Exhaustivity and á-marked constituents in Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ

It has been proposed that there are various types of focus, referred to with terms such as information/presentational focus, contrastive/identificational focus, selective focus (É. Kiss 1998, Van der Wal 2009). The present article attempts a detailed description of focus strategies in the Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ language, paying special attention to the particle *á*. Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ exhibits a striking variety of focus strategies. We discuss these multiple ways of realizing focus and demonstrate that there exist a correlation between the different focus realizations and the different focus types. We argue that the focus that *á* marks is semantically equivalent to the identificational focus of Kiss (1998). We show that contrary to the situation in English and Hungarian, identificational focus is expressed in Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ without syntactic reordering. Based on semantic evidence, we argue that the particle *á* is a focus marker which besides yielding a contrastive focus reading also conveys exhaustiveness effects.

Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ has three strategies to express focus. A focus constituent can be fronted (ex-situ focus); it can remain in its base-position (in-situ focus) without any focus marker, or can appear in its canonical position (in-situ) with the focus marker. Ex-situ focus in Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ is syntactically and morphologically marked. It is syntactically marked through fronting. In addition, it is morphologically marked because the fronted constituent must be preceded by the focus particle. An example for ex-situ focus is given in (1). Here, as in most other examples, focus is pragmatically controlled for by means of question-answer pairs.

1)
Q.   á   nʉ̌m   wʉ́   zὰ   nǎná   ná'   fá   càŋ   á
      Foc   to   who that Nana PST give food   QM
       "To whom did Nana give food?"

A.   á   bə́ á nʉ̌m   nǎmí   zὰ   nǎná   ná'   fá   càŋ   lá
      it is Foc to   Nami that Nana PST give food   Def
       "It is TO NAMI that Nana gave food"

In situ focus, on the other hand, is not syntactically marked. In cases of new information foci there is neither a syntactic marker nor a morphological marker. Example (2) gives a typical question-answer pair to illustrate information focus.

2)
 Q.   nǎná   ná'   fá   càŋ   nʉ̌m   wʉ́
       Nana   PST give food   to   who
         "To whom did Nana give food?"

A.   nǎnɑ   ná'   fá   cáŋ   nʉ̌m   nǎmí
      Nana PST five food   to   Nami
        "Nana gave food to Nami"

The focused constituent can be preceded by the particle á as (3) and yields a contrastive focus reading.

3)
Q.   nǎná   ná'   fá   càŋ   á   nʉ̌m wʉ́
      Nana PST give food Foc to who
        "TO WHOM did Nana give food?"

A.   nǎná   ná'   fá   cáŋ   á   nʉ̌m   nǎmí
      Nana PST five food Foc to   Nami
        "Nana gave food TO NAMI"

The paper presents a discussion of the cross-linguistically better studied cases of the term subject and non-subject focus. The main point to be shown here is that there are three structural ways of realizing focus in Mə̀dʉ́mbὰ. We demonstrate that the particle which always precedes contrastive focused constituents is a focus marker. Building on some exhaustivity tests, we show that the focus marker *á* also yields exhaustive effects. The article also discusses the semantic relation and interpretation that results from the use of *á*-marked constituents with other focus particles such as the exclusive *ndá*: 'only'.