The Determiner 'la' in selected domains in Kusaal and sister Mabia languages

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Outline of presentation

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Introduction

- Individual Mabia languages have received some attention on topics that express notions of definiteness: RCs and NPs (Hiraiwa et al. 2017; Hiraiwa and Bodomo 2018; Abubakari 2019, Dakubu 1999, Issah 2013).

- Very little information, if any, can be traced on studies that examine the concept across domains in Kusaal and other sister languages.

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Introduction

- Previous studies generally attest that the clausal determiner in these languages 'asserts the content of the proposition, relating to something that has been said earlier in the conversation' (Hiraiwa et al. 2017: 5-7; see also Abubakari 2019: 43; Lefebvre 1992; 1998; Larson 2003).

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Question?

- *The question is….*
- What is the determiner in Kusaal and in what domains does it occur?
- What function(s) does the determiner in Kusaal perform across these domains?

Goal

- This talk examines definiteness marking in four domains in Kusaal: NPs, Relativization, Cleft and Topic constructions.

- It shows that the determiner la is a marker of definiteness across these domains in Kusaal, however, with different operational/semantic implications.

- It draws an analogy between la in Kusaal and la in Gurene, Dagbani and Dagaare and concludes that this morpheme, hypothetically, performs identical function in these languages.

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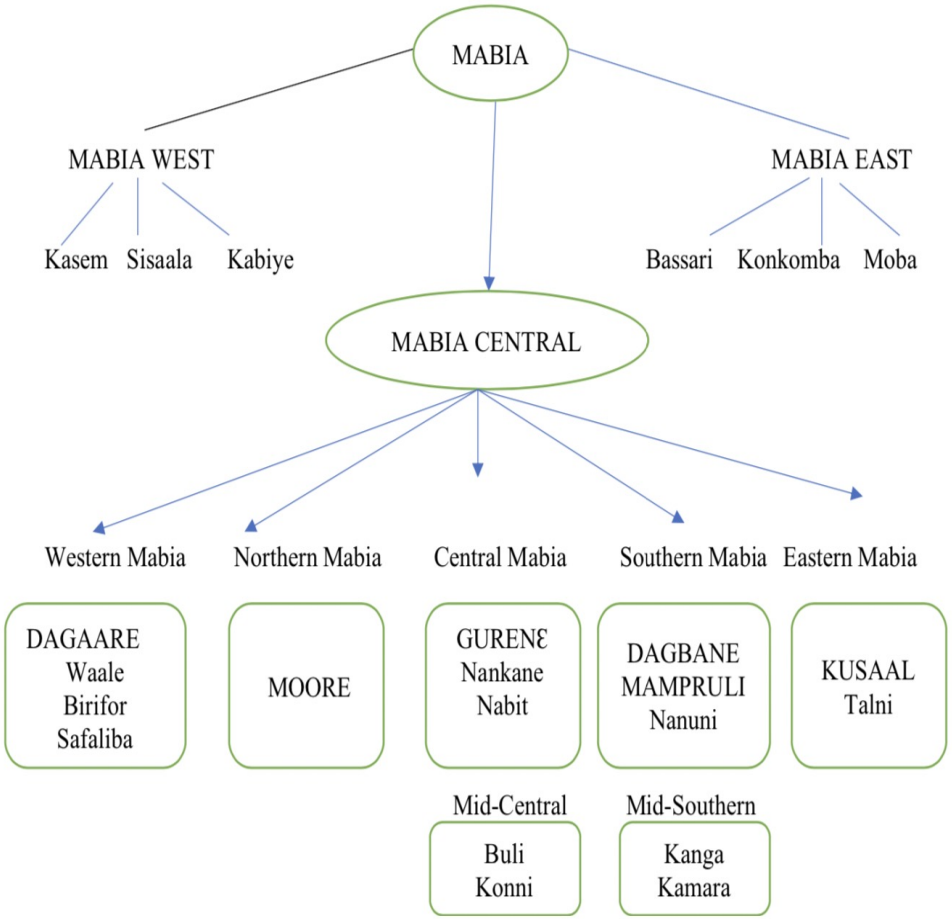
The Language- Kusaal

Source: Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu (n.d.). Online material:
http://aodl.org/oralnarratives/farefari/object/4A-1C5-B/



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Definiteness and indefiniteness in Kusaal NPs

Kusaal has overt determiners for marking definiteness and indefiniteness in NPs.

1. Dau	la	da'	fuug	vɛl	la
man	DEF	buy.PERF	dress	beautiful	DEF

'The man bought the beautiful dress.'

Whilst the determiner *lá* occurs at the end of an entire DP the indefinite determiner- *sɔ', si'eba, si'a* is immediately located after the head noun.

2. Bi- *sɔ'*	kina	di	diib	la.
child-INDEF	come.PERF	eat.PERF	food	DEF

A/certain child came and ate the food.'

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Definiteness and indefiniteness in Kusaal NPs

The definite determiner is number and animacy neutral but the indefinite determiners mark number and animacy in Kusaal.

3. Bi- si'eba	kina	di	diib	la
child-INDEF.PL	come.PERF	eat.PERF	food	DEF

'Some children came and ate the food.'

4. a. ti-si'a	luya	4.b. ti-si'ba	luya
tree-INDEF	fall.PERF	tree-INDEF.PL	fall.PERF
'A certain tree has fallen'		'Some trees have fallen.'	

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Definiteness and indefiniteness in Kusaal NPs

		Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
Definite		la	'the'	la	'the'
Indefinite					
	+Hum	sɔ’	'a certain'	si’eba	'some'
	-Hum	si’a			

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In short…

- *La* is a definite determiner in NPs and DPs in Kusaal.

La in Relative clauses in Kusaal

In relativization in Kusaal, both the definite determiner *la* and the indefinite determiners: *sɔ', si'eba, si'a* play active roles.

- Whilst the definite determiner *la*, **functions as a clausal determiner** and is restricted to clause final position the indefinite determiners function as demonstrative relative pronouns.

5. REL-clause in Kusaal

a. Dáú [kànɛ̀ sà dá' gbáʊ́ŋ lá]
man REL PAST buy.PERF book DEF
mɔ̄r lígídí.
have money
'The man who bought the book has money' (Abubakari 2019)

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La in Relative clauses in Kusaal

b.

Dáú[-sɔ̃	nɛ́	sà	dá'	gbáʊ̀ŋ lá]
man.IDEF.P	COMP	PAST	buy.PERF	book DEF

mɔ̄r lígídí.

have money

'The man who bought the book has money.'

The relative clauses in (5a,b) presuppose that interlocutors share a common knowledge that A MAN BOUGHT A BOOK whilst the main clause serves as new information.

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Resumptive Pronouns and RCs in Kusaal

- Resumptive pronouns in Kusaal RCs trigger specificity. They occur only in object relativization and trigger both restrictive and non-restrictive interpretations (Abubakari 2019).

6. a. Pú ˈá-kànɛ̀ ká m̀ sá nyɛ̄ (ò) lá
womanREL COMP 1SG. PAST see.PERF (3SG) DEF
kūōsìdnɛ́ gʋ ŕ.
sell.IMPERF cola nut

i. ‘The woman I saw sells cola nuts.’

ii. 'The woman I saw, sell cola nuts.’

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Resumptive Pronouns and RCs in Kusaal

The resumptive pronoun is optional in arriving at the restrictive interpretation

6 b. Pú ˈá	kànɛ̀	ká	m̀	sà	nyɛ̄	(ø)	lá
woman	REL	COMP	1SG	PAST	see.PER	(3SG)	DEF
kūōsìdnɛ́		gʋ ŕ.					
sell-IMPERF		cola nut					

'The woman I saw sells cola nut.'

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In short…

- *La* is a clausal determiner in RCs in Kusaal.

Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

- The morpheme la in both NPs and RCs is a definite determiner with identical functions in both domains.
- In NPs and RCs, la encodes uniqueness (see Arkoh and Matthewson 2013; Bombi et al. 2019: 183).

Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

Context: It is a school's PTA meeting and a lot of parents have gathered on the compound.

7. Meeti	la	zug,	dap	bedigo	la'as	doogin	la.
meeting	DEF	top	man.PL	plenty	gather	room.LOC	DEF
Biis	la	wusa	nye		dau	*sɔ'*/#la	
child.PL	DEF	all	see.PERF		man.SG	INDEF/#DEF	

'Because of the meeting, a lot of men have gathered in the room. All the children saw a man/# the man.'

- it is infelicitous to use la for encoding indefiniteness; e.g.

where the antecedent, ***dap bedigo*** 'a lot of men', **is not unique**.

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Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

NPs with the definite determiner la must always have referents that are unique in the discourse. Thus, la-NP cannot introduce new and unfamiliar referents that are not unique:

Context: (A cow boy informs his master of the visit of a cow-buyer)

8. a. Dau-*sɔ'*	sa	kina	gos	niis
man.SG.-INDEF	PST	come.PERF	look.PERF	cow.PL
la.				
DEF.				

b.**Dau**	**la**	sa	da'	ni-ata'a.
Man DEF	PST	buy.PERF	cow-three	

'A man came to look at the cattle yesterday. The man bought three cattle.'

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Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

9. a Adolub	sa	da’	nɛ	fuug	ne	**taa'ara**
Adolub	PST	buy.PERF	FOC	dress	CONJ	shoe

'Adolub bought a dress and a shoe.’

b. **Taa'ara**	**la**	vɛl.
shoe	DEF	nice

'The shoe is nice.’

In both example (8b and 9b) *la* has unique referents and mark familiarity.

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Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

Two NPs with la in the same referent, thus, nominal property (Bombi et al 2019) cannot refer to two separate entities but the indefinite determiner sɔ' can do.

- The context below describes a situation in a creche where babies are catered for based on their needs at a particular time

9. Ka bi- *sɔ'/#la.* *gbisid* *ka* *bi-sɔ'/#la* *dit*

child-INDEF/#DEF sleep.IMPERF CONJ child-INDEF/ eat.IMPERF

ka *bi-sɔ'/#la* *ka'asid*

CONJ child.INDEF/#DEF cry.IMPERF

' and a/#the child is sleeping and a/#the child is eating and a/#the child is crying.'

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Tests for Definiteness (Bombi et al. 2019)

As soon as *la* replaces the indefinite pronoun, the interpretation of the whole construction will take the habitual and the event cannot be said to happen concurrently.

Again, in the absence of a uniqueness, the referent marked through the determiners can vary in number which is impossible with *la*.

10. Ka bi- *sɔ'/#la* *gbisid* *ka*

PRT child-INDEF/#DEF sleep.IMPERF CONJ

*bi-s*i'eba */#la* *dit* *ka* *bi-sɔ'/#la*child.INDEF.PL/#DEF eat.IMPERF CONJ child-INDEF/#DEF *ka'asid*

cry.IMPERF

' and a/#the child is sleeping and some #the children are eating and a/#the child is crying.'

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Interim assumptions on the roles of *la* in NPs and RCs:

- From the tests for definiteness :
- *la* is a definite determiner in Kusaal.
- *la* cannot be used to encode indefiniteness,
- *la* must always have a unique referent in the utterance already familiar to both interlocutors;
- *la* does not introduce new and unfamiliar referent
- Unlike in contexts involving the indefinite determiner *sɔ'*, two NPs with la in the same referent must refer to the same individual

- **Next is more elaboration on *la* for marking uniqueness and familiarity**

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la- for both Familiarity and Uniqueness encoding

- Definite description is mainly associated with two central roles: Uniqueness and familiarity (Schwarz 2009:1).

- Whilst "Uniqueness approaches build on the intuitive insight that we use definite descriptions to refer to things that have a role or property that is unique and can thus be picked out with the appropriate description, e.g., the sun; familiarity is based on the idea that they serve to pick out referents that are in some sense familiar to the discourse participants.

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Familiarity and Uniqueness

- Familiarity is classified into two: 'weak familiarity' and 'strong familiarity' (Robert 2003). Whilst 'weak familiaty' may be derived through "contextual existence entailment, or by being ‘globally familiar in the general culture’ (Roberts 2003, p. 304 f Schwarz 2009:2), 'strong familiarity, more importantly, requires a definite to be anaphoric to a given preceding linguistic expression (Schwarz 2009:3).

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La for Uniqueness

- Context 1: There is chieftaincy conflict in Bawku, the traditional capital of the Kusaas. A group says there is no chief of Bawku since they do not recognize the legitimacy of the current king of the Kusaal traditional area who doubles as the chief of Bawku. After several provocations from the rival group the King of the Kusaas continues to call for calm among his youth. In a radio discussion, a mediator from the government of Ghana passes the comment below:

La for Uniqueness

13. Kʊsaʊg na'aparinya'uŋ la mɔr sumbʊgʊsʊm.

Kusaug chief.head DEF have peaceful

'The King of Kusaug is peaceful.'

- The definite determiner asserts the uniqueness of this individual as the ONLY King known and recognised by the government.

Context 2: It is a bright night as family members gather to share folktales. One of the participants says:

14. Nwadig la pɛlignɛ yʊ'ʊŋ kaŋa

moon DEF bright night this

'The moon is bright this night.'

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La for Encoding Uniqueness

Context 3: A trader has in stock a goat and a cow. A buyer says:

15.	M	bor	naaf	la
	1SG	like	cow	DEF

'I like the cow.'

- **It is infelicitous to use *la* if the trader has in stock goats and cattle.**

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La for Familiarity

- The determiner *la* is used in encoding familiarity with anaphoric referentiality.

16 a.	N sa	nyɛ	dau-sɔ	suos.
	1SG PST	see.PERF	man.INDEF	yesterday.

'I saw a man/ a certain man yesterday.'

b. Dau	la	anɛ	karimsaam
man	DEF	COP	teacher

'I saw a man yesterday. **The man** is a teacher.'

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La in Cleft in Kusaal

Cleft constructions in Kusaal entail existential presuppositions as also observed in Akan (Bombi et al. 2019). Cleft constructions in the language evoke a discourse background perceived to be mutually shared by the discourse participants.

17 a. Q: Anon sa di?

who PST eat.PERF

'Who ate yesterday?

b. Ans: Ayipok sa di.

Ayipok PST eat

'Ayipok ate.'

c. Correction: (Li ane) Aduk n sa di (**la**).

it COP Aduk. FOC PST eat.PERF (LA)

'It was ADUK who ate.'

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La in Cleft in Kusaal

The use of la puts additional emphasis on the entire clause hence blocking any doubt on the presupposition that Aduk bought something.

La, in clefts, is a clause final element and cannot be followed by any other item.

18 a. (Li	annɛ)	Aduk	n	di	la	(#diib	la)
It	COP	Aduk	FOC	eat	LA	(food	DEF)

'It is Aduk who has eaten.' (Context: We are fasting and I knew Aduk will break it before time but you disputed by claim.)

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La in Topic Constructions in Kusaal

Topic always belongs to the common knowledge between interlocutors. Topic elements in Kusaal are specific and definite as such their obligatory use of the definite article la. The anaphor is in the form of a resumptive pronoun in the comment clause.

19. a. Yá'á	àn	kʊɔsʊgɔ	la,	bà	mi'i	li
if	COP.be	sell-NOM	DEF,	3PL	know	it

'As for selling, they have the know-how.'

b. Yá'á	án	bííS	lá,	bà	díyá.
if	COP.be	children.	DEF	3SG	eat.PERF

'As for the children, they have eaten.'

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La in Topic Constructions in Kusaal

The resumptive pronoun is obligatory and must be co-referential with the topic constituent.

20a. Yá'á	àn	ta'ámá	lá,	m̀	dì	(li)	wʊ́sá.
if	COP.be	shea-fruits	DEF,	1SG	eat.PERF	it	all

'As for the shea-fruits, I ate all of it.'

b. Yá'á	àn	bíís	lá,	ǹ	nyɛ̄	*(bà)	wʊ́sá.
if	COP.be	children	DEF	ISG	see	3PL	all

'As for the children, I saw them all.'

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On the particle 'la' in sister Mabia languages

- Research on the particle la has gained several attentions in the literature of Mabia languages as it is one of the commonest that is found in most of the languages.

- It functions as a marker of definiteness in some of the languages; Kusaal, Gurene, Dagabni.

- It also plays the role of a post verbal focus marker in others, Dagbani, Gurene and

- It is a factive default focus marker in others like Dagaare.

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Gurene

Dabuku (2000) observes that the particle *la* performs several roles in Gurene.

- *lá* is the shape of the definite of the Nominal Phrase marker 'the'.

(38)bíá lá 'the child' sá!dɔ´ɔ` lá 'the road'

- *lá* equally occurs after a verb and forms part of the Verbal Phrase.

(39)	Dáárí	n`	dáá	dóósì	lá	n`	kéémà
	day	I	past	following	foc.	my	elder-sib

Yesterday I was following my elder brother.

- *lá* occurs finally in certain kinds of subordinate clauses in Gurene

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Dagaare

- *La* is a post verbal particle in Dagaare used for marking affirmation, and emphasis of particular aspects of the sentence (Bodomo 1997:93).
- *Lá* in Dagaare does not occur after adjunct post verbally and occurs after all full NP complements (Bodomo 1997:95).

(44) a.	Bayuo	da	gbir-ee	la	velaa
	Bayuo	past	sleep-perfInstr	fact	good

'Bayuo slept well.'

b.	o	da	ko	la	Dɛre	a	gane
	s/he	past	give	fact.	Dere	DEF	book

'S/he gave Dere the book.'

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Dagbani

- Definiteness is marked in Dagbani using the postnominal articles maa, and la (Wilson 1972: ch 27.3 cf Olawsky 1999:44; Issah 2013: 206).
- Wilson (1972: ch 27.3) explains that the morpheme lá identify something "specific or particular" which has not yet received mention in the context.
- Issah (2013) also notes that maa and la encode definiteness with underlying pragmatic differences between the two:
- Maa is used when the noun preceding it has already been previously mentioned or it is contextually known to the listener.
- *La* is the non-anaphoric counterpart of *maa*. It is used when the head noun is known to the interlocutors although it has not been pre-mentioned

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Anaphoric use of MAA (Hassan n.d., Yakubu 2012 cf Issah 2013: 207)

Yila ŋmahimgbaŋ din pahi nyɛla di pum-pumi doya jila jila ka ***pubu*** *kam mali di ni gbubi lahabali shɛli.*

'Another feature of songs is that they are arranged in stanzas and each stanza has its message.'

Pubu maa *puuni di mali piligu, ka mali sunsuuni, ka mali* ***naabu.***

'The arrangement (just mentioned in discourse) will have a beginning and has a middle and has an end.'

Di zooya pam ka ***naabu maa*** *kooni vaarila lahabali shɛli din kuli yina* ***tuuli maa.***

'It is very possible that the end (just mentioned in discourse) summarises the story that came at the beginning (just mentioned in discourse).

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Non-anaphoric use of LA(Data taken from Yakubu 2012 cf Issah 2013: 207)

a. *Bɛ dɔɣila Yakubu Moses Tampe Kukuo din be* ***Tamale la****. Silimiin goli 15th June 1982* ***yuuni la.***

'They gave birth to Yakubu Abdulai Moses in Tampe Kukuo which is located in Tamale on the 15th of June 1982.'

b. *O daa pili o shikuru Tampe Kukuo R/C Primary* ***shikuru la*** *1987* ***yuuni la***

'He started his education at the Tampe Kukuo R/C primary school in 1987.'

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Maa and *La* in Dagbani Clefts

- Issah (2013) notes that the pragmatic morphemes *maa* and *la* are equally traceable in cleft constructions and are used as clause final particles in conjunction with the focus particle *n* or *ka* which are subject and object focus markers respectively

a. Abu	n	di-ri	la
Abu	foc	eat-Imperf	LA

'It is Abu who is eating.'

b. Abu	n	di-ri	maa
Abu	foc	eat-Imperf	MAA

'It is Abu who is eating.'

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Summary and Conclusion

- It has been shown that in Kusaal, the determiner la is used in marking definiteness in NPs, RCs, and topic constructions
- In cleft constructions on the other hand, la functions as a marker of assertion and emphasis. It is an optional element which erases all notions of doubts.
- The observations from Kusaal corroborate previous findings on the role of la in sister Mabia languages: Gurene (Dakubu 2000), Issah (2008, 2028), Hiraiwa et al. (2017), Bodomo 1997) among others

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Summary and Conclusion

- Common in all these languages is that the morpheme la is used for marking either (i) **definiteness** or (ii) focus/emphasis.
- Whilst la functions as a determiner in Dagbani, Gurene and Kusaal, it also functions as a clause final element in clefts assuming the role of a focus/emphatic marker.
- In Dagaare, the determiner is á and la is a factive/focus marker which occurs in all constructions but negation.

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Thank You!