**Contrastive focus particles in Kʋ́sáàl**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents and discusses the particles used in expressing contrastive focus[[1]](#footnote-1) in Kʋ́sáàl, a Gur language spoken in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo. Contrary to the earlier claim made by Abubakari (2011) that focus is morphologically null in the language, the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́* are identified as contrastive focus markers in Kʋ́sáàl.The particle *kà* is limited to fronted focused items, whilst *ń* and *nɛ́* are limited to in-situ focused constituents. Ex-situ focus always bears contrastive interpretation, hence the obligatory use of *kà*. In-situ focus is marked prosodically. However, the in-situ use of *ń* and *nɛ́* correlates with a contrastive and exhaustive focus interpretation. To determine the validity of *ń, nɛ́* and *kà* as contrastive focus particles, I subject them to various tests of exhaustivity from which I conclude that these are contrastive focus particles in the language.

Key words: Kʋsaal, focus particles, contrastive/exhaustive focus, information focus

**1.0. Introduction**

The concept of contrastive focus, marked with different strategies in most languages, has received a lot of attention in the literature. É. Kiss (1998) looks at the concept with data from Hungarian and English, Horn (1981) with data from English, Szabolsci (1981) with Hungarian, Hartmann & Zimmerman (2007) with Hausa, and Duah (2015) with Akan. Additionally, Hudu (2012) discusses contrastive focus constructions in Dagbani, Hiraiwa (2005) and Hiraiwa & Bodomo (2008) also mention focus constructions in Buli and Dagaare respectively. Abubakari (2011) analyses focus as morphologically null in Kʋ́sáàl. This paper seeks to clarify that notion by showing that *information* focus is not overtly marked since Kʋ́sáàl does not have a grammatical focus marker (1ii); but *contrastive* focus is marked using the particles *kà, ń, nɛ́* (2i-ii).

1. Context: Meals are not to be repeated; the questioner in (1i) knows that the children ate something yesterday but does not know what exactly they ate. Focus is therefore on what was eaten.

i. *Bíís lá sà[[2]](#footnote-2) dī bɔ́?*

children DEF PRT eat.perf. what

‘What did the children eat yesterday?’

ii. *Bíís lá sà dī* ***mùì***.

children DEF PRT eat.perf. rice

‘The children eat *rice* yesterday.’

1. Context: The hearer thought the children ate something other than rice, for example beans. The sentences in (2i-ii) are corrections to the perceived notion of what was eaten yesterday.

i. ***Mùì*** *kà bà sá dī.*

rice FOC 3PL. PRT eat.perf.

‘It is *rice* (and nothing else) that they ate yesterday’

ii. *Bà sà dī nɛ́* ***mùì.***

3PL. PRT eat.perf. FOC rice

‘It is *rice* (and nothing else) that they ate yesterday’

In these examples, (1ii) is an instance of information or presentational focus, where the focused constituent does not carry any contrastive interpretation. The utterances in (2i-ii) on the other hand convey exhaustive interpretation, where what is eaten is not only emphasized but also exhaustive (in the sense that *only rice* is eaten) and contrastive (in the sense that *what is eaten is rice and nothing else*).

Extensive research on discourse-related information widely differentiates between two different forms of focus (Halliday 1967; Chafe 1976; Szabolcsi 1981; Rochemont 1986; É. Kiss 1998; Vallduví & Vilkuna 1998, and Molnár 2002). É. Kiss (1998) refers to the two forms as: “information focus” and “identificational focus”. Alongside É. Kiss (1998), Vallduví & Vilkuna (1998) and Selkirk (2008), where it is assumed that the evocation of alternative is restricted to contrastive or identificational focus, another widely acknowledged semantic definition of focus is Rooth’s (1985; 1992; 1996) “alternative semantics” where the argument is made that “focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expression” (cf Krifka 2007:6). By consequence, any kind of focus is assumed to set an alternative against which focused constituents are evaluated. This line of argumentation is followed by Zimmermann, who further adds that:

…the alternatives that play a role with contrastive focus are not just calculated relative to the semantic denotation of the focus constituent (the semantic alternative). Instead, they are calculated relative to the focus denotation together with the speaker’s suppositions as to which of these alternatives the hearer is likely to expect (discourse-semantic alternative). (Zimmermann 2008:3).

This work is not intended to go through the merits or demerits of these arguments. The fundamental goal is to provide empirical evidence in support of the claim that Kʋ́sáàl does not have an overt grammatical focus particle and that the particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* are used in marking contrastive focus. I will therefore align this work with the definition of É. Kiss (1998), which provides the platform for differentiating information focus, which is morphologically null, from identificational focus, which uses the particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl. The following serve as the working definitions for (I) information focus and (II) identificational focus respectively.

(I) ‘‘If a sentence part conveys new, nonpresupposed information marked by one or more pitch accents – without expressing exhaustive identification performed on a set of contextually or situationally given entities, it is a mere information focus.” (É. Kiss (1998:246)

(II) ‘‘An identificational focus represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds.” (É. Kiss 1998:249)

In this paper I discuss the syntax and semantics of the particles *kà, ń,* and *nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl and argue that these particles are used in expressing exhaustive/contrastive focus every time they occur in a construction with focus interpretation. Whereas the particle *kà* is limited to fronted focused items only and is obligatory whenever fronting occurs, *ń* and *nɛ́* are limited to in-situ focused constituents any time a contrastive/exhaustive focus interpretation is desired. Ex-situ focus always bears a contrastive interpretation and as such requires the obligatory use of *kà*. Kʋ́sáàl marks in-situ focus using focal stress. The use of *ń* and *nɛ́* correlates with a contrastive/exhaustive focus interpretation. The grounds for these assertions are born out of the observed syntactic and semantic properties exhibited by these particles in Kʋ́sáàl. Even though they perform similar functions compared to grammatical focus markers by triggering focus related interpretations, they differ significantly from default grammatical focus markers on the following grounds: First, the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́* are not default grammatical focus elements like *lá* and its variants in Dagaare, where the default focus marker must obligatorily occur in all declarative constructions (Bodomo 1997), even when no contrastive/exhaustive focus interpretations are encoded. Second, the presence of these particles has a direct semantic impact on the interpretation of the focused constituent. Either they cause an exhaustive/contrastive interpretation of the focused item, or the focused status of the constituent could be said to cause the appearance of these particles. They are excluded in non-exhaustive environments such as ‘mention-some’ contexts or contexts where a property is known to hold more than the focused entity (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007:242).

Some of the major questions this paper seeks to answer are: (1) How is discourse-related information packaged using the particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl? (2) How can one determine whether indeed the identified particles are contrastive/exhaustive focus particles in Kʋ́sáàl?

The paper is organized into five sections. The second section looks at information packaging strategies in Kʋ́sáàl and analyses the various types of focus constructions. In the third and fourth sections, I apply various standard tests for exhaustivity on the identified focus particles to verify whether they are indeed contrastive/exhaustive focus particles. The conclusion forms the final section.

**2.0. Focus constructions in Kʋ́sáàl**

As indicated earlier, this work uses the definition of É. Kiss (1998) as a background in analyzing and setting apart the two types of focus in Kʋ́sáàl. Information or presentational focus is expressed prosodically where the focused item receives extra stress in its pronunciation. No grammaticalized focus particle is used in such instances. Information focus is therefore argued to be overtly null in Kʋ́sáàl. Contrastive focus on the other hand uses the particles *kà, ń,* and *nɛ́*. In the following subsections, I present various contexts that naturally elucidate the use of information focus (2.1) and contrastive focus (2.2).

**2.1. Information focus constructions in Kʋ́sáàl**

Following the definition in (I) by É. Kiss (1998:246), the notions expressed using information focus are not expected to be exhaustive in nature. They serve to dissuade one’s ignorance about an event, action or situation. The answers to the *wh*-questions in the examples below represent instances of information focus in Kʋ́sáàl.

1. Context 1: Several things need to be done. The questioner does not know the activity carried out by a partner and underrates the relevance of what was done. The question in (3i) is used and the response in (3ii) provides new information with focus on the activity that was carried out. It could be that several other activities were carried out but the most salient is the *buying of the items*

i. Q: *Ò sà kēŋŋɛ̄ māāl bɔ́?*

3Sg PRT go.perf. do.perf. what

‘What at all did s/she go to do yesterday.’

ii. Ans:*Ò sà kēŋŋɛ̄* ***dāˈ láˈád***

3Sg. PRT go.perf. buy.perf. items

***lá.***

DEF

‘S/he went and *bought the items* yesterday.’

1. Context 2: A group of children are playing. The youngest one is hit and he starts crying. The mother in (4i) wants to know who hit the child. One of the children who saw *Aduku* hitting the child responds as in (4ii). It could also be the case that there are other children who hit the child although they are not mentioned.

i. Q: *Ànɔ́’ɔn bʋ̄ˈ bííg lá?*

who beat-perf. child DEF.

‘Who beat the child?’

ii.Ans: ***Àdúkú*** *bʋ̄ˈ bííg lá.*

Aduku beat-perf. child DEF.

‘*Aduku* beat the child.’

*Aduku*’s mother also hears that her child has beaten someone, and asks to know who her child has beaten (5i). Again it could be that there are other victims of *Aduku* but only *Asibi* is mentioned (5ii).

1. i. Q: *Àdúkú bʋ̄ˈ ànɔ́ˈɔ́nɛ́?*

Aduku beat-perf. who

‘Who did Aduku beat?’

ii. Ans: *Àdúkú bʋ̄ˈ* ***Àsíbí.***

Aduku beat-perf. Asibi.

‘Aduku beat *Asibi*.

In all the answers to questions (3i-5i) above, the sentences convey new, nonpresupposed information, since the questioner has no knowledge of the information or the response the respondent is going to offer. The focused items do not have any form of contrastive/exhaustive interpretation and no overt morphological focus particles are used.

**2.2.** **Contrastive focus constructions in Kʋ́sáàl**

Again following the working definition for identificational focus in (II), it will be seen that unlike information focus, contrastive focus constructions are largely inherently exhaustive or exhaustive by implicature. I illustrate the various distributions of the particles *kà, ń, nɛ́* in packaging this notion.

**2.2.1. Ex-situ focus marking with *kà***

The particle *kà* occurs immediately after any item fronted to the left periphery of any construction. *Wh*-focus phrases are assumed to have moved to a designated focus position and they co-occur with the ex-situ focus particle *kà* (see Aboh 2007). Answers to questions involving *wh*-focus-phrases must have the particle *kà* after the focused constituent. It is ungrammatical to substitute *kà* with either *ń* or *nɛ́* in ex-situ focus constructions in the language.

1. Q: i. *Bᴐ́ kà fʋ̀ dá dāˈ: bʋ́ʋ́g bɛ́ɛ*

what FOC 2Sg. PRT buy.perf.: goat or

*pɛ́ˈʋ́gɔ́?*

sheep

‘What did you buy: a goat or a sheep?’

ii. \**Bᴐ́ nɛ́ fʋ̀ dá dāˈ: bʋ́ʋ́g bɛ́ɛ* what FOC 2Sg. PRT buy.perf.: goat or

*pɛ́ˈʋ́gɔ́?*

sheep

‘What did you buy: a goat or a sheep?’

iii. \* *Bᴐ́ ń fʋ̀ dá dāˈ: bʋ́ʋ́g bɛ́ɛ*

what FOC 2Sg. PRT buy.perf.: goat or *pɛ́ˈʋ́gɔ́?*

sheep

‘What did you buy: a goat or a sheep?’

A: iv. *Bʋ́ʋ́g kà m̀ dá dāˈ.*

goat FOC 1Sg. PRT buy.perf.

‘It is *a* *goat* that I bought’ (not a sheep)

v. *\*Bʋ́ʋ́g nɛ́ m̀ dá dāˈ.*

goat FOC 1Sg. PRT buy.perf.

‘It is *a* *goat* that I bought’ (not a sheep)

vi. *\*Bʋ́ʋ́g ń m̀ dá dāˈ.*

goat FOC 1Sg. PRT buy.perf.

‘It is *a* *goat* that I bought’ (not a sheep)

1. Ànᴐ́ˈɔ́n *bííg kà fʋ̀ īēdá: Àsíbí bɛ́ɛ Àdúkɔ́?*

who child FOC 2Sg. search Asibi or Adukɔ

‘Whose child are you after: Asibi or Adukɔ?’

A: *Àsíbí bííg kà m̀ īēd.*

Asibi child FOC 1Sg. search

‘It is *Asibi’s child* I am after.

The question in (6i) is an example of a contrastive *wh*-focus construction with a set of alternatives. The response equally conveys a strong contrastive focus interpretation by excluding other alternatives from what is bought to ‘a goat’ and not, for instance, ‘a sheep’. The use of *kà* in *wh*-questions as well as in fronted focused items causes a contrastive focus interpretation of the focused constituent. It is implied that the particle *kà* serves as a contrastive focus particle in Kʋ́sáàl in ways similar to the particle *ka* in Dagbani (Hudu 2012).

**2.2.2 In-situ focus marking with *nɛ́***

The particle *nɛ́* can be used with the object NP, the VP as well as the entire IP. Whenever focus is expressed on the entire IP, *nɛ́* occurs at the end of the entire clause and has its scope spread across the whole construction. However, when focus is expressed on an object NP or an adverbial, the particle occurs before the object NP, thus after the verb (8ii), and before the locative adverbial adjunct or complement (9ii). The particle *kà* cannot be used in-situ, nor can the particle *ń* substitute *nɛ́.* This explains the ungrammaticality of the examples in(8iii-iv).

1. i. Q:*Bɔ́ kà púˈá lá sà dāˈ*

what FOC woman DEF. PRT buy.perf.

*dáˈá-n lá?*

market-LOC DEF.

‘What did the woman buy at the market?’

ii. Ans:  *púˈá lá [VPsà dāˈ nɛ́ núá]*

woman DEF PRT buy.perf. FOC fowl

*[PP dáˈá-n lá.]*

marke-LOC DEF.

‘The woman bought a *fowl* at the market’

iii*. \* púˈá lá sà dāˈ kà núá*  woman DEF PRT buy.perf. FOC fowl

*dáˈá-n lá.*

marke-LOC DEF.

‘The woman bought a *fowl* at the market’

iv. *\* púˈá lá sà dāˈ ń núá*

woman DEF PRT buy.perf. FOC fowl

*dáˈá-n lá.*

marke-LOC DEF.

‘The woman bought a *fowl* at the market’

1. i. Q: *Yà kà púˈá lá sà dāˈ*  where FOC woman DEF. PRT buy.perf.

*núá lá?*

fowl DEF

‘Where did the woman buy the fowl?‘

ii. Ans: *Púˈá lá sà dāˈ [NP núá lá ] nɛ́*

woman DEF PRT buy.perf. fowl DEF FOC

*[PP dáˈá-n lá.*

market-LOC DEF

‘The woman bought the fowl *at the market’*

1. i. Q: *Bɔ́ kà Àdólúbà sà māālɛ?*

what FOC Adoluba PRT do.perf.

‘What did Adoluba do?’

ii. Ans: *Àdólúbà [VP sà kūl nɛ́.]*

Adoluba PRT go-home.perf. FOC

‘Adoluba went-home.’

1. i. Q: *Bɔ́ māālɛ?*

what make/do.perf.

‘What happened?

ii. Ans: *[****IP*** *Bíís lá dī dīīb lá nɛ́.]*

child DEF. eat.perf. food DEF. FOC

‘The children ate the food.’(an unexpected occurrence)

In (10ii-11ii) the particle *nɛ́* assumes an IP internal right position with a scope that extends to cover the entire construction. It is equally possible to have *nɛ́* focusing the object DP in instances such as below.

1. i. Q: *Bɔ́ kà Àdólúbá dāˈā?*

what FOC Adoluba buy.perf.

‘What did Adoluba buy?’

ii. Ans 1: *Àdólúbá dāˈ nɛ́ núá.*

Adoluba buy.perf. FOC fowl

‘Adoluba bought *a fowl*’

iii.Ans2: *Àdólúb́a dāˈ núá nɛ́.*

Adoluba buy.perf. fowl FOC

‘Adoluba bought *a fowl*’

The example in (12ii) serves as the expected response to the question in (12i). The particle *nɛ́* occurs before the focused item and causes an exhaustive/contrastive interpretation of the item bought. On the other hand, the example in (12iii), where the particle occurs after the focused object DP, can be used in a context where *Adoluba* is known for not buying anything when he is visiting. This time around he surprises everybody by buying ‘a *fowl*’.

To account for the word order variation, it is assumed that *nɛ́* behaves as an adnominal selected by the NP/DP or PP it modifies (see Renans 2016:§3). It behaves as an adverbial when it modifies VPs and IPs, in which case it merges with the entire IP or VP as illustrated below.

1. nɛ́ [NP/DP]………....Adnominal nɛ́
2. [VP ] nɛ́ …………. Adverbial nɛ́
3. [IP ] nɛ́ …………. Adverbial nɛ́

**2.4. In-situ focus marking with *ń***

The particle *ń* is restricted to subject focus. It is expected to occur after all subject NPs or DPs deemed to have an exhaustive/contrastive focus interpretations.

It is infelicitous to use the particles *nɛ́* and *kà* in focusing subject constituents, as shown in (13ii-iii).[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. i. *Dáú lá* ***ń*** *dāˈ bύύg lá.*

man DEF FOC buy.perf. goat DEF

‘*The man* bought the goat (not the woman)’

ii. *\*Dáú lá nɛ́ dāˈ bύύg lá.*

man DEF FOC buy.perf. goat DEF

‘*The man* bought the goat (not the woman)’

iii.*\* Dáú lá kà dāˈ bύύg lá.*

man DEF FOC buy.perf. goat DEF

‘*The man* bought the goat (not the woman)’

1. *Dáú* ***ń*** *bɛ̄ɛ̄ dɔ́ɔ́gin lá.*

man FOC COP.be room-LOC DEF

‘*A man* is in the room (not a woman)’

‘*A brave man* is in the room (not a coward).’

The particle *ń* also cliticizes on subject pronouns to form strong or emphatic forms.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. *Ón sá dāˈ núá lá*

3Sg.-Emph. PRT buy.perf. fowl DEF

‘*S/he* bought the fowl’

In (15), the focus particle is attached to the subject pronoun to create the emphatic form *on/ᴐn* ‘3Sg. Emph.’. The emphatic pronoun is not exclusive in its interpretation. In fronting, it occurs with *kà* and in in-situ focus it co-occurs with the adverbials *máˈáá* ‘alone, only, just’ and *kυn-kυn* ‘just’ for an exclusive interpretation as illustrated in (16-17). This will be further discussed in section 4.1.

1. *Ón kà m̀ bɔ̄ɔ̄d.*

3Sg.-Emph. FOC 1Sg. like

‘It is *him/her* that I like (not any other person).’

1. *Ón máˈáá dá dāˈ núá lá*

3Sg.-Emph. alone PRT buy.perf. fowl DEF

‘*S/he* alone bought the fowl.’

In this section, the various ways of packaging both information and contrastive focus in Kʋ́sáàl have been demonstrated. It has been shown that Kʋ́sáàl does not have an overt grammatical focus particle and whereas information focus is morphologically null, contrastive focus is marked using the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́*. The particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́* are purposely used to convey contrastive/exhaustive focus any time they occur in a construction with focus interpretation. Whereas *kà* is used for fronted DPs and NPs, *ń* and *nɛ́* are used in-situ: *ń* for subject NPs, and *nɛ́* for object NPs, VPs as well as IPs. In the following section, the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́* are subjected to several tests for exhaustivity to ascertain their true statuses as contrastive/exhaustive focus particle in Kʋ́sáàl.

**3.0. Tests for exhaustivity**

Several standard tests are used in the literature in testing exhaustive focus. In this section, I demonstrate how some of these tests are used to justify the claim that the particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* are indeed contrastive/exhaustive focus particles in Kʋ́sáàl. In all focus constructions with the aforementioned particles in the language, there is a conversational implicature that the answer to the question/subject under discussion is the strongest true answer (Beaver & Clark 2008; Roberts 2012). The following are accounts of some tests on the particles: *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl.

**3.1. Natural context/Spontaneous speech context**

This test is in line with what Van der Wal (2013) refers to as *Heuristic: Context conjuring*. It is considered as one of the simplest tests for focus diagnostics in languages. This test involves the creation of contexts or scenarios where speakers are presented with situations that will naturally incite/elicit responses with contrastive focus interpretations. Another angle is to present speakers with utterances with a (contrastive) focus interpretation and ask their intuitions about when these utterances could be used felicitously or more naturally (Van der Wal (2013:5). The following contexts, (18) and (19), generate the responses in examples (18i-ii) and (19i) respectively.

1. Context i: There are two animals, a goat and a sheep, and you ask which one the man bought (contrast).

Context ii: You expect the man to buy a sheep. (The responses could be used as corrections because the hearer believes something different. It could also be used to show surprise in unexpected situations).

i. *Dáú lá sà dāˈ nɛ́ bʋ́ʋ́g*.

man DEF PRT buy.perf. FOC goat

‘It is a goat the man bought.’

ii. *Bʋ́ʋ́g kà dáú lá sá dāˈ.*  goat FOC man DEF PRT buy.perf.

‘It is a goat the man bought.’

1. Context i: There are two people, a man and a woman. Which one of them bought a goat? (contrast)

Context ii: You expect the woman to buy a goat

(correction/unexpectedly)

i. *Dáú lá ń sá dāˈ bʋ́ʋ́g.*

man DEF FOC PRT buy.perf. goat

‘It is the man that bought a goat.’

The examples in (18-19) are naturally produced by speakers under the proposed contexts with the use of the particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́*. These sentences convey both contrastive and exhaustive focus interpretations. It is infelicitous to respond to the questions under the supposed contexts without using these particles.

**3.2. Coordination**

Szalbolsci (1981) uses coordination to identify exhaustive focus in Hungarian. Duah (2015) applies this technique to data in Akan, a Kwa language, with similar results. In my own test, I use a pair of sentences: one with a focused coordinated DP (20ii-iii) and another one where one of the coordinated DPs is dropped (20iv-v). With exhaustive focus, the second sentence without the coordination cannot be a logical consequence of the first one. In the answers to question (20i), I use both ex-situ and in-situ contrastive/exhaustive particles *kà* (20ii) and *nɛ́* (20iii) in comparison with in-situ focus without these particles (21i).

1. i. Q: *Bɔ́ kà dáú lá dāˈ?*  what FOC man DEF. buy-perf.

‘What did the man buy?’

ii. Ans1*: Bʋ́ʋ́g nɛ́ nááf kà dáú lá dāˈ.*  goat CONJ cow FOC man DEF. buy-perf.

‘It is *a* *goat* and *a* *cow* that the man bought.’

iii. Ans2: *Dáú lá dāˈ nɛ́ bʋ́ʋ́g nɛ́ nááf.*

man DEF buy.perf. FOC goat CONJ cow

‘It is *a* *goat* and *a* *cow* that the man bought.’

iv. Ans3: # *Bʋ́ʋ́g kà dáu lá dāˈ.* goat FOC man DEF buy-perf.

‘It is *a goat* that the man bought’

v. Ans4: #*Dáu lá dāˈ nɛ́ bʋ́ʋ́g.*

man DEF buy.perf. FOC goat

‘It is *a* *goat* that the man bought’

1. i. Ans1. *Dáu lá dāˈ bʋ́ʋ́g nɛ́ nááf.*

man DEF buy.perf. goat CONJ cow

‘The man bought *a* *goat* and *a* *cow.*’

ii.Ans2. *Dáu lá dāˈ bʋ́ʋ́g.*

man DEF buy-perf. goat

‘The man bought *a* *goat*.’

If the utterances in (20ii-iii), in which the coordinated NPs *a goat and a cow* are focused with the particles *kà* and *nɛ́* respectively, are given by a speaker, this speaker cannot give the responses in (20iv-v) as partial descriptions of the former since this will amount to a contradiction. This arises due to the presence of the particles *kà* and *nɛ́* which contrastively/exhaustively express the number of items bought to be two: *a* *goat* *and* *a* *cow*. However, if the speaker had used the construction in (21i) where *a* *goat* and *a* *sheep* are focused in-situ (suprasegmentally) without the use of *kà* or *nɛ́* then the answer in (21ii) can also be given as a partial response to the question in (20i)[[5]](#footnote-5).

**3.3. Numerals**

Using a variation of the coordination test with focused numerals (see Szabolsci 1981; É. Kiss 1998) where a numeral is added to the noun and focused in instances where focus is exhaustive, the focused entity must be equal to the original entity in number; if not there will be contradiction in the sentence. The scope of the quantifier interprets as ‘exactly’ in exhaustive focus environments whereas it interprets as ‘at least’ in non-exhaustive environments in Kʋ́sáàl. (see Szalbolsci 1981:155).

The sentence in (22ii) suggests that the number of people who went to the market is five. But (22iii) which follows from (22ii) shows that if five people went to the market then at least three people went to the market.

1. i. Q. *Nídíb àlà sà kēŋ*

people how.many PRT go.perf.

*dáˈá lá?*

market DEF

‘How many people went to the market?’

ii. Ans1: ***Nídíb ànú s****à kēŋ*

people five PRT go.perf.

*dáˈá lá.*

market DEF

‘*Five people* went to the market’

iii.Ans2: ***Nídíb àtánˈ*** *sà kēŋ*

people three PRT go.perf.

*dáˈá lá.*

market DEF

‘*Three people* went to the market’

The logical conclusion from the interpretations of (22ii-iii) further reveals that the semantics of numerals as not always exact. It could be either the exact amount or a lower boundary (Horn 1972; Levinson 2000 cf Van der Wal 2013:15).

In contrast, the contrastive and exhaustive focus particles; *kà, ń* and *nɛ́*, make it impossible for numerals to maintain their upward entailing quality and as such they only refer to the exact quantity of the number (see Van Kuppevelt 1996; Van Rooij 2002; Van Rooij & Schulz 2004).

1. i. Q. *Nídíb àlà sà kēŋ*

people how.many PRT go.perf.

*dáˈá lá?*

market DEF

‘How many people went to the market?’

ii.Ans1: *Nídíb* ***ànú******ń*** *sá kēŋ*  people five FOC PRT go.perf.

*dáˈá lá.*

market DEF

‘It was *five people* who went to the market.’

iii. Ans2: *Nídíb àtánˈ* ***ń*** *sà kēŋ*  people three FOC PRT go.perf. *dáˈá lá.*

market DEF

‘It was *three people* who went to the market.’

The answer in (23ii) contradicts (23iii) because (23ii) implies that exactly five people went to the market, whilst (23iii) implies that exactly three people went to the market.

The different interpretations of the answers to the same questions (22i) and (23i) are due to the types of focus expressed by the answers to these questions. Whereas the answers to the question in (22i) express information focus, the answers to the question in (23i) express exhaustive/contrastive focus using the particle *ń* for subject focus. The answers in (23ii-iii) suggest the impossibility of using the exhaustive focus marker in identifying a single entity out of a plural group (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007:253). This suggests that the particles identified are contrastive and exhaustive focus particles in Kʋ́sáàl.

**3.4. Weak quantifiers**

The indefinite quantifiers *síˈá/ síébá* ‘some’ and *bíˈél/bíˈélá* ‘a few’ cause a narrow focus interpretation whenever they co-occur with the contrastive/exhaustive focus particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl. This, as also observed by Skopeteas & Fanselow (2010:1387, cf. Van der Wal 2013), is because “the definite quantifiers ‘some’ and ‘a few’ are upward entailing, i.e. they imply that the denoted quantity reaches at least a minimum from a scale of potential quantities” (cf Van der Wal 2013:15).

1. *Tì sà pāām lígídi lá síébá.*

3PL PRT get.perf. money DEF some

‘We got the/some of the money’

(…, so we can solve the problem)

#(…., so we cannot solve the problem)

The upward entailment quality of the quantifier in (24) makes it possible to interpret the sentence as ‘receiving/getting all the required money or getting at least a substantial amount of the required money which can be used to address the situation at hand’.

On the other hand, when the contrastive /exhaustive focus particles *kà, ń* and *nɛ́* are used with the indefinite quantifiers, *si’a/sieba* ‘some’, the derived interpretation excludes the upward entailing quality of the quantifier, resulting in an interpretation with a narrow focus (25ii).

1. i. *Lígídi là síébá kà tì sá pāām.*

money DEF some FOC 3PL PRT get

‘It is some/part of the money we got.’

ii .*Tì sà pāām nɛ́ lígídi lá síébá.*

3PL PRT get FOC money DEF some

‘It is some/part of the money we got.’

# (…, so we can solve the problem)

(…., so we cannot solve the problem)

**3.5. Part as a whole relationship**

Unlike instances involving non-exhaustive focus when a part can be used in connection to a whole as illustrated in (26ii), which is an answer to (26i), it is illogical and illicit to use the exhaustive particles *ń* and *nɛ́* after a focused entity, (26iii), which captures part of a whole group (wider entity). Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007:253) refer to this context as the “mention-some environment”. Consider the scenario below and the question and answer that follow it.

1. Context: *Asibi* is looking for a child to send on an errand. There are a lot of children playing at the playground. For lack of time, she only wants to get the name of one of them and she finds out from *Akuda*:

i. . Q: *Àsíbí: fʋ̀ mīˈ bánɛ́ díˈém yíŋ*

2Sg. know those play-imperf. outside

*lá?*

LA

‘Do you know those playing outside?’

ii. Ans 1: Àkúdà: *ɛ́ɛ́n, Àzúmà bɛ̄ɛ̄ bà*

Yes, Azuma COP.be their

*sʋ́ʋ́gi-n.*

middle-LOC

‘*Azuma* is among them’

iii. Ans 2: Àkúdà:? *ɛ́ɛ́n, Àzúma ḿ bɛ̄ɛ̄*

Yes, Azuma FOC COP.be

*bà sʋ́ʋ́gi-n.*

their middle-LOC

‘It is *Azuma* who is among them.’

*Akuda* in (26ii) mentions the name of a child who is among the children who are playing. In this context it would be contradictory as well as illogical to use the exhaustive in-situ subject particle *ḿ (=/ń/)*, as in(26iii),since it would capture only part of the entire group of children playing outside. What this implies is that the stronger the effect of an exhaustive focus interpretation, whether by implicature or in the semantics, the less appropriate it will be as a response to a mention-some question (see Van der Wal 2013:10).

**4.0. ‘Strongly exhaustive’ and ‘Weakly exhaustive’ particles**

There appears to be a subtle difference in the statuses of the exhaustive particles *kà* on the one hand and *ń* and *nɛ́* on the other. Available data reveal a tendency for the particles *ń* and *nɛ́* to be inherently ‘strongly exhaustive’ compared to the particle *kà,* which is only inherently contrastive and exhaustive by implicature, hence referred to as ‘weakly exhaustive’. The tests in sections 4.1 and 4.2 show that whereas *ń* and *nɛ́* are in complementary distribution with exhaustive adverbial particles as well as exhaustive additive particles, the particle *kà* freely co-occurs with both adverbial and additive particles.

**4.1. The Omission of *ń, nɛ́* in the environment of adverbials**

The adverbials *máˈáa/ máˈáanɛ́* “only, just, alone, *kυn-kυn* ‘only/just’ *zaŋ-zaŋ* ‘only’ correlate with an exhaustive focus interpretation such that all other alternative possibilities are excluded from the reading (see Rooth 1985; 1992; Krifka 2006; Van der Wal 2013 among others). The particles *ń* and *nɛ́* are often in complementary distribution with the exhaustive adverbial particles on the grounds of redundancy. This trend is consistent with the observation made by Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007: 256), Jaggar (2001:511) and Newmann (2000:190) that the exhaustive particles *nee/cee* in Hausa are often omitted in the environment of other adverbials.

1. *Bíís lá máˈáá (ń) sà dī*

children DEF only FOC PRT eat.perf. *mùì lá.*

rice DEF.

‘Only the children ate the rice.’

1. *Bíís lá sà dī (nɛ́) mùì lá*

children DEF PRT eat.perf. FOC rice DEF *máˈáá.*

only

‘The children ate only the rice.’

The particle *ka,̀* on the other hand, must obligatorily co-occur with the adverbial when the focused constituent is fronted.

1. *Mùì kà bíís lá dī.*

rice FOC children DEF eat.perf.

‘It is rice that the children ate.’ (not, say, beans)

1. *Mùì máˈáa kà bíís lá dī.*

rice only FOC children DEF eat.perf.

‘It is only rice that the children ate.’ (and nothing else)

\* *Mùì máˈáa bíís lá dī.*

rice only children DEF eat.perf.

From the exhaustive interpretation derived from the use of the adverbials, it is obvious that these elements are used to introduce exhaustivity into the assertion as part of its truth conditions (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007). The open option available to speakers to use or not to use *ń* and *nɛ́* (whilst *kà* is obligatory) suggests that the particle *kà* is semantically weaker in expressing exhaustivity than the particle *nɛ́.*

The lack of exhaustivity in the interpretation of the emphatic pronoun, as indicated elsewhere, explains the grammaticality of having the exhaustive adverbial marker *máˈáá* ‘only’ co-occur with the third person emphatic pronoun *ón* as in (31).

1. *Ón máˈáá (\*n) tʋ̄m tʋ́ʋ́má lá.*

3Sg. lone FOC work work-Nomimative DEF

‘S/he alone did the work.’

**4.2. Restrictions on *ń, nɛ́* with exhaustive additive particles**

The exhaustive focus particles *ń,* and *nɛ́* do not co-occur with the additive particles *mɛ́* ‘also, too’, *yá’ásì* ‘else, again’. This is because the additive particles make the referent non-exhaustive in the sense that the action of the verb is assumed to have taken place with different/other referents.

1. *Ànɔ́’ɔ́n yá’ási (\*n) sá kārīm gbàùŋ*  who else FOC PRT read.perf. book *lá?*

DEF

‘Who else read the book yesterday?’

1. *Àsíbí mɛ́ (\*n) sá kārīm gbàùŋ lá.*

Asibi also FOC PRT read.perf. book DEF

‘Asibi also read the book yesterday.’

Unlike *ń* and *nɛ́*, which do not co-occur with the exhaustive focus additives, it is grammatical to have *kà* in fronted *wh*-focus questions as well as with fronted DPs co-occurring with the exhaustive focus additive *yáˈásì* ‘else’ (34) and *mɛ́* ‘also’ (35-37).

1. *Bᴐ́bín yáˈásì kà**Asibi sá kārīm.*

what else FOC Asibi PRT read.perf.

   ‘What else did Asibi read yesterday?’

1. *Àsíbí sá kārīm (\*nɛ́) gbàùŋ lá*

Asibi PRT read.perf. FOC book DEF

*mɛ́.*

also

‘Asibi read the book also yesterday/it was also the book

that Asibi read yesterday.’

1. *Gbàùŋ lá mɛ́ kà Àsíbí sá kārīm.*

book DEF also FOC Asibi PRT read.perf.

‘It is also the book that Asibi read yesterday.’

1. *Gbàùŋ lá kà Àsíbí sá kārīm*

book DEF FOC Asibi PRT read.perf.

*mɛ́.*

also

‘It is also the book that Asibi read yesterday/ it was also reading the book that Asibi did’

Since an item or a situation is either exhaustive or additive but not both, the grammaticality of *kà* co-occurring with the additive exhaustive particles *yá’ás* ‘else’ and *mɛ́* ‘also’ further shows that the particle *kà* has a weaker exhaustive focus interpretation in Kʋ́sáàl.

**5.0. Conclusion**

Returning to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper, it is now possible to state that Kʋ́sáàl does not have a default grammatical focus marker and that the language employs two different strategies in the packaging of discourse related information. Whereas information focus is morphologically null, contrastive focus is marked using the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́*. The particle *kà* is used for ex-situ contrastive/exhaustive focus marking and the particles *ń* and *nɛ́* are also used for in-situ contrastive/exhaustive focus marking. The evidence from all the tests suggests that the particles *kà*, *ń* and *nɛ́* encode strong contrastive focus, leading to the assumption that there are indeed contrastive focus particles in Kʋ́sáàl. On exhaustivity, the study shows that whereas the particles *ń* and *nɛ́* evoke a strong exhaustive focus interpretation, the particle *kà* evokes a weak exhaustive focus interpretation. The reason is that *ń* and *nɛ́,* unlike *kà,* are in complementary distribution with the exhaustive adverbial particles and additive particles in Kʋ́sáàl.

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**Abbreviations**

DEF. *definite determiner*, PRT *temporal adverbial particle*, PL *plural*, Sg. s*ingular*, FOC *focus particle*, CONJ. *conjunction*, PERF *perfective*, FUT. *future*, DEM *demonstrative*, REL. *relative* , POSS *possessive*, Q. *question*, A. *answer*, LOC. *locative*. EMPH. *emphatic*. FACT. *factive marker*

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1. The use of the term contrastive focus is aligned with what É. Kiss (1998) refers to as exhaustive focus or identificational focus. With this background, the terminological use of identificational focus, contrastive focus and exhaustive focus are meant to refer to the same notion that is expressed by the particles *kà, ń, nɛ́* in Kʋ́sáàl. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Verbs do not inflect for tense in Kʋ́sáàl. The remoteness of an activity is expressed using particles. The particle *sà* means the event is a day old, *dàà* means the event is two days old but less than a year and *dà* means the event is a year and beyond. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A reviewer raised a question as to whether subject focus involves any form of movement in Kʋ́sáàl. The situation is not immediately clear for the following reasons: (1) Assuming that subject focus has the structure: [FocP n [TP Subj [VP OBJ]]], the hypothesis is that the subject moves from Spec TP to Spec FocP, triggered by both Agree and EPP features on FocP. (2) A problem arises when the subject is substituted by other elements such as the *wh*-phrases *ànᴐ́ˈᴐ́n(ɛ́)* ‘who’ and *bᴐ́ᴐ́* ‘what’. It is ungrammatical to focus the *wh*-phrase as subject with the subject focus particle *ń*, as in (ii) and (vi), though the constituent that corresponds to the *wh*-phrase in the answer to the question can be focused with *ń* as in (iii) or it can be left bare as in (iv).

   (i) Ànᴐ́ˈᴐ́nɛ̀ dī dííb lá?

   who eat.perf food DEF

   ‘Who ate the food?

   (ii) \* Ànᴐ́ˈᴐ́nɛ̀ ń dī dííb lá?

   who FOC eat food DEF

   (iii) Ans: Púˈá lá ń dī dííb lá.

   woman DEF FOC eat food DEF

   ‘It is the woman who ate the food.’

   (iv) Púˈá lá dī dííb lá.

   woman DEF eat food DEF

   ‘The woman ate the food.’

   (v) Bɔ́ɔ́ ɔ̄nb váánd lá?

   what chew leaves DEF

   ‘What chewed the leaves?’

   (vi) \* Bɔ́ɔ́ ń ɔ̄nb váánd lá?

   what FOC chew leaves DEF

   However, it is grammatical to focus *wh*-phrases, using the non-subject focus particle *nɛ́*, if they happen to be objects of the sentence.

   (vii) Àdúk būˈ nɛ́ ànᴐ́ᴐ́nɛ̀?

   Aduk beat.perf FOC who

   ‘Who (specifically) did Aduk beat?

   (viii)Bʋ́ʋ́g lá ᴐ̄nb nɛ́ bᴐ́ᴐ́?

   goat DEF chew FOC what

   ‘What (specifically) did the goat chew?’

   The situation is unclear in view of the fact that *wh*-phrasescannot co-occur with the focus particle *ń* in subject position, even though it is grammatical to have the non-subject focus particle *nɛ́* co-occurring with the same *wh*-phrases at object position. One cannot argue that *wh*-phrases in subject position have the structure in (1) even though the constituents in the answer which correspond to the *wh*-phrase can be focused using *ń.* I therefore assume the vacuous movement hypothesis and argue that subject focus in Kʋ́sáàl is an instance of in-situ focus until further evidence is found to counter this assumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Subject pronouns and their corresponding emphatic forms: m/man ‘1Sg./1Sg.Emph.’ fυ/fυn ‘2Sg./2Sg.Emph.’ ɔ/ɔn ‘3Sg./3Sg.Emph.’ ti/tinam ‘1Pl./1Pl.Emph.’, ya/yanam ‘2Pl./2Pl.Emph.’, ba-ban/banam ‘3Pl./3Pl.Emph.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Duah (2015: 11) for a similar analysis of data from Akan. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)