

Abstract

This study examines focus realization in Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), a national sign language used by Deaf communities in Ghana. Based on data elicited using the Questionnaire for Information Structure (Skopeteas et al. 2006), we analyze GSL’s focus marking strategies with attention to syntactic position and non-manual prosody.¹ To avoid signed English influence, elicitation stimuli were translated into GSL.

In GSL, in situ focus is generally unmarked, except for subject focus, which is accompanied by raised eyebrows (reb) and an optional indexical (IX) marker, as shown in (1):

- 1) Q: Who is eating an apple?
 A: reb
 A: [MAN (IX)]_(SUBJ-FOC) EAT APPLE
 ‘**The man** is eating an apple.’

Ex situ focus involves leftward displacement of objects or predicates, with ‘reb’ marking aligning at the clause-initial boundary rather than directly on the constituent, as demonstrated in (2) and (3) respectively.

- 2) Q: What is the woman pushing, a table or a sofa?
 A: $\overline{\text{reb}}$ [CHAIR^{^BIG}]_(OBJ-FOC) WOMAN PUSH
 ‘The woman is pushing a sofa.’
- 3) Who is the man doing?
 A: $\overline{\text{reb}}$ [WALK]_(V-FOC) MAN
 ‘The man is walking.’

In contrast, *ex situ* subject focus is realized clause-finally and depends on IX for referent anchoring in signing space, without accompanying non-manual(s):

- 4) Who is pushing a table?
 A: reb
 A: TABLE PUSH [IX MAN]_(SUBJ-FOC)
 ‘The man is pushing a table.’

These findings reveal that GSL employs a structurally asymmetrical system for focus realization, shaped by constituent type, clause position, and non-manual prosody. Rather than following a uniform pattern, GSL reveals a hybrid focus system shaped by flexible interactions between word order, prosody, and spatial deixis. Focus realization varies depending on the type of constituent being focused. Importantly, the left edge of the focus domain is consistently marked prosodically across constructions.

¹ Skopeteas, Stavros. et al. 2006. Questionnaire on Information Structure: Reference Manual. In *Quantificational Variability Effects with Plural Definites*, Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure (ISIS) 4. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam.