and (10b) respectively confirm this observation:

- (10) a. Dagbani  
 Abu ñ dá gbáj máá.  
 Abu FOC buy.PFV book DEF  
 ‘Abu bought the book.’ (Issah & Smith 2018: 5)  
 b. Gurene  
 A-ni n zàa nyε bùdáa lá.  
 a-WH FOC yesterday see.PFV man DEF  
 ‘Who saw the man yesterday?’ (Kropp Dakubu 2003: 4)

The deletion of ñ from a sentence in Lìnàjùúl, nevertheless, does not render such a construction ungrammatical. As such, any of the sentences in (9) above can be re-presented grammatically as in (11), except that these sentences become neutral in their contextual meanings:

- (11) a. Ú-ŋóó mén wé júú lī-núúl. [neutral]  
 CL.SG-goat red DEM bite.PRF CL.SG-yam  
 ‘This red goat bit the yam.’
- b. Bī-nìnkpíí-b bī-tī-ká-nà bán n̄-dàn. [neutral]  
 CL.PL-elder-CL.PL 3PL-LOC-sit-DEF want.IPFV CL-drink  
 ‘The elders sitting over there want a drink.’

*N̄* cannot be used to mark focus on non-subject constituents. As earlier indicated, an attempt to re-position *n̄* in any part of the sentence different from the immediate post canonical subject slot results in ungrammaticality of the sentence. This accounts for the unacceptable forms in (12).<sup>4</sup>

- (12) a. \*Ú-bór yì n̄ kī-tiŋ.  
 CL.SG-chief own.HAB FOC CL.SG-land  
 ‘The chief owns the land.’
- b. \*Bīmá yór n̄-dàn n̄.  
 3PL.SBJ take.PFV drink FOC  
 ‘They took (to take away) the drink.’
- c. \**N̄* Bīmá yór n̄-dàn.  
 FOC 3PL.SBJ take.PFV CL-drink  
 ‘They took (to take away) the drink.’

*N̄* equally serves both +contrastive and –contrastive focus functions. The specific context of utterance determines whether *n̄* is used for emphasis or to code a meaning of contrast.

## 5.2 The particle, *ńká* as a focus marker

*ńká* is used to focus-mark only fronted non-subject constituents. In this case, a focus phrase (i.e., comprising both the focus particle and the focal constituent) must be placed extra-clausally. Extracting the focus particle only or the focal constituent only leads to a distortion of the grammaticality of the sentence. Although Likpākpāln is not a Kwa language, the requirement that *ńká* necessarily collocates with its focal target in the extra-clausal position falls in with Ameka’s (2010) observation that in some Kwa languages, both a focus particle and the focalised element must be placed together in a fronted position. *ńká* can be used to focus-mark objects as the sentences in (13) show:

<sup>4</sup>Please note that “\*” in front of an item means ungrammatical/unacceptable form.

- (13) a. *Ú-nìmpū ká ñáándé tī-kpēn né.*  
 CL-woman sit.IPFV boil.IPFV CL-soup FOC  
 ‘A woman is preparing soup.’
- b. *Tī-kpēn ñká ú-nìmpū ká ñáándé.*  
 CL-soup FOC CL-woman sit boil.IPFV  
 ‘A woman is preparing soup.’
- c. *Ú bī-nyó ñ-dám.* [canonical]  
 3SG.SBJ PROG-take CL-drink  
 ‘S/he is taking (drinking) a drink.’
- d. *Ñ-dám ñká ú bī-nyó.*  
 CL-drink FOC 3SG.SBJ PROG-drink  
 ‘S/he is taking (drinking) a drink.’

Also, the sentences (14b) and (14d) below provide instances of *ñká* marking focus on an adjunct and an adpositional respectively.

- (14) a. *Kónjà lán fúnī dín.* [canonical]  
 Name will arrive today  
 ‘Kónjà will arrive (here) today.’
- b. *Dín ñká Kónjà lán fú-nī.*  
 Today FOC Konja will arrive-LOC  
 ‘Konja will arrive (here) today.’
- c. *Ú bī-kór kī-sáá-k nē.* [canonical sentence]  
 3SG.SBJ PROG-weed CL-farm in  
 ‘S/he is weeding inside the farm.’
- d. *Kī-sáá-k nē ñká ú bī-kór.*  
 CL-farm-CL in FOC 3SG.SUBJ PROG-weed  
 ‘S/he is weeding in the farm.’

With reference to the sentences cited so far, one would also realize that it stands to say that fronting constituents for focus assignment with *ñká* does not trigger a resumptive pronoun in the base clause. Syntactically, *ñká* takes the slot immediately after its focal host, but must also precede the subject argument in the canonical clause position, which can either be a pronominal or a lexical subject.

Unlike the *ñ* focus marker, a deletion of the *ñká* particle from a focus construction renders it ungrammatical, unless such a deletion is concomitant with a re-positioning of the focal constituent in its base position (in situ). As such, (14b) and (14d) become ill-formed constructions as in (15a) and (15b) below:

- (15) a. \*Dín Kónjà lán fú-nī.  
 Today Konja will arrive-LOC  
 ‘Konja will arrive (here) today.’  
 b. \*Kī-sáá-k nē ú bī-kór.  
 CL-farm-CL in 3SG.SUBJ PROG-weed  
 ‘S/he is weeding inside the farm.’

Nevertheless, (15a) and (15b) would be well formed if there were in situ object placement alongside the deletion of *ńká*. Hence, (15a) and (15b) as re-presented in (16a) and (16b) stand as grammatically correct sentences:

- (16) a. Kónjà lán fú-nī dín.  
 Name will arrive-LOC today  
 ‘Konja will arrive (here) today.’  
 b. Ú bī-kór kī-sáá-k nē.  
 3SG.SUBJ PROG-weed CL-farm-CL in  
 ‘S/he is weeding inside the farm.’

Discourse contextually, it was observed that *ńká* is mostly used for a contrastive focus function. It appears that when a non-subject constituent is to be focused –contrastively, a sentence final particle (discussed in §5.3) is preferred while the other way around calls for *ńká*.

### 5.3 Sentence final focus particle

There is a phenomenon in Línàjùúl where a focus particle is placed sentence finally for the marking of focus, mostly, on post verbal constituents. This is as shown in the sentences in (17) below:

- (17) a. Ú jóó lī-kú-l lé.  
 3SG hold.IPFV CL-hoe-CL FOC  
 ‘S/he is holding a hoe.’  
 b. Ú-pìi bī-ŋmáán bī-sū-b áá-fár ré.  
 CL-sheep PROG-chew CL-tree-CL GEN-leaves FOC  
 ‘A sheep is chewing leaves of a tree.’  
 c. Ntáánáá chá kī-sáá-k ké.  
 Name go.IPFV CL-farm-CL FOC  
 ‘Ntáánáá is going to the farm.’

- d. Ntáánáá gáá bī-sū-b bé.  
 Name cut.PRF CL-tree-CL FOC  
 ‘Ntáánáá has cut a tree.’
- e. Ntáánáá bī-ɲmán ntúúm mé.  
 Name PROG-chew beans FOC  
 ‘Ntáánáá is eating beans.’
- f. i. Chákún dó lá?  
 Cat be.lie where  
 ‘Where is the cat lying?’
- ii. Chákún dó lí-jà-l tàáb bé.  
 Cat lie-IPFV CL-chair-CL under FOC  
 ‘It is lying [under a chair]<sub>FOC</sub>.’

While *é* remains invariant in all instances of the sentence final focus particle, the consonants have varied, depending on the final consonant segment(s) in the sentence final word of the constituent in focus. This, therefore, means that the sentence final focus particle is constructed by retaining a sentence final consonant (where sentence final consonant refers to the word-final consonant before the focus particle) and adding *é* to it. One may then state that the shape of a sentence final focus marker in Linàjùúl is phonologically conditioned. The influence of phonological environment on the choice of focus particles is also found in Sissali (a sister Mabilia language spoken in Upper West Ghana). Dumah (2017) shows that in Sissali, when a focal constituent ends in a consonant, *né* is used for focus while *ré* is used where such a constituent ends in a vowel. The following Sissali sentences in (18) from Dumah (2017) illustrate the phenomenon:

(18) Sissali (Dumah 2017: 84)

- a. Gyinaŋ<sub>i</sub> né<sub>ti</sub>/\*ré Dùmà sí gún<sub>n</sub>i wòj<sub>i</sub>ŋ.  
 Today FOC Dùmá FUT learn lesson  
 ‘Today (and not any other day) that Dùmà will learn a lesson.’
- b. Daari<sub>i</sub> ré/\*né<sub>ti</sub> yóbò tèn.  
 Name FOC buy book  
 ‘Daari (and not any other person) has bought a book.’

The inappropriateness of \**ré* in (18a) is because the focused constituent ends in a consonant and the reverse accounts for \**né* in (18b). However, in the case of Linàjùúl, when a post verbal focal constituent ends in a vowel, a focus particle is not used. Instead, there is an increase in the duration/extra lengthening of

the final vowel (although this still requires an acoustic investigation to be more formally established).

The sentence final focus particle can be used to focalise both simple and complex non-subject constituents, including even entire VPs as can be seen from the examples in (17). (19) specifically illustrates VP focus with the sentence final focus particle.

- (19) a. Áá-jàpúán ɲáá bá?  
 GEN-son did Q  
 ‘What did your son do?’  
 b. Ú jón bī-sū-b bé.  
 3SG.SBJ climb.PFV CL-tree-CL FOC  
 ‘He [climbed a tree]<sub>FOC</sub>.’

In (19b), we see a sentence final particle, *bé* used to mark focus on an entire VP. The scenario is that the speaker (19a) saw the addressee (19b) knock her son (addressee’s son) on the head. This prompted the speaker’s question, leading to the addressee’s response (19b) in which the entire VP structure is in focus. It must also be reiterated that the sentence final focus particle mainly has a –contrast discourse function. Thus, it serves more to give relative emphasis or prominence to a particular constituent rather than to contrast.

Also, the non-use or the deletion of a sentence final focus particle does not make a sentence ungrammatical. In this sense, sentence final focus particles behave like particle *ń* discussed in §5.1. The sentences in (20) are a representation of (17a–b), except that they are now neutral forms.

- (20) a. Ú jóó lī-kú-l.  
 3SG hold.IPFV CL-hoe-CL  
 ‘S/he is holding a hoe.’  
 b. Ú-pìi bī-ɲmáán bī-sū-b áá-fár.  
 CL-sheep PROG-chew CL-tree-CL GEN-leaves  
 ‘A sheep is chewing the leaves of a tree.’

Thus, in (20) we find that the sentences with sentence final focus particle in (17a–b) are represented as grammatical forms without the focus markers.

## 6 Any combinatorial permissibility between the Līnàjùúł focus particles?

A careful analysis of the Līnàjùúł focus particles affirm that, to a large extent, they have a complementary distribution in clauses or sentences. A co-habitation of any two of the focus particles in the same clause or even respectively in conjunct clauses usually results in a grammatically weird form as can be seen in the examples in (21) below.

- (21) a. \* Chákún ń chú ú-námpúl lé.  
cat FOC catch.PFV CL-mouse FOC  
'A cat caught a mouse.'
- b. \* Kónjà ń pēn í-lik kē kūn kī-sáák ké.  
Name FOC borrow-PFV CL-money CONJ farm.PFV CL-farm-CL FOC  
'Kónjà borrowed money and used it to make a farm.'

(21a) is a simple clause while (21b) is a compound clause, yet a concurrent hosting of two focus particles is unacceptable in any of the cases.

## 7 Focus marking in Līchából

Two particles, *lé* and *lá*<sup>5</sup> have been identified as the focus markers in Līchából (Schwarz 2009). In Schwarz's study, emphasis was more on establishing the divergent status of *lé* and *lá* in the Līchából grammatical system. Schwarz appears to have ended on the following key conclusions, inter alia:

- i. *Lé* marks focus on constituents in the preverbal field while the realisation of focus on post-verbal constituents is the preserve of *lá*.
- ii. *Lé* and *lá* have a mutually exclusive occurrence in a simple sentence.
- iii. Both *lé* and *lá* are non-obligatory in sentence structures as their omission does not engender ungrammaticality in the sentence.

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<sup>5</sup>In the present analysis, I might not have covered all the aspects of *lé* and *lá* that were dealt with in Schwarz (2009), even though I might have also introduced some new perspectives on these focus particles here. The reason is that this paper's interest is more in two issues: 1. articulate focus marking differences between Līnàjùúł and Līchából, and 2. to address any gap(s) that were observed in Schwarz's analysis.



Much as I accede to Schwarz's arguments, one of my points of disagreement lies with his claim about the non-obligatoriness of *lé* and *lá* in the sentence (Schwarz 2009: 184–185). In my observation, it is only *lá* which is possibly non-obligatory in every context of its use as a focus particle. *Lé*, on the other hand, has an obligatory use in the case of certain pronominal subjects (which I tentatively typologize as strong, disjunctive pronouns) and also in a situation where a non-subject is placed sentence initial as data in (22) and (23) suggest. Furthermore, a new dimension that I offer in the present analysis is that *lá* can also be used to lay a special emphasis on the entire proposition of a clause, rather than on only constituents within the clause. This is illustrated in example (23).

### 7.1 Particle *lé*

When marking focus on a focal subject, both *lé* and the focused constituent are located within the canonical clause as can be seen in (22a), (22b), and (22c) respectively. However, when it is a non-subject focal constituent, both particle *lé* and a focalized element are fronted as in (22e):

- (22) a. Mákīnyì lé bì-síì ū-pú.  
 Name FOC PROG-insult his-wife  
 'Mákīnyì is insulting his wife.'
- b. Ú-píí lé kpá b-ūmó-b.  
 CL.SG-woman FOC have CL.SG-mouth-CL  
 'A woman is talkative (in a quarrel).'
- c. Úmáá lé nyún n-dáán.  
 3SG FOC drink.PFV CL-drink  
 'He is the one who took a drink.'
- d. N̄ wáá ú-pìì. [canonical sentence]  
 1SG.SBJ see.IPFV CL-sheep  
 'I see a sheep.'
- e. Ú-pìì lé n̄ wáá.  
 CL-sheep FOC 1SG.SBJ see.IPFV  
 'A sheep is what I see.'

Noteworthy is that whether in subject or non-subject focus, *lé* invariably occupies the immediate slot after the focal constituent as can be seen from (22). *Lé* is not placed in an intervening position within the complements of a focal constituent (i.e., in the case of a complex constituent), even when it is used for a

narrow focus on only a part of the complex constituent, illustrated in (23). The question (23a) shows that the focus is narrowed to only *ɲi-lé* (two). Yet the placement of the *lé* focus marker (23b) remains positioned in the same place as would be the case if the entire NP, *ɲi-tà ɲi-lé* ‘two tyres’ were in focus:

- (23) a. *ɲi-tà ɲiɲá pú?*  
CL-tyre many spoilt.PFV  
‘How many tyres got spoilt?’  
b. (*ɲi-tà*) *ɲi-lé lé pú.*  
CL-tyre two FOC spoilt  
‘Two (tyres) got spoilt.’<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to Schwarz (2009), *lé* is found to be obligatory in certain focus conditions. This occurs when certain strong, disjunctive pronouns take the subject position and also when a non-subject constituent is moved to the left periphery. The examples (24) further illustrate the use of *lé*:

- (24) a. *ú-píí lé ń jóó.*  
CL-woman FOC 1SG.SBJ marry.PRS  
‘I am married to a woman.’  
b. *Mín lé ɲmán ɲí-tùùn.*  
1SG.SBJ FOC eat.PFV CL-beans  
‘I ate beans.’  
c. *Tìmín lé jín bī-sáá.*  
1PL.SBJ FOC eat.PFV CL-food  
‘WE ate (the) food.’

It is as a result of the obligatory status of *lé* in contexts such as (24) that the sentences in (24) become ungrammatical as re-presented in (25) below.

- (25) a. \**Ú-píí ń ń jóó.*  
CL-woman 1SG marry.PRS  
‘I am married to a woman.’  
b. \**Mín ɲmán ɲí-tùùn.*  
1SG.SBJ eat.PFV CL-beans  
‘I ate (the) beans.’

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<sup>6</sup>(23b) is adapted from Schwarz (2009: 187).

- c. \*Tīmīn jín bī-sáá.  
 1PL.SBJ eat.PFV CL-food  
 ‘We ate (the) food.’

*Lé* (25a) becomes necessary because of the fronted object (a non-subject constituent). Similarly, *lé* is indispensable (25b and 25c) because of the particular pronominal subjects involved.

## 7.2 Particle *lá*

The particle, *lá* as a focus marker in Lichából is constrained to sentence final position in a similar way as the sentence final focus particle in Linàjùúl. In its post canonical verb position, *lá* is immediately postposed to the constituents that it focus-marks. That is, the element in focus precedes *lá* in terms of nearness to the canonical verb. *Lá* can be used to mark focus on any non-subject constituent as can be noted (26) below:

- (26) a. i. Mbá yúnl nē fī cháá?  
 Q time 2PL.SBJ TRM go.IPFV  
 ‘What time are you leaving tomorrow?’  
 ii. Tī gē fī búén máláá lá.  
 1PL.SBJ FUT TRM go.IPFV early FOC  
 ‘We will be going early.’  
 b. i. Bá ákēkēln ú gbáb?  
 Q cloth s/he wear.IPFV  
 ‘What type (colour) of cloth is s/he wearing?’  
 ii. Ú gbáb lí-kēkē mēnl lá.  
 3SG.SBJ wear.IPFV CL-cloth red FOC  
 ‘S/he is wearing a red cloth.’  
 c. i. Ú-jà wé bī-ńánì bá.  
 CL-man DEM PROG-do Q  
 ‘What is this man doing?’  
 ii. Ú bī-máá kī-díí-k lá.  
 3SG.SBJ PROG-building CL-room-CL FOC  
 ‘He [is building a house]<sub>FOC</sub>.’

*Lá* (26a-ii), is used to mark focus on an adverbial. *Lá* marks focus on an adjective and (26c-ii) marks focus on a complex VP.

Furthermore, *lá* also occurs when the element of focus is just the verb. (27) is an example to this effect:

- (27) a. Lá bī dá ídó?  
Q 3PL.SBJ buy.PFV wood  
'Where did they buy the (fire)wood?'  
b. Bī sūn lá.  
3PL.SBJ steal.PFV FOC  
'They stole it.'

Additionally, Schwarz (2009) hints at the fact that *lá* can be used to add a kind of emphasis to the meaning of a focal constituent. A further discovery the present study brings on board is that such emphasis by *lá* can also apply to the meaning of the entire sentence. This is observed to happen when, in discourse, a speaker wants to be sarcastic or, in earnest, indicate that the idea or situation being stated is beyond the ordinary. An example (28) below illustrates this:

- (28) Jàgrì kpó ñì-móbìl lá.  
Jàgrì has CL-money FOC  
'[Jàgrì has money]<sub>FOC</sub>'

The discourse-contextual interpretation of the sentence (28) is not to emphasize or contrast only a portion of the sentence. Rather, the contextual meaning is that 'Jàgrì is, indeed, rich or he is richer than the ordinary.' One must also note that in cases like (28), *lá* is still retained in the sentence finally. An interesting commonality about every context use of the *lá* focus marker, is its optionality in the sentence. Hence, example (28) and (27b) are still grammatically correct (although their contextual meanings may become inappropriate) without *lá* (29).

- (29) a. Jàgrì kpó ñì-móbìl.  
Jàgrì has CL-money  
'Jàgrì has money.'  
b. Bī sūn.  
3PL.BJ steal.PFV  
'They stole.'

Finally on *lá*, Schwarz (2009) acknowledges that there are similar particles like *lá* in Lìchából, but with different functions. Possibly, a more appropriate way to put this is to say that there are homophonous *Lás* in Lìchából-Kpakpaln. There is a focus marking *lá* and there is also an interrogative particle *lá*, meaning roughly "where" (see, for instance, data example 27a).

## 8 Highlights of focus marking divergences between Līnàjùúł and Līchából

The foregoing discussions (in sections above) reveal that Līnàjùúł and Līchából have intriguing similarities as well as differences, with respect to the phenomenon of focus marking. In the first place, the two dialects use special focus markers (in this case focus particles) for marking focal constituents. To that extent, both Līnàjùúł and Līchából conform to the common linguistic phenomenon, where the focus systems of Mabilia languages involve the use of focus marking particles. Nonetheless, whereas Līnàjùúł has three particles (*Ń*, *ńká* and a clause final particle of varying shapes), *lé* and *lá* are the only particles used for coding focus in Līchából. However, Līnàjùúł further appears to draw on the prosodic feature of duration/sentence final vowel lengthening for focus assignment (see §5.3), whereas this does not occur in Līchából. This means that while focus marking remains mainly morphological in Līchából, Līnàjùúł has both morphological and prosodic strategies for marking focus.

There is the temptation to state that the focus marking differences between Līnàjùúł and Līchából owe to the fact that Līnàjùúł has innovated a more complex focus system, while also bearing decadence in that regard. This comes up somewhat clearly when one considers the focus marking system of Līnàjùúł vis-a-vis the larger Mabilia framework. It can be said, for instance, that the use of prosody and a phonologically conditioned sentence final focus particle of varying shapes is currently not known to be prevalent among the Mabilia languages. What comes close to the latter case in Līnàjùúł is the occurrence in Sissali where the focus markers, *ńé* and *ńé* alternate depending on whether the focalized constituent ends in a consonant or a vowel (Dumah 2017). Also, *lá* which is a prevalent focus particle in the focus systems of many Mabilia languages of Ghana, such as Dagbani, Dagaare, Moore, Kusaal, Mampruli (Bodomo 1997: 93, Kropp Dakubu 2003, Issah 2013, Saanchi 2005) is synchronically not used for focalization in Līnàjùúł. The only trace of *lá* in Līnàjùúł is its use as a question particle (see example 17f).

There is a possibility that the *lá* focus marker existed in Līnàjùúł at a certain point, but only synchronically got lost due to linguistic evolution over time. The innovations presently noted in the Līnàjùúł focus system correlates with a pattern recently found with its noun class system (Bisilki & Akpanglo-Nartey 2017). In a study of Līnàjùúł noun classes, Bisilki & Akpanglo-Nartey (2017) similarly found that Līnàjùúł is evolving further away from the prototypical Gurma noun class characteristics.

It must, however, be indicated that despite the attested focus marking incongruences between Līnàjùúł and Līchából, no comprehension challenges obtain

between the native speakers of these variants. Thus, the degree of mutual intelligibility between Līnàjùúl and Līchából is high enough to warrant smooth intercommunication between their respective speakers.

## 9 Conclusion

I have examined some salient aspects of focus marking in Likpākpáln in this article. In particular, I have discussed focus marking strategies and the syntax of focus constructions in the language. Of more interest in the article is the comparison of the focus marking systems of the Līnàjùúl and the Līchából dialects of Likpākpáln. The comparison (see §8) has revealed some generic similarities, but more intriguing divergence in the shape and number of focus particles. Within the Mabilia focus systems, Līnàjùúl was also found to be a bit more diversified by using phonologically conditioned sentence final focus markers. Yet this finds a kind of analogous pattern in a sister Mabilia language, Sissali (see §5.3), which uses phonologically conditioned focus markers. Another point of dissociation with Līnàjùúl is the non-focus function of *lá*, which is a common focus marker in several Mabilia languages.

Finally, I recommend that investigation of focus marking in other dialects of Likpākpáln be undertaken. This will help establish whether the focus system of Līnàjùúl is truly an isolate innovation or the pattern is a shared linguistic tendency in Likpākpáln. Similarly, more thorough studies into the phonological possibilities in focus marking in Mabilia, needs to be pursued. Both the cases of Sissali and the Līnàjùúl dialect of Likpākpáln raise this interest.

## Abbreviations

This article adheres to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the following additions:

CL	(Noun) class	R	Response
CONJ	Conjunction	SID	Subject identity
HAB	Habitual	TRM	Time reference marker

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