Predication Focus and "Affirmative" Markers in Gur

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1 Previous Analyses

The *ME*-particle:

- is placed clause-finally and most frequently occurs in direct postverbal position whereby [enclitic, A.S.] pronominal objects may intervene. Other complements separating verb and clause-final particle are less common, but possible.
- is nearly totally excluded from negative sentences. It needs special contexts to occur here.
- seems to be restricted to the indicative mood.
- shows some affinity to the imperfective aspect. It is (almost) obligatory in imperfective intransitive sentences, although it is compatible with the perfective aspect, too.
- conveys some emphatic and "insisting" communicational value, at least in part of its occurrences.

Hypothesis: The *ME*-particles have a basic pragmatic status and function as verb-and-predication focus marker in all four languages.

2 Elicitation Method

Use of a special questionnaire ("*kama*-Test"):

Precondition: Mother gives some orders to her child before leaving for shopping. After each order the child confirms the fulfilment in advance.

A: Wash the clothes!   B: Okay / I will (wash them).

...   ...

A: Don't take my medicine!   B: Okay / I won't (take it).

3 Focus System

1. Determination of morphological means according to scope in the (affirmative) focus system

Scope of focus	1. complement / VP	2. subject / sentence (topicless)	3. non-subject (marked topic)	4. verb / predication	
Structure	SV**x**O	SV**x**(O) Konni S**x**V(O) others	OS(**x**)V Konni O**x**SV others	SV(O)**x**	SV**x**
Buli	*ká*	*lē*	*tè*	*ká-mā*	*-y(a)*
Konni	*-wÁ, -Á[1]*	*-nÀ*	*(di)[2]*	*mìŋ*	*-yÁ*
Dagbani	*lá*	*N*	*kà*	*mì*	*-ya*
Gurene	*la*	*N*	*ti*	*mɛ*	*-ya*
	canonical transitive sentence			canonical intransitive sentence	
				imperfective perfective affinity	

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[1] aspectually differenciated: *-wÁ* in the perfective, *-Á* in the imperfective
[2] only after lexical subject

4   Focus Marking by "Affirmative" Markers

Focus as pragmatic and not necessarily marked notion:

> "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)

Assertive and contrastive focus subtypes applying to:

- term focus

- verb focus: verb's lexical meaning

- predication focus: predicative operators (verum / auxiliary focus)

  (Hyman & Watters 1984; Güldemann 1996; Wolff 2003)

Pragmatic Focus Control:

> the speaker determines the element(s) on which
> the grammar will express focus

Grammatical Focus Control:

> the grammar determines how
> the speaker will express focus

(Hyman & Watters 1984, Wolff 2003)

4.1 Verb Focus

2.   Situation XII: Mother's orders were not properly fulfilled by her child. When mother comes back and asks, the child informs her about the correct action which doesn't match with mother's expectation.

A: Have you washed the clothes?
B: <u>No, I have patched them.</u>

ààyà,	mí	láŋ-ŋá	**kámā**.	Buli
no	1sg	patch:PF-3pl	AFF	

ààyí,	ǹ	báálí-!há	**mìŋ**.	Konni
no	1sg	sew:PF-3pl	AFF	

éhè,	ń	lágí-!lí	**mì**.	Dagbani
no	1sg	patch:PF-3(sg)	AFF	

ààyí,	ǹ	lìg-bá	**!mɛ́**.	Gurene
no	1sg	patch:PF-3pl	AFF	

Result: highly appropriate use of *ME*-particle in contrastive contexts in affirmation, even in the perfective aspect

4.2 Predication Focus

3.   Situation I: Mother comes back after some time and wants to know whether her orders have been fulfilled. Her positive expectation is confirmed by child.

A: Have you washed the clothes?
B: <u>Yes, I have washed them.</u>

ŋm̄m̄,	ǹ	sùgrí	**kámā** / -y(à).	Buli
yes	1sg	wash:PF	AFF / -ITR	

wà,	ǹ	súgírí-!yé	*(**mìŋ**).	Konni
yes	1sg	wash:PF-ITR	AFF	

ɛ̌ɛ̌,	m̄	páɣá-yà.	/ #**mì**	Dagbani
yes	1sg	wash:PF-ITR		

ɛ̀ɛ̀,	m̀	pèè-yá.	/ ***mɛ̀**	Gurene
yes	1sg	wash:PF-ITR		

Result: language-specific restrictions towards use of *ME*-particle in assertive predication focus in affirmative perfective

4.   Situation VIII: (...) Child's bad aunt shouts at the child that he should follow his mother's orders. The child communicates that there is no need for such command, since the required action has already been done.

A: Do what your mother told you!
B: <u>I have (already) washed (the clothes)!</u>

mí	súgrí	gàttàŋà	**kámā**.	Buli
1sg	wash:PF	cloth.DEF	AFF	

ǹ	wɔ́ŋ	sùgìrì	ɲìntítí	**mìŋ**.	Konni
1sg	already	wash:PF	things.DEF	AFF	

m̀	púm	páɣɘ̀	**mì**.	Dagbani
1sg	already	wash:PF	AFF	

m̀	pèè	fútú là.	/	m̀	pèè-yá.	Gurene
1sg	wash:PF	cloth DEF	/	1sg	wash:PF-ITR	

Result: language-specific restrictions towards use of *ME*-particle in contrastive predication focus in affirmative perfective

5.   Situation XVII: When mother realizes that child hasn't fulfilled the orders, she becomes angry and tells her child, what he would have got, if only he had done what she ordered.

A: <u>If you had not taken my medicine,</u> you would have got money.

fì	dàn	kàn	ɲū	mí	tììmù	**kámā**, ...	Buli
2sg	if	NEG	drink	1sg	medicine.DEF	AFF	

fú	tìŋ	ká	ɲú	ǹ	tììbú	**mìŋ**, ...	Konni
2sg:H	PAST	NEG	drink:PF	1sg	medicine.DEF	AFF	

á-ń	dí	bə̀	válí	ǹ	tìm	máá **mì**, ...	Dagbani
2sg-SUB	PAST	NEG	swallow:PF	1sg	medicine	DEF AFF	

or:	à	yí	dí	bə̀	kpìgì-lí	**mì**, ...	
	2sg	if	PAST	NEG	take:PF-3sg	AFF	

hù	sán	!ká	ɲú	nì	ǹ	tìèm	lá	**mɛ́**, ...	Gurene
2sg	if	NEG	drink:PF	PAST?	1sg	medicine	DEF	AFF	

Result: appropriate use of *ME*-particle even with negative perfective predicates in counterfactual conditional clauses

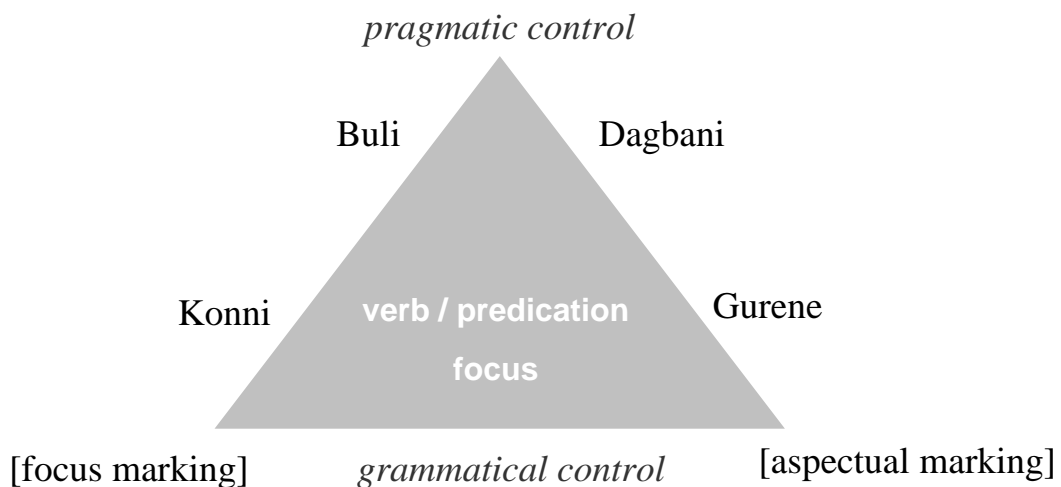## 4.3   Comparative Results

6a. Affirmative perfective, **SV(O)x**

type / scope	**verb focus**	**predication focus**
assertive	Konni (Buli)	Konni, Buli (Dagbani)
contrastive	Konni, Buli, Dagbani (Gurene)	Konni, Buli, Dagbani (Gurene)

6b. Affirmative imperfective, **SV(O)x**

type / scope	**verb focus**	**predication focus**
assertive	Konni, Buli, Dagbani, Gurene	Konni, Buli, Dagbani, Gurene
contrastive	Konni, Buli, Dagbani, Gurene	Konni, Buli, Dagbani, Gurene

- highest degree of pragmatic control for the *ME*-particles in all sample languages: contrastive focus in the affirmative perfective
- especially in Konni and Gurene, *ME*-particles are subject to restrictions diminuishing the pragmatical control
- greater choice for use of *ME*-particles in Buli and Dagbani

7. Degree and parameters of grammatical control for marked verb/predication focus

pragmatic control

Buli   Dagbani

Konni   **verb / predication**   Gurene
               focus

[focus marking]   *grammatical control*   [aspectual marking]

Evidence: Results of *kama*-test corroborate the initially postulated pragmatic function of the *ME*-particles as verb-and-predication focus markers

- why is it that – apart from Konni and to certain degree also apart from Buli – the particles are almost completely blocked from assertive verb focus occurrences in the perfective?
- Solution: existence of a competing clause-final verb suffix *–ya* with basic pragmatic function

8. Former pragmatic counterparts

type / scope	verb / predication focus
assertive	*-YA*
contrastive	*ME*

9. Konni

	verb / predication focus
assertive	*ME*
contrastive	*ME*

-YA as perfective aspectual marker

10. Gurene

	(verb / predication focus) aspect
(assertive/contrastive) perfective	*-YA*
(contrastive) imperfective	*ME*

5 Conclusion

- complex and heavily marked focus systems exist in Gur languages of the Oti-Volta branch

- "affirmative" markers (*ME*-particles and *-YA*-suffixes) mark verb/predication focus and their function is comparable with "in-focus" verb forms in Chadic languages and "disjoint" verb forms in Bantu
- complementary marked "verb" focus constructions: (i) secondary focus on verb via marked complement in complex VP, (ii) exclusive verb focus and predication focus by *ME-* and *-YA*-particles
- focus interacts with grammatical categories, including the aspect system, absorption by aspect is possible
- parallels between contrastive verb/predication focus marker (*ME*) and postnominal morphemes used with a subgroup of contrastive topics
- future necessity to integrate negative markers and constructions into investigation
- further research in Gur will reveal other morphemes marking verb/predication focus and probably other strategies to express this focus category

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