Topic: *On the licensing of traces and resumptive pronouns in Dagbani wh-extraction*

*Introduction***:** This paper examines the syntax of *wh*-questions in Dagbani, a relatively little researched (Gur) Mabia language of Northern Ghana. I focus on the distribution of *wh*-operators in the formation of *wh*-questions, the patterns of overt movement reflexes including the licensing of traces and resumptive pronouns, the distribution of the focus particles *kà* and *ń* (or its phonological variants *ḿ/ŋ)* which obligatorily follow extracted *wh*-phrases in *wh*-questions and asymmetries in the formation of *wh*-questions.

Background: Though studies in A-bar movement have attracted the attention of linguists over the last decade, the phenomenon has not received any systematic investigation in Dagbani. Although Olawsky (1999) and Issah (2015a) discuss Dagbani *wh*-questions, there are not only descriptive inaccuracies but several potentially interesting theoretical questions are left unanswered including: inexhaustive list of the focus heads that interact with *ex-situ wh*-questions, a rather cursory discussion of the various strategies employed in the formation of *wh*-questions, lack of accounts for the presence or absence of focus heads in *wh*-questions depending on whether they are *in-situ* or *ex-situ* questions, failure to account for the patterns of reflexes in movement and inadequate account for the distribution of focus heads in *wh*-questions. The present paper aims to fill this gap by presenting a systematic study of the phenomenon with focus on *wh*-extraction.

Descriptively, there are two distinct syntactic positions that the *wh*-phrases occupy in the formation of *wh*-questions the *ex-situ* (1a) and *in-situ* (1b) positions, at least for non-subject *wh*-phrases. However, when *wh*-operators are substitutes for subject arguments they occur only in the latter position as in the contrast between (2a) and (2b).

1. a. $Bò_i$ *(kà)   á   dá-ø-ø   zùŋó t_i?
    what   FOC   2SG   eat-PFV-CJ   today
    'What have you bought today?'

   b. Á   dá-ø-ø   bò   zùŋó
    2SG   buy-PFV-CJ   what   today
    'What have you bought today?'

2. a. $ŋùní_i$ *(m) t_i bú-r-í   bìá   máá   kpè?
    who   FOC   beat-IMP-CJ   child   DEF   here
    'Who has beaten the child here?'

   b. *ŋúní bú-r-í   bìá   máá   kpè?
    who   beat-IMP-CJ   child   DEF   here
    Intended: 'Who has beaten the child here?'

As shown in (1a) and (2a), locally extracted *wh*-subjects, (that is only matrix subjects) and objects c-command traces, while extracted embedded subjects can only c-command resumptive pronouns (3a) extracted matrix objects just like local subjects require a trace (3b). In furtherance, while local (matrix) *wh*-operators within the clausal left periphery occur with the particle *ń* or its phonological variants (2a) that of embedded subjects require *kà* (3a).

3. a. [FocP *ŋùní*ᵢ *(kà)* [Abu yèlí-ø-ø [CP nì [TP *(óᵢ) sà tú
         who   FOC   A.   say-PFV-CJ   that   3SG   PST   insult
         bìá   máá?]]]]
         child   DEF
         'Who did Abu say that s/he insulted the child yesterday?'

   b. [FocP *Bòᵢ* *(kì)* [TP á bó-r-ì *(liᵢ)?]]
         what   FOC   2SG   want-IMP-CJ   3SG
         'What do you want?'

Analysis: I provide a theoretical analysis of the syntax of *wh*-phrases couched within Minimalism (Chomsky1995 et seq.). I assume that Dagbani has two focus feature specifications in the lexicon: a strong and a weak feature. Whereas the former triggers overt syntactic movement of the question operators from their base positions to the clausal left periphery, the latter licenses movement at LF. Consequently, I conclude that *kà* and *ń/ḿ/ŋ* be analysed as spell-outs of a strong focus feature which establish the needed Spec-Head configuration for feature checking. Thus unlike their *ex-situ* counterparts which undergo overt movement and have syntactically visible focus heads, the *in-situ* variants undergo covert movement, triggered by weak focus features and this I assume explains why they lack phonologically visible focus heads. I account for this apparent absence of phonologically visible focus heads in the *in-situ wh*-questions with the theoretical explanation that LF movement is a post syntactic phenomenon, and for that matter although the focus heads are present in the *in-situ* as well, they are not visible to syntax. The movement analysis is supported with the empirical fact that both overt and LF movements are constrained by island effects. I further account for the complementarity of traces and resumptive pronouns by assuming a surface EPP requirement that the Spec, TP should always be filled. The resumptive strategy, however, is blocked for local (matrix) subject extraction because that would violate the Highest Subject Restriction, McCloskey (1990, 2002).

Conclusion: This paper gives a systematic analysis of an aspect of Dagbani grammar has not received much attention, and adds to our knowledge of the formation of *wh*-questions in African languages, especially on an otherwise under described one.

Selected references
Chomsky, Noam (1995). *The Minimalist Program. Cambridge*. MIT Press.
Olawsky, Knut J. (1999). *Aspects of Dagbani grammar, with special emphasis on phonology and morphology*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Munich: Lincom.
McCloskey, James (1990). Resumptive Pronouns, A'-Binding, and Levels of Representation. In *The Syntax of the Modern Celtic Languages, Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 23, Randall Hendrick, ed., Academic Press, 199-248.
McCloskey, James (2002) "Resumption, Successive Cyclicity, and the Locality of Operations," *Derivation and Explanation in the Minimalist Program*, ed. by Samuel Epstein and Daniel Seely, 184-226, Oxford: Blackwell.