The information packaging particle *1a* in Dagaare

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Introduction

This talk examines the use of the information packaging particle *la* in Dagaare

- the exact function(s) of these particles can be difficult to pin down

**Method:** Beginning from clues in the grammatical descriptions of Dagaare, will proceed to examine a wide range of elicited and naturally-occurring data, and develop a general meaning
Introduction: Dagaare

Basic Language Facts:

- Classification: Gur language family, Oti–Volta branch
- Region: Spoken in northwest corner of Ghana, western part of Upper West Region
- Population: 700,000 (1,000,000 including Northern Dagara in Burkina Faso) (2003 figures)

Basic word order:

- S V O X

Tonal language:

- Two level tones, fall-rise, rise-fall
Introduction: Dagaare

Based on data obtained in field trip in 2011

- would not be possible without Mark Ali (College of Education, Winneba, Ghana)
- currently completing a Dagaare-English dictionary together

Multiple dialects:

- all data is from Central dialect
- differs substantially from what is spoken around Wa or Ndole or further North in Burkina Faso
Introduction: Data and Sources

The data comes from multiple sources:

- elicitation based on the “Questionnaire on Information Structure” (Skopeteas et al. 2006)
- a portion of a novel (1500 sentences) written in Dagaare by Mark Ali
- various short texts elicited in the field (folk tales, folk definitions)
- examples sentences from the forthcoming Dagaare-English dictionary
Bodomo 1997 provides an early discussion of *la* in Dagaare, who terms it a post-verbal particle, and notes a variant -ŋ.

(1) \[ n \quad \text{gɛ-rɛ} \quad \textbf{la} \]
\[ 1.\text{SG go-IMPFT PART} \]
\[ ‘I am going’ \]

(2) \[ n \quad \text{gɛ-rɛ-ŋ} \]
\[ 1.\text{SG go-IMPFT-PART} \]
\[ ‘I am going’ \]
Basic Distribution of *la*

*la* follows the verb, if transitive, preceding the direct object, unless a pronoun (Bodomo 1997, p. 95)

(3) o da ko *la* Dɛrɛ a gane
3.SG PST give PART Dere DET book
‘She gave Dere a book.’

(4) *o* da ko Dɛrɛ *la* a gane
3.SG PST give Dere PART DET book
‘She gave Dere a book.’

(5) o da ko ma *la* a gane
3.SG PST give me PART DET book
‘She gave Dere a book.’
Basic Distribution of *la*

If intransitive, precedes other adjuncts

(6) Bayuo da gbiree la velaa
    Bayuo PST go-PFT- PART good
    ‘Bayuo slept well.’

*la* occurs regularly and is considered by Bodomo (1997) to be obligatory.
An intriguing aspect of *la* is its distribution across clause types:

- Occurs in declaratives (as above).
- Occurs with interrogatives:
  
  (7) A  woɔŋ la be?
      DET bag inside PARTIC exist
      Is it in the bag? (Ali 0074)

- Does not occur in imperatives or hortative sentences.

(8) Nyu!
    ‘Drink!’
Bodomo (1997) considers *la* to have two functions:

1. **First, as a marker of an affirmative statement, or of factivity:**
   - “One can then say that the factive aspect of every Dagaare declarative or interrogative sentence is signaled or even affirmed by *la*”

2. **Second, as a marker of emphasis (focus)**

(9)  Badɛre la kpi
     Spider PART died
     ‘Spider died’

(10) Badɛre kpi la
     Spider died PART
     ‘Spider died’
"la" as marker of “factivity” and focus

This position is echoed by Kropp Dakubu (2005)

- "la" has focal uses as well as an “affirmation” function, which may be related to Predicate Focus
la as marker of “factivity” and focus

Support for viewing the contribution of *la* as having to do with factivity or affirmation comes from a contrast with negative sentences where the particle *ba* occurs preverbally (exs from Bodomo 2000 p. 37)

(11)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>te</th>
<th>da</th>
<th>gaa</th>
<th>la</th>
<th>daa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.PL</td>
<td>PST</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>PART</td>
<td>market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘We went to the market.’

(12)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>te</th>
<th>da</th>
<th>ba</th>
<th>gaa</th>
<th>daa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.PL</td>
<td>PST</td>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘We did not go to the market.’

(13)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>te</em></th>
<th>da</th>
<th>ba</th>
<th>gaa</th>
<th>la</th>
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<td>1.PL</td>
<td>PST</td>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>PART</td>
<td>market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘We did not go to the market.’
The postverbal use is ambiguous between (at least) wide VP-focus and all new focus.

(14) Ba ănggoôle la a naa wirí.
3PL.PN decorate.PF PART DET chief horse
‘They have decorated the chief’s horse.’
(15) Boŋ la e?
What PART COP
‘What happened?’

(16) Pɔge ŋmɛ la Bayuo
woman hit  PART Bayuo
‘A woman hit Bayuo.’
Subject focus is marked in-situ by preverbal use of *la*.

(17) Aŋ la ṣe a bɛnɛ?
who PART eat DET beans
‘Who ate the beans?’

(18) Poge la ṣe a bɛnɛ.
woman PART eat DET beans
‘A woman ate the beans.’
Ex-Situ Focus

Focus on elements other than the subject requires movement/bi-clausal structure (see also Bodomo 2000, Kropp Dakubu 2005)

(19) Boŋ la ka a poge di?
    What PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘What did the woman eat?’

(20) Bɛŋɛ la ka a poge di
    Beans PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘The woman ate beans’
Ex-Situ Focus

Practically any element can move to this focus position:

Time Adverbials:

(21) Boŋ saŋ ka a poge da di?
What time PART COMP DET woman PAST eat
‘When did the woman eat?’

(22) Zaameŋ la ka a poge da di
Yesterday PART COMP DET woman PAST eat
‘The woman ate yesterday’
Ex-Situ Focus

Manner Adverbials:

(23) Wola ka a pog e di?
    How PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘How did the woman eat?’

(24) Gboragbora la ka a pog e di
    greedily PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘The woman ate greedily’
Bodomo (2000) and Kropp Dakubu (2005) indicate the preverbal  
*la* gives rise to exhaustive interpretations:

(25) **A bie la tu a zie**  
The child (and nobody else) dug up the place (Kropp Dakubu 2005, p. 18)

Under this view, preverbal *la* is interpretationally equivalent to  
clefting in English
Interim

Picture from the literature:

- \( S \ V \ la \ (O) \ (X) \Rightarrow \) Broad/Predicate Focus + “Factivity”
- \( S \ la \ V \ (O) \ (X) \Rightarrow \) Subject Focus (exhaustive)
- \( X \ la \ ka \ S \ V \ (O) \ (X) \Rightarrow \) Argument Focus (exhaustive)
Clearly *la* is involved in how focus is coded in Dagaare. Yet, data from various textual sources indicate a more nuanced story than reported in the literature.

- many different types of focus are involved
- *la* is less obligatory than proposed by Bodomo (1997)
- not necessarily exhaustive
- not necessarily “factive” or “assertive” in and of itself

More generally, the occurrence and placement of *la* shows sensitivity to the question-under-discussion (QUD)
The grammatical descriptions discuss focus constructions involving new information

- much wider set of uses associated with focal position
Selective focus (value is chosen from explicit list of alternatives):

(26) Aŋ la ṣmẹ Bayɔɔ? Ayuo bee Ayoo la?
Who PART hit Bayoo? Ayuo DISJ Ayoo PART
‘Who hit Bayoo? Ayuo or Ayoo’

(27) Ayuo la ṣmẹ Bayɔɔ.
Ayuo PART hit Bayoo
‘Ayuo hit Bayoo’

- Same preverbal use of *la* as for new information focus
- Similar parallel with ex situ cases
Corrective Focus

(28) A poge la ɔɔ a bẹŋe.
woman PART eat DET beans
‘The woman ate the beans’

(29) bẹŋe nanne, mui la ka o ɔɔ.
beans neg.PART rice PART COMP 3.PN eat
‘Not beans, she ate RICE.’

- Similar parallel with in situ cases
Frame-Setting Adverbial

First line of the novel uses frame-setting adverbial in ex situ position:

(30) Sokoɔre sokyara ṭọc kyεrpon k𝑎ŋa pare road intersection in archie-big SPECIFIC under la ka saandoɔ k𝑎ŋa da zeŋ. PART COMP strange-man SPECIFIC PST sit Under a big archie tree by an intersection of a road sat a strange man. (Ali 0001)
(31)  Lɛ la ka ba teɛɛ a gbaŋ so PART COMP 3PL.PN shoot.IMPF DET gambling wa ta Paryeli come arrive Paryeli So they gambled until it got to the turn of Paryeli.
Uses of focus: Conclusions

Identified focus positions correspond to many types of focus.
Re-examining the Distribution of *la*

Recall Bodomo (1997) claimed that *la* is obligatory for declarative and interrogative sentences

- further examination of elicited and textual data indicates that *la* is *nearly* obligatory
- the interest lies in where it doesn’t show up or shows up more than one would expect
Conjunction

Sentences made up of conjoined clauses only have *la* in the first conjunct:

(32) A pɔge daa la a ɗɔɔ ane o
DET woman push PART DET man PREP 3SG.POSS
faŋa zaa ka o te le.
strength all CONJ 3SG.PN ADVfall
‘The woman pushed the man with all her strength and he fell over.’

(33) A peroo dɔgɛɛ la kyɛ mere bare ka
A sheep give-birth.PRF PART CONJ still birth COMP
a bilii kpi.
DET lambs die
‘The sheep littered but deserted the lambs and they died.’
Conjunction

Indicates that *la*:

- differs from negation morphemes, which would appear on each clause
- *la* cannot be straightforwardly analyzed as a clause-level operator
Disjunction

Disjunctive sentences may contain more than one *la*:

(34) Ba die la bee ba ba di la a 3PL.PN win PART DISJ 3PL.PN NEG win PART DET deɛne?
game
Did they win or lose (lit. not win) the game?

(35) Ba koora la a baa bee ba koɛ 3PL.PN kill.IMPF PART DET dog DISJ 3PL.PN kill.PF la?
PART
Are they killing the dog or did they kill it?
Implication for factive analysis:

- Neither of the disjuncts is being affirmed (nor is a fact), so odd to consider that the contribution of *la* is that of an affirmative/factive.
Complex Sentences

Similar to conjunctions, complex sentences often contain only one *la* or *ba*.

Unlike conjunctions, *la* is absent in the initial clauses in these examples.
When clause:

(36) O ma naŋ da kpi o deɛ 3SG.POSS mother when PST die 3SG.PN just kono la nentaŋ maa. cry.IMPFPART tears flowing ‘When her mother died, she was shedding tears uncontrollably.’
Complex Sentences

*Temporal* clause:

(37) Te na wa tara ka zie nyaaɛ la.  
1PL.PN FUT ADV arrive COMP day break PART  
By the time we arrive, it will be daybreak.
Complex Sentences

Because clause:

(38) N naŋ pæa nyu dabiltuuri le le ka
1SG.PN CONN then drink stick-bitter-PL until CONN
n nyaga zaa te zele nə
1SG.POSS intestine-PL all COP be.bitter SIM
kyeɛ toɛɛ kyeɛ ka baa ba wuoli
ground.squirrel portion CONN CONN dog NEG bark
a poɔ.
3PL.PN PREP
‘Because I have taken bitter herbs and my intestines have
become as bitter as that of a ground squirrel but without
results.’ (Ali 0023)
Embedded clauses

*Ia* may occur within an embedded clause:

(39) Maatable ka a ŋ每隔-ba ŋŋ boex
1.PL.STRONG think COMP DET woman-PL gather plan
*la* beri ŋa ŋa ŋa
PART day-pl two 3.DEM inside
I think the women have planned of late.

Yet, this is variable.
(40) Yɛ baŋ ka n ma yi-deme, 2.PL know COMP 1POSS.SING mother house-owner.pl 
Sawɔleɛŋ, bore kyerre wuli no-ba? Sawoleen plant archie-pl show person-pl 
Do you know that it is my mother’s family from Sawoleen that have taught people how to plant archie trees? (Ali 0052)

(41) Yɛ baŋ ka a dɔɔ serɛŋ yi la tammo? 2pl know COMP det man really go-out PART bow 
Do you know the man is really on the rampage?
Embedded clauses

**Relevant contrast:** whether the complement is presupposed by the speaker.

- Opposite of what one would expect from an affirmative marker: the proposition which is known for certain by the speaker does not contain *la*.
Conclusions: *la* and “factivity”

There is a strong speaker intuition, as witnessed by the grammatical descriptions, that *la* indicates that the speaker is affirming the content of a sentence:

- seems clear for the simple cases
- runs aground on more complicated data

We will see that even if it is too strong to say that *la* asserts affirmation, this arises through *la*’s contribution
Proposal:

- *la* serves to mark the focus of a sentence, inducing alternatives
- Discourse coherence ensures that the focus alternatives induced by *la* corresponds to a Question Under Discussion (QUD) (Roberts 1996, Buering 2003)
  - this QUD may often be implicit

This is a very weak semantics

- only information packaging component, no direct effect on truth-conditions (cf. *too*)
- corresponds to the broad range of uses
- equivalent to contributing an overt Roothian F-marker and a Roothian squiggle operator (see Hartmann and Zimmermann 2012 on Bura)
/a as an information packaging particle

(42)  Badere /a kpi
       Spider PART died
       ‘Spider died’

Ordinary meaning: DIED(SPIDER)
Focus-induced alternative: ALT(SPIDER) = \{x \in ENTITY \}
Focus-induced alternative propositions: \{DIED(x) | x \in ENTITY \}

(43)  Pɔge ŋmɛ /a Bayuo
       woman hit PART Bayuo
       ‘A woman hit Bayuo.’

Ordinary meaning: p = HIT(WOMAN)(BAYOU)
Focus-induced alternative propositions: \{p | p \in Q\}
la as an information packaging particle

Congruence condition: use of la presupposes that focus alternatives correspond to an active QUD.
The analysis clearly covers the basic cases show for question-answer congruence:

(44) **Aŋ la ɔɔ a ɓẹŋẹ?**
who PART eat DET beans
‘Who ate the beans?’

(45) **Poge la ɔɔ a ɓẹŋẹ.**
woman PART eat DET beans
‘A woman ate the beans’

The focus alternatives induced by *la* in the declarative sentence correspond to the meaning of the question which it answers.

For *la* in interrogatives, the active QUD is the question itself
Return to the data

The fact that *la* only appears once in multiple clauses does not pose a problem

- scope of this discourse-based analysis of *la* is on speaker contributions, not a particular syntactic construct

(46) A pọge daa la a ḍọọ ane o DET woman push PART DET man PREP 3SG.POSS faŋa zaa ka o te le. strength all CONJ 3SG.PN ADVfall ‘The woman pushed the man with all her strength and he fell over.’
Interrogatives with disjunctions query two distinct propositions and thus have two distinct QUDs $\Rightarrow$ two occurrences of *la*
When or because clauses contain backgrounded information, *la* does not need to appear since it does not address an active QUD.

(47) O ma naŋ da kpi o deɛ 3SG.POSS mother when PST die 3SG.PN just kono la nentaŋ maa. cry.IMPFPART tears flowing ‘When her mother died, she was shedding tears uncontrollably.’
Consequences

Exhaustive interpretations are not hard-wired, but arise by pragmatic reasoning (Rooth 1992)

(48) A bie la tu a zie
    The child (and nobody else) dug up the place (Kropp Dakubu 2005, p. 18)

- Hearer assumes that speaker is being informative and relevant and would have mentioned if others were involved in digging up the place
Consequences

Affirmative quality also need not be hard-wired, but can be derived simply by noting that contributions with *la* provide an answer to a question under discussion which is not negative

- the negation of the asserted proposition will belong in the alternative set
Conclusion and future work

- Textual data allowed us to see a range of additional uses and functions of *la*.
- Able to give a simpler account of *la*, which fits in with broad views of discourse structure.
Future work

- Compositional account
  - requires a better understanding of the syntax of Dagaare

- Interaction with phonology
  - requires a better understanding of intonational structure in Dagaare
  - may be less relevant for languages with particles devoted to discourse structure

Much to do!
Further, the preverbal use of *la* sometimes also occurred in all-new environments in elicitation.

(49)  Boŋ la e? Neɛ-kaŋ la age-kyinni kɔo what PART be? person-INDEF PART jump-land water pɔo.  
PREP  
‘What happened? Somebody jumped into water’

(50)  Boŋ la e? Pɔge la ɔɔ a bɛŋɛ. what PART be? woman PART eat DET beans  
‘What happened? A woman ate the beans’

Implies that preverbal *la* does not always align with subject focus in a straightforward manner.
Observation: Question and Answer Congruity

Note that Dagaare has a particularly clear relation between questioned elements and focus elements in the answers.

(51) **Who** ate the beans?
    John$_F$ ate the beans.

(52) **What** did John eat?
    John ate the beans$_F$. 
Observation: Question and Answer Congruity

(53)  Aŋ la ɔɔ a ɓɛŋɛ?
    who PART eat DET beans
    ‘Who ate the beans?’

(54)  Poge la ɔɔ a ɓɛŋɛ.
    woman PART eat DET beans
    ‘A woman ate the beans’

(55)  Boŋ la ka a poge di?
    What PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘What did the woman eat?’

(56)  Bɛŋɛ la ka a poge di
    Beans PART COMP DET woman eat
    ‘The woman ate beans’