

PhD Project:
A comparative view on focus in Sara-Bagirmi
From synchronic and diachronic perspective

Colloquium on Linguistics, Department of African Studies
2012-04-24, Peggy Jacob

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1 The field of research

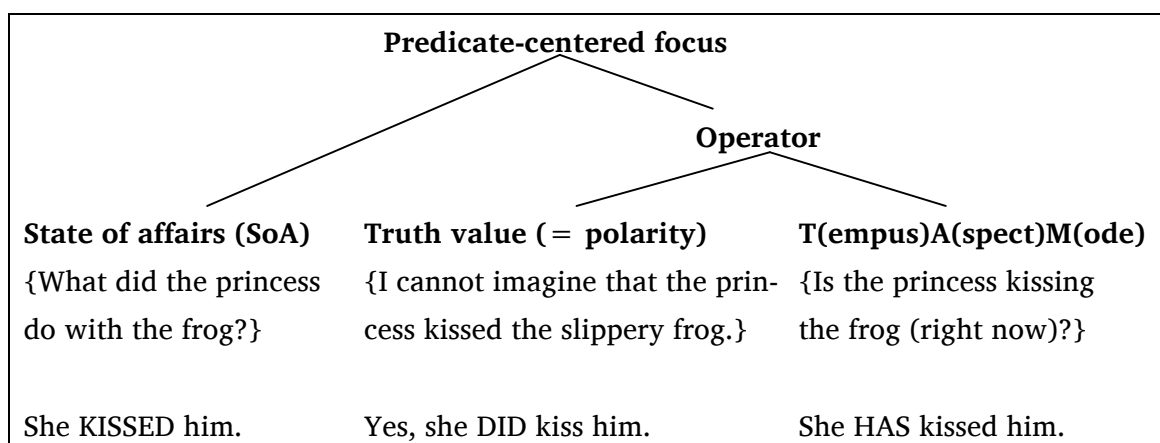
1.1 Information structure

Information structure (IS) refers to the linguistic coding devices, which organize the way different pieces of information are presented in discourse in order to optimize information transfer.

- It has to do primarily with how the message is sent (Chafe 1976: 28).
- The most important or salient element of a sentence is focus (Dik 1997: 326).
- Focus refers also to the assignment of presupposed and new elements in the sentence (“focus relation” Lambrecht 1994: 209ff.)

Focus is realized with a number of different strategies in each language. Most languages show asymmetries in the realization of focus. They differentiate either between subject focus marking and non-subject focus marking (e.g. Fiedler et al. 2009: 242ff.) or they show different strategies for the marking of term- and non-term focus (e.g. Hyman & Watters 1984: 233).

- **Term focus** concentrates on the IS marking of nominal elements. It is – in contrast to non-term focus or “predicate-centered focus” (Güldemann 2009) which are related to the verb or the predicate – a well established research field.
- **Predicate-centered focus types (PCF)** subsume focus on the lexical meaning of the verb (verb focus) and focus on sentence operators. Operator focus can be splitted in focus on the temporal, aspectual or modal operator and focus on the truth value of the utterance.

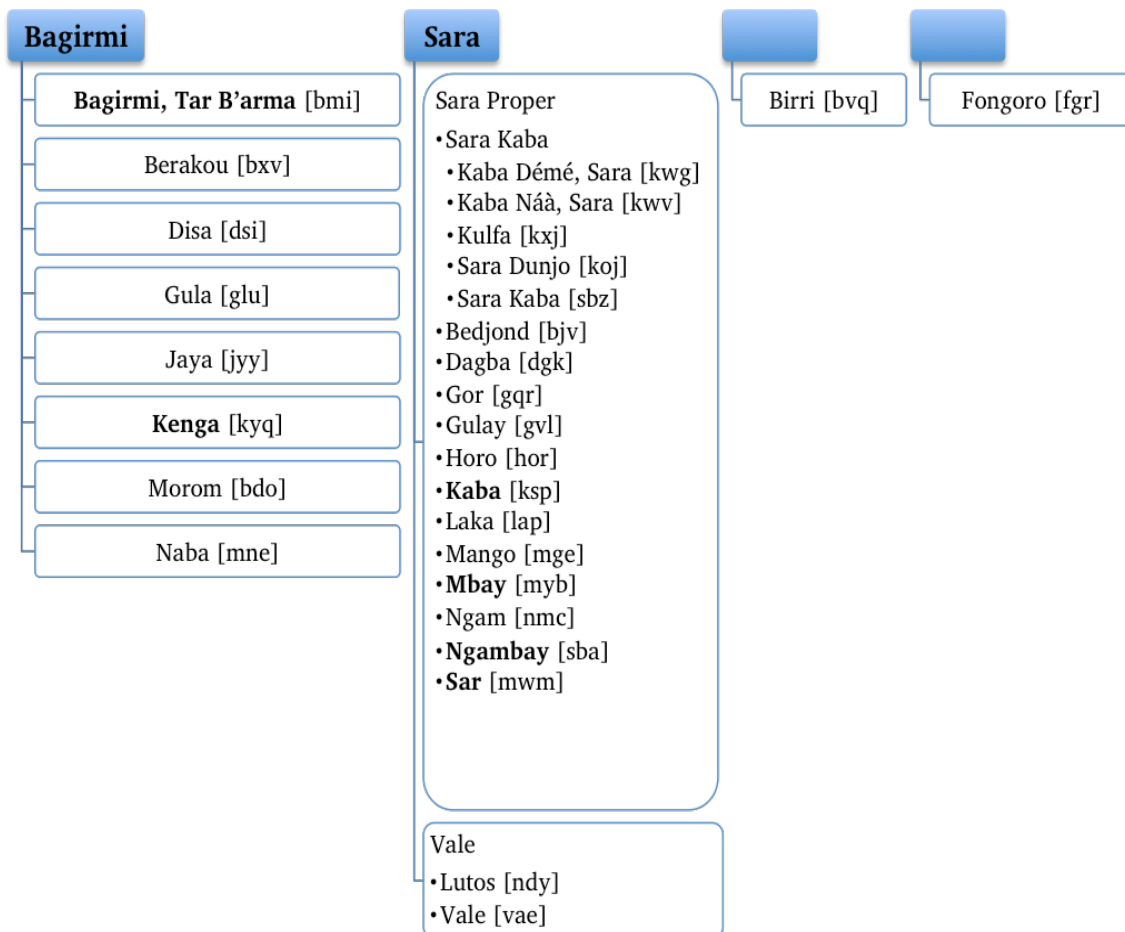


Basic subclassification of predicate-centered focus types (Güldemann 2009)

1.2 The group of Sara-Bagirmi languages

1.2.1 Genetic affiliation

Nilo-Saharan > Central Sudanic > West > Bongo-Bagirmi > **Sara-Bagirmi (29)**

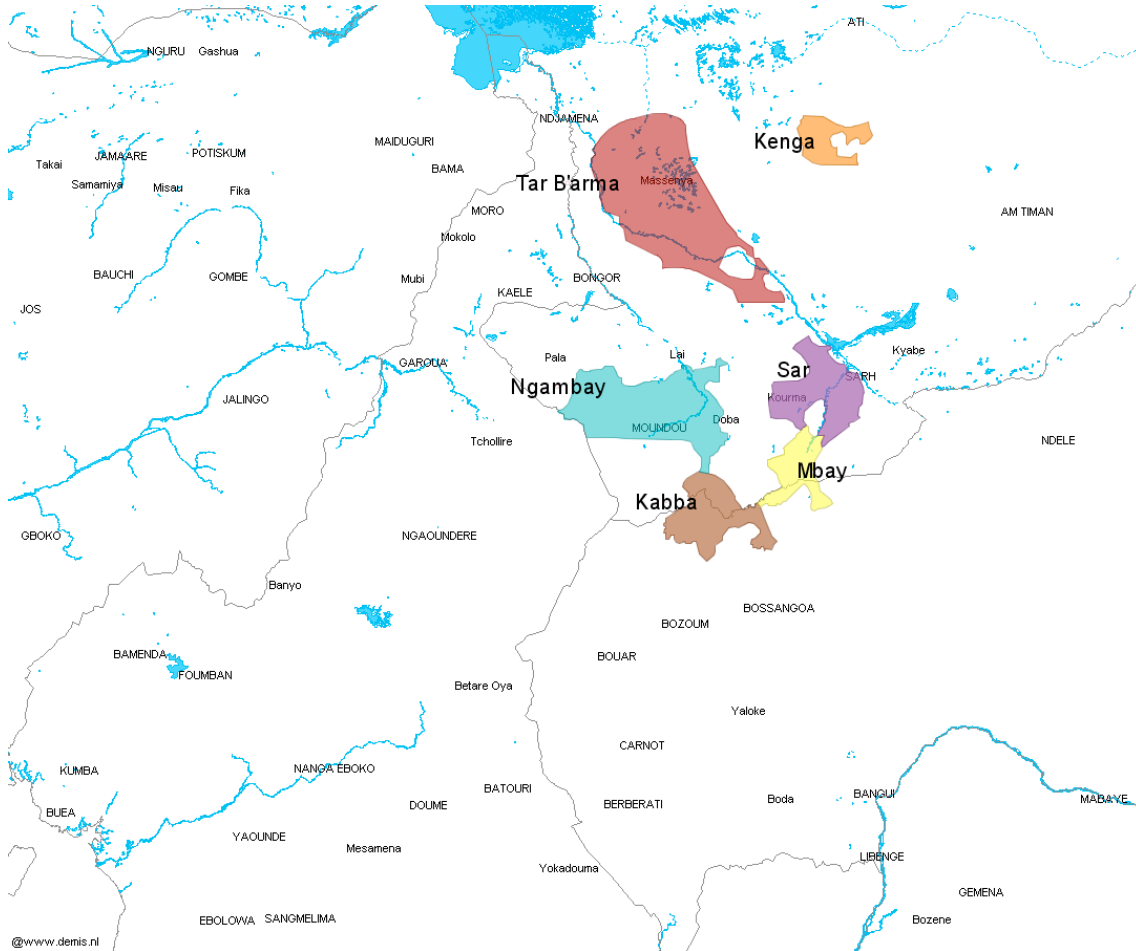


Sara-Bagirmi Group (Lewis 2009)

1.2.2 Basic information on the language group

- predominantly agglutinative languages with synthetic features
- all languages have the SVO word order
- all languages are tonal languages,
 - for example Tar B'arma, Mbay and Kabba have three level tones (H, L, M)

1.2.3 Geographical and socio-cultural situation



Selected languages of the Sara-Bagirmi group (areal information from Lewis 2009)

Possible candidates for my language sample:

- Tar B'arma (Bagirmi): 44,800 speakers, Chari-Bagirmi region (SW Chad)
 - Kenga (Bagirmi): 40,000 speakers, Guéra region (SW Chad)
 - Sar (Sara): 183,000 speakers, Moyen-Chari region (SW Chad)
 - Mbay (Sara): 88,300 speakers, Mandoul region (NE CAR/SW Chad)
 - Kabba (Sara): 83,000 speakers, Ouham-Pendé region (NE CAR/SW Chad)
 - Ngambay (Sara): 896,000 speakers, Logone-Occidental region (SW Chad)
- (statistics from Lewis 2009)

1.3 Preliminary structure of the thesis

1 Introduction

1.1 Generally (field of research, goal of the thesis and structure of the work)

1.2 Theoretical background

1.2.1 Information-structural basics

1.2.2 Historical-comparative methodology

1.2.3 Framework of construction grammar

1.3 The Sara-Bagirmi-language group

1.3.1 Areal information

1.3.2 Sociolinguistic and cultural interaction

1.3.2 Grammatical characteristics

2 Synchronic perspective

2.1 Information structure in Sara-Bagirmi

2.1.1 Information structure in Tar B'arma

2.1.2 Information structure in Mbay

2.1.3 Information structure in Kabba

2.1.4 Information structure in Kenga

2.1.5 Information structure in Ngambay

2.1.6 Information structure in Sar

2.2 Comparison

2.2.1 Genealogical comparison

2.2.1.1 Characteristics of Sara (Mbay, Kabba, Ngambay, Sar)

2.2.1.2 Characteristics of Bagirmi (Tar B'arma & Kenga)

2.2.2 Areal comparison

2.2.2.1 Specifics of Eastern languages (Ngambay & Tar B'arma)

2.2.2.2 Specifics of Western languages (Kenga & Sar)

2.2.2.3 Specifics of Southern languages (Kabba & Mbay)

2.2.3 Language contact influence

2.2.3.1 Afro-Asiatic neighborhood (Tar B'arma, Kenga, Ngambay)

2.2.3.2 Niger-Congo neighborhood (Mbay & Sar)

2.2.3.3 (only) Nilo-Saharan neighborhood (Kabba)

3 Diachronic perspective

3.1 Analysis of synchronic data for elaboration of relevant questions

3.2 Historical survey

3.3 The (possible) phenomena

3.3.1 Grammaticalization of IS marker

3.3.2 Development of verbal duplication

3.3.3 IS influences to word order

4 Conclusion (Presentation and discussion of results, critical evaluation and outlook)

2 Preliminary work

2.1 Term focus realization in Sara-Bagirmi

2.1.1 Tar B'arma

- ISO 639-3: bmi

- 44,800 speakers, spoken in Chad, Chari-Bagirmi region in Massénya and Bousso subprefecture, and in Nigeria (Lewis 2009)

Subject focus marking

Focused subjects appear obligatorily in sentence-initial position and are marked obligatorily with the morphological marker for term focus *dáj* which follows the subject:

- (1) Q: Naŋ **dáj** táɗ djùm tɛŋ tɛprɛ
who TF PFV.do gruel millet yesterday
ngal kudj nii kii ná wà?
in house DET DEM BG Q
WHO cooked millet gruel in the house yesterday?
- A1: Boukar **dáj** táɗ djùm tɛŋ tɛprɛ ngalá.
PN TF PFV.do gruel millet yesterday in
BOUKAR cooked millet gruel in (the house) yesterday. (Jacob 2010: 123)
- A2: Boukar **dáj** (tádà).
PN TF PFV.do
BOUKAR (did it). (f.n. Jacob 2003)

Non-subject focus

Focus on non-subjects can be realized in three different ways:

- focused non-subjects remain focus unmarked (2-A2),
- focus can be marked directly (3-A1) or,
- focus can be marked indirectly (3-A2).

Object focus is usually not marked morphosyntactically:

(2) Q: Boukar ndugo *đfi* gee tɛprɛ kasko ná wà?
 PN PFV.buy what PRT yesterday market DET Q
 What did Boukar buy at the market yesterday?

A1: Tɛprɛ kasko ná, Boukar ndugo kro kɛɖɛ.
 yesterday market BG PN PFV.buy donkey INDF
 Boukar bought a donkey at the market yesterday. (Jacob 2010: 124)

A2: Boukar ndugo kro kɛɖɛ tɛprɛ kasko.
 PN PFV.buy donkey INDF yesterday market
 Boukar bought a donkey at the market yesterday. (Jacob 2009: 7)

In (2), interrogative and focused objects are in their canonical position. Except for the pause-marking element *gee* in the question and the adverbial frame setting in (2-A1), there is no morphosyntactic focus marking.

- Particle *gee* is an optional supplement to the interrogative pronoun *đfi*. It only occurs in in-situ questions, as in (2-Q), and will be replaced by the focus marker *đán* in ex-situ questions, as in (3-Q).
- The occurrence of both the adverbials in sentence-initial position entails the appearance of the focused object in sentence-final position. As we will see below, this final position seems to be the preferred position for focus.

Answers to ex-situ *wh*-questions will always be morphosyntactically marked for focus:

(3) Q: *đfi* **đán**, Boukar ndugo tɛprɛ kasko ná wà?
 what TF PN PFV.buy yesterday market DET Q
 WHAT did Boukar buy at the market yesterday?

A1: Kro kɛɖɛ **đán**, Boukar ndugo tɛprɛ kasko. **direct**
 donkey INDF TF PN PFV.buy yesterday market

A2: Tɛprɛ kasko ná, Boukar ndugo ná, **kro** **kɛɖɛ**. **indirect**
 yesterday market BG PN PFV.buy BG donkey INDF
 Boukar bought A DONKEY at the market yesterday. (Jacob 2010: 125)

- In (3-A1), focus is marked directly: the object appears, like the subject in (1-A1, A2), in sentence-initial position and is marked with *đán*.
- In (3-A2), focus is marked indirectly: all non-focused elements are left-peripheral and are marked by the particle *ná* as background. The focused element is not focus marked itself. As the only unmarked element it must be interpreted as focus, because it is excluded from the area of background information.

2.1.2 Mbay

- ISO 639-3: myb

- 88,300 speakers, spoken in in Chad, Markounda and Batangafo subprefectures, and in Central African Republic (Lewis 2009)

Focus marking

Focused elements appear in sentence-initial position. They are marked with the particle *lā* immediately after the focused element. Particle *yé* marks the rest of the sentence as background:

(4a) Súu *lā* ndà ngōn-ñ yé. **subject focus**

PN GF hit child-POSS.3S.MSR BG

It was Suu_i who hit his_i child.

(4b) Ngōn-á *lā* Súu ndà-á yé. **object focus**

child-POSS.3S GF PN hit-3S BG

It was his child that Suu hit. (Keegan 1997: 158)

Particle *lā* seems to function (in combination with *yé*) as a generic focus marker. With its meaning (*and, and then or but*) *lā* confirms the “narrative hypothesis” (Schwarz & Fiedler 2007: 277ff.) which assumes that – at least in the examined Kwa- and Gur languages – morphological focus markers can be grammaticalized conjunctions.

Focus marking in Mbay seems to demand a double marking. First, of the focused element by the focus marker *lā*, and second, by marking the background information by *yé*. This does not including any subordinating strategy, like clefting, as neither a copular nor a relative marker are attested.

Topic marking

Presupposed elements can occur in sentence-initial position:

(5) Ndɔ́ ká kòò-mètá **dá** Súu àw gògò báa-á.

day that DET-three BG PN go back river-LOC

Three days later, Suu went back again to the river. (Keegan 2009: 35)

Keegan (1997: 116) describes the particles *dá*, *nò*, *yé*, ... as “end-of-clause markers” which mark the end of a relative clause. The data in example (5) rather suggests another analysis: as simply background marker.

2.1.3 Kabba

- ISO 639-3: ksp

- 83,000 speakers, spoken in Central African Republic, Paoua and Marounda subprefectures, and in Chad (Lewis 2009)

Marker á can be used as a focus marker for highlighting subjects (6a) or objects (6b):

(6a) Dèné ngo-màndè ké bàánn bbá màndè bè á wòy ...
woman child-beautiful REL like.this before beautiful PRT IS die
How can a beautiful girl like this die ... (Moser 2004: 445)

(6b) Kubbu á m-ndoko tàkónè.
material IS 1S-buy yesterday
This is the material I bought yesterday. (Moser 2004: 412)

Inthetic sentences, marker á follows the subject:

(7) Esú dé kè Gúma-je á ní-to mè dàmm té.
PN 3P with PN-P IS 3P-COP in granary LOC
(Once upon a time) Esu and Wasp lived in a granary. (Moser 2004: 411)

Marker lá marks preceding information as given or topical:

(8a) Né Baro lá núju Nàrègòtó.
3S PN IS engender PN
It is he, Baro, who engendered Naregoto (Moser 2004: 413)

(8b) Tína lá òrù n-ày mè bòlò tǽjǽ té-nn ...
axe IS 2S-remove 3S-stay in hole honey LOC-DEM
That axe which you removed stayed in the beehive ... (Moser 2004: 413)

It's concrete meaning is difficult to describe. The explanation by Moser points to a topical information, but the translation makes a focal interpretation more likely.

Marker dá usually occurs for topic marking, here it denotes “aboutness”:

(9a) Ngà Esú dá pà àrè dé pàna: ...
then PN IS say to 3P say
And Esu said (to them) ... (Moser 2004: 438)

(9b) Esú pàna: Bóbbíli! Kanji lèé-m nèénn dá m-ínga bàá àáng.
PN say really fish of-1S this IS 1S-find simply not
Esu answered and said: This my fish I did not find it easily. (Moser 2004: 442)

If there is a relative marker in the sentence, *dá* indicates the end of the relative phrase:

- (10) Dèné nèénn ká e-tɔl-é-nn **dá** tò tóku tàr.
woman this REL 2S-kill-3S-DEM **IS** COP big problem
The woman that you killed here, that is a big problem. (Moser 2004: 415)

Furthermore, *dá* is used to express a causal relation:

- (11) Tàjè tèe bbe **dá** ró dèné làá kè ngánn-é nèel-dé nya.
PN arrive home **IS** body wife of.3S with children-3S happy-3P much
Bee arrived home, so his wife and children were very happy. (Moser 2004: 414)

In summary, IS marking in Kabba is organized with different IS markers. In the story “Esu and Enjamgotoje”, marker *á* and marker *lá* occur in almost the same context, but they differ in IS:

- (12a) Esu found some birds swallowing mud and he asks: “What are you doing here?”

And the birds replied:

Bbo **á** dda nè-je **á** ñ-túru-je bèrè-nn bbò. **marked**
hunger **IS** make thing-P **IS** 1P-swallow-P mud-this DM **focus**

We are hungry. That’s why we are swallowing mud. (Moser 2004: 441)

(lit.: It is the HUNGER that made us swallowing mud, PJ)

- (12b) And he said: “Really, if you are hungry, then here is my fish. Take some and eat then!” The birds ate all the fish and when he came to have a look, he saw the empty calabash. So he said: “Really how can you eat all my fish?” The birds said:

Bbo **lá** dda-je nya **lá** j-ùsà tóyn bbò. **marked**
hunger **IS** make-P much **IS** 1P-eat all DM **background**

This terrible hunger made us eat all, you see? (Moser 2004: 442)

(lit.: This terrible hunger made us EAT ALL, PJ)

(12a) is a reply to a *wh*-question with wide focus, but the IS in the answer with *á* (which marks the preceding elements as focus) shows a sentence with focus on the subject. (12b) is a reply to a causal question. It has quite a similar structure as (12a), but replacing *á* with *lá* causes a fundamental change in the IS of the sentence: *lá*, which marks the preceding elements as background, indicates focus on the (IS non-marked) quantifier.

In contrast to the common usage of IS markers, in both (12a) and (12b) the particular marker occur twice. Neither the reason of this “double” marking nor the particular structure of these sentences (e.g. the function of final discourse markers) is clear yet.

2.1.4 Summary

To sum up, term focus marking in the languages under discussion is realized morphosyntactically. The sentence-initial position can be used for focal and topical elements as well. If this position is exploited for IS, the concrete interpretation is disambiguated by the use of the different markers.

Furthermore, focus can be realized in-situ. In Tar B'arma, it seems that we have a sentence-final focus position.

In all of these languages, (term) focus marking seems not to involve subordination strategies.

In Tar B'arma there is a tendency to place focal elements at final position.

Kabba and Tar B'arma prefer the usage of background marker for indicating focus.

The languages show a wide range of IS markers:

	Tar B'arma	Mbay	Kabba
Focus marker	ɗáŋ (and <i>le</i> ¹)	<i>lā</i>	á
Background marker	<i>ná</i>	<i>dá, nò, yé</i>	<i>lá</i> and <i>dá</i>

The goal of my dissertation is

- to find out the particular (synchronic) function of these IS markers,
- to analyze the historical development and the distribution of IS markers with the language group and
- to have a more intensive look at the interplay of word order and IS.

¹ Marker *le* is used for subject focus only and has a rather existential interpretation:

(i) Q: Naŋ ɗáŋ táɗ djùm tɛŋ ná? A2: Boukar *le*.
 who TF PFV.do gruel millet DET PN **EXIST**
 WHO cooked the millet gruel? BOUKAR
 (f.n. Jacob 2003)

2.2 Predicate-centered focus types in Sara-Bagirmi

2.2.1 Mbay

Intensification of a verbal element can be expressed with duplicated verbs and with explicit IS assignment by means of morphological markers:

- (13) A: Kā-gē lò-í māj-ái.
tree-P POSS-2S good-NEG
Your wood is bad.
- B: Jágá, ì kā-gē kó mājè kārī,
no COP tree-P GEN is.good fine
nà ndūsē lā ndūsē yé.
but worm.eaten GF INF.worm.eaten BG
No, the wood is fine; it's just that it's worm-eaten (Keegan 1997: 148)

The combination of the markers *lā* and *yé* is similar to term focus realization. For SoA focus, the first part of duplicated verbs is marked with the focus marker, the second one is infinite (cf. Keegan 1997: 147f.) and provides the background. The underlying structure for this construction is: [**verb GF**]_{FOC} – [**INF.verb BG**]_{BG}.

In other examples, the generic focus marker *lā* is replaced by the marker *ń* and background marker *yé* is replaced by the background marker *dá*:

- (14a) Tèjè ń-tèn dá yīkē ń yīkē dá.
honey DEM BG INF.sweet IS sweet BG
This honey is very sweet.
- (14b) bògè ń à bògè dá.
INF.steal IS PRT 3S.PST.steal BG
He really steals a lot.
- (14c) Ngōn ń-tèn dá k-à̄y kàsè ń à à̄y dá.
child DEM BG INF-drink alcohol IS PRT 3S.PST.drink BG
This boy really drinks a lot. (Keegan 1997: 151)

With dynamic verbs (14b, c), the particle *à* appears, but it lacks with stative verbs (14a).

In contrast to the example in (13), the structure **INF + ní + VP + dá** in (14) could be interpreted as cleft(-like) construction, because the combination of *ní* and *dá* is used in relative sentences as well:

(15) Dèē ní ndà-á nò.
 person REL hit-3S DEF

The person who hit him (or the person whom he hit). (Keegan 1997: 167)

The examples in (14) represent the structure **INF + ní + VP + dá**, while (13) has the structure **VP + Iā + INF + yé**. Even if they differ in the marking strategies, both (13) and (14) could be interpreted as SoA focus. Since no context is available for examples in (14), a truth value focus interpretation cannot be excluded.

If a language shows different strategies, one can assume that each of these strategies has its own function. For this reason, it might be possible that only (13) shows SoA focus and (14) marks focus on the truth value.

In Hausa (Chadic, Afro-Asiatic), a similar structure as in (14) – a preposed verbal noun followed by a focus marker – expresses SoA focus:

(16) Gyaaraa nèe ya yi.
 repair:VN GF 3M.S.PFV.DEP do
 He REPAIRED it. (lit.: It was REPAIRING, he did.)
 (Fiedler, f.n., cited in Güldemann 2011)

If both (13) and (14) are indeed used to indicate SoA focus, one might ask where the differences between these structures lie? For economical reasons, languages usually develop one structure for one function. Therefore, it is very uncommon that a language provides two entirely different strategies to express the same.

This phenomenon needs intensive research. If there are, in fact, no differences between the two identical means, this can be interpreted as an ongoing language change.

2.2.2 Tar B'arma

SoA focus

Semantic focus on a verb is expressed with duplicated verbs as well:

(17) Q: Boukar táđ djùm téŋ làbà sà ksàa wà?
PN PFV.do gruel millet or PFV.eat INF.eat Q

Did Boukar cook millet gruel or did he eat it?

A1: Djùm téŋ ná, Boukar táđ táđà.
gruel millet BG PN PFV.do INF.do

A2: Boukar táđ djùm téŋ táđà.
PN PFV.do gruel millet INF.do

Boukar COOKED millet gruel (Jacob 2010: 129)

The first verb in the construction is finite, the second one is infinite, cf. the “marked” infinitive with *k*-prefix in (17-Q).

In contrast to examples (13) and (14) from Mbay, in Tar B'arma no focus marker occurs. The lack of (any other) IS marking and – at least in (17-A2) – the occurrence of a presupposed object between the verbs, implies that only the second part of the duplication, i.e. the infinite form, is more emphasized than the rest of the sentence. The first part seems to provide the background and only the right-most element of the sentence is the exponent of focus. This observation confirms the idea of a sentence-final focus position in Tar B'arma. The structure for this construction is: **subject verb (object) – [INF.verb]_{FOC}**.

Operator focus

Tar B'arma provides no explicit marking strategy for operator focus. Focus on the truth value can be highlighted with particle *gà*:

(18) Q: Ì ndà ordinateur ná làbà tòli-nj-kor-gà wà?
2S PFV.put computer DET or PFV.kill-OBJ-away-PRT Q

Did you switch the computer on or off?

A1: Mà m-tòli ordinateur ná.
1S 1S.PFV-kill computer DET

I switched the computer off.

A2: Mà m-tòli-nj-gà.

1S 1S.PFV-kill-OBJ-PRT

I switched it off (, really, I DID it!) (Jacob 2009: 11)

In (18) both answers are possible, but only (18-A2) is an IS marked construction.

Particle *gà* function as a perfectivity marker, which is related to the adverb *already*.

This particle can emphasize TAM as well:

(19) Q: Né sàa-gà làbà n-ét ksàa wà?
3S PFV.eat-PRT or 3S-PROG INF.eat Q

Has she eaten or is she still eating?

A1: Né sàa-gà.

3S PFV.eat-PRT

She has eaten

A2: N-ét ksàa (pta).

3S-PROG INF.eat yet

She is still eating (Jacob 2009: 11)

Corresponding to the semantics of *gà*, it can only mark perfective sentences (19-A1). Therefore, progressive TAM focus (19-A2), for example, uses a lexical element.

2.2.3 Summary

The examples from Tar B'arma and Mbay show two different structures of verb duplication for the marking of SoA focus.

For operator focus realization, Tar B'arma uses the perfectivity marker, which can mark truth value focus as well as (perfective) TAM focus.

In Mbay, different structures with different IS markers are available. Furthermore, duplication can highlight the truth value as well.

Based on these facts, the goal of my dissertation is

- to draw conclusions from the previous results (concerning the structure of duplication, the usage of the markers with respect to IS, etc.)
- compare the data with other languages (inside Sara-Bagirmi and outside) and
- to give a comprehensive description of PCF marking in Sara-Bagirmi.

3 The goals of the project

Description and Analysis of the IS systems of selected languages of Sara-Bagirmi:

I plan to expand the data base elicited by myself (with one language consultant in Berlin) for Tar B'arma and work with existing grammars and large textual data bases for the other languages:

Mbay:	Keegan 2009
Kabba:	Moser 2009
Kenga:	Neukom 2010
Sar:	Rosetta project online

The textual data and the language descriptions (Bender 1996, Boyeldieu 1989, 2000, Gaden 1909, Gakinabay & Wiesemann 1986, Keegan 1997, Moser 2003, Palayer 2004, Stevenson 1969, Thayer & Thayer 1971, Thayer 1973, Vandame 1963 and Vandame 1968) allow a comprehensive view on the strategies used for IS marking. With the earlier literature a substantial analysis of language-change processes is possible.

For elicitation, I will continue to use the materials of the CRC 632 Information structure (QUIS, Skopeteas et al. 2006 and Questionnaire on PCF from project B7) and several tests developed by myself.

Comparison of the data with special emphasis on a historical-comparative view:

I will analyze existing similarities in the languages, e.g. the (term) focus markers and the SoA focus marking by duplication, and examine what they are due to:

- are they based on language contact,
- are they genealogically related or
- are they subject to other processes?

The selected languages of the Sara-Bagirmi group are spoken in an area of less than 700 km of maximal expansion. In this area, a multiplicity of Afro-Asian, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo languages affect each other. Synchronically and diachronically, one can assume an intensive language contact. Probably the (former) wide spreading presence of Tar B'arma has left its traces in the other languages.

Challenge previous assumptions on focus.

I intend to bring new ideas into the concept of focus. For example, the idea that some languages rather mark the background information to indicate focus, than the focused element itself.

Furthermore, I will place the results of my language analysis and the (historical) comparison into a wider context beyond Africa. On the one hand, I intend to bring the predicate-centered focus types more into the centre of interest of theoretical research. On the other hand, I will provide new and interesting data from a little investigated language group.

Abbreviations

Glosses:

Arabic numerals indicate a noun class or, when immediately followed by a gloss for gender and/or number, a person category.

BG	Background	NEG	Negative
COP	Copula(tive)	OBJ	(Direct) Object
DEF	Definite	P	Plural
DEM	Demonstrative	PFV	Perfective
DEP	Dependent	PN	Proper name
DET	Determiner	POSS	Possessive
DM	Discourse marker	PROG	Progressive
GF	Generic focus	PRT	Particle
INDF	Indefinite	PST	Past
INF	Infinitive	Q	Question marker
IS	Information structure	REL	Relative
LOC	Locative	S	Singular
M	Masculine	TF	Term focus
MSR	Mandatory subject reference	VN	Verbal noun

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f.n. Field notes

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