Morphological Focus Marking in Gùrùntùm (West Chadic)*

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The paper presents an in-depth study of focus marking in Gùrùntùm, a West Chadic language spoken in Bauchi Province of Northern Nigeria. Focus in Gùrùntùm is marked morphologically by means of a focus marker *a*, which typically precedes the focus constituent. Even though the morphological focus-marking system of Gùrùntùm allows for a lot of fine-grained distinctions in information structure (IS) in principle, the language is not entirely free of focus ambiguities that arise as the result of conflicting IS- and syntactic requirements that govern the placement of focus markers. We show that morphological focus marking with *a* applies across different types of focus, such as new-information, contrastive, selective and corrective focus, and that *a* does not have a second function as a perfectivity marker, as is assumed in the literature. In contrast, we show at the end of the paper that *a* can also function as a foregrounding device at the level of discourse structure.

Keywords: morphological focus marking, focus ambiguity, focus types, foregrounding

1 Introduction

In this paper, we present an in-depth study of focus marking in Gùrùntùm, a West Chadic language spoken in Bauchi province of Northern Nigeria. In the remainder of this section, we lay out our ideas on the notion of focus as an

information-structural (IS) category, and present some background information on Gùrùntùm. In section 2, we present the basic pattern of focus marking in Gùrùntùm: Focus is marked by means of a morphological focus marker *a*, which usually precedes the focus constituent. Section 3 discusses predicate focus on V/VP and focus on parts of complex NPs. We show that focus marking is subject to at least two syntactic restrictions that sometimes give rise to focus ambiguity. Section 4 shows that all types of focus (new-information, contrastive, selective, corrective) are marked alike by means of the focus marker *a*. Section 5 shows that *a* does not have a secondary function as a perfectivity marker despite claims to the contrary in the literature. In contrast, section 6 shows that *a* also functions as a foregrounding device at the level of discourse: It serves to highlight bounded events that contribute to the main story line of a narrative sequence. In this function, the *a*-marker often combines individual sentences into larger informational units. Section 7 concludes.

1.1 Focus as an information-structural category

We adopt the following definition of *focus*: *Focus* stands for that information component that is new or important in the sense that the speaker assumes it not to be shared by him and the hearer (Jackendoff 1972). We further assume, following Rooth (1985, 1992), that a focused constituent α ($[\alpha]_F$) invokes a set A of alternatives to α from which α is chosen. Depending on the interaction of α with its alternatives, a focus can be used in different ways, giving rise to several focus types: (i.) a focus expresses *new-information* if α introduces an element of A into the common ground and A is implicit (1a); (ii.) a focus is *corrective* if α replaces an element of A introduced into the common ground in the preceding context (cf.1b); (iii.) a focus is *selective* if α introduces an element of A into the

common ground, and α is chosen from a subset of A whose members have been explicitly mentioned in the preceding context (cf.1c). Focus is called *contrastive* if α juxtaposes an element of A to one or more explicitly mentioned elements of A that belong to the same syntactic category and the same semantic word field (cf.1d).

(1) a. (Which color did Peter paint his bicycle?) He painted it [blue]$_F$.
         α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink,…}
     b. (Peter painted his bicycle red.) No, he painted it [blue]$_F$.
         α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink,…}
     c. (Did Peter paint his bicycle red or blue?) He painted it [blue]$_F$.
         α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink,…}
     d. Paul painted his bicycle [red]$_F$, and Peter painted it [blue]$_F$.
         α = blue, A = {blue, red, green, pink,…}

1.2 Background information on Gùrùntùm

Gùrùntùm is a highly endangered language spoken by less than 10.000 people (in 1988) in the South West corner of Bauchi Province/Northern Nigeria. It belongs to the South Bauchi group of the West Chadic B-subbranch of the Chadic family (Afro-Asiatic phylum) (see Newman 1977). Linguistic information on Gùrùntùm is scarce. The two main sources are a grammatical sketch plus word list by Jaggar (1988), and a grammar by Haruna (2003). Our data were elicited from Al Haji Umaru Muhamed Gùrùntùm, an approximately 50-year old native speaker of the Gùrdùŋ-Kùukù dialect.

The neutral word order in Gùrùntùm is SVO, as shown in (2) (Haruna 2003:121). Aspectual information is generally marked by independent morphemes, such as the progressive marker *bà* in (2) (Haruna 2003:83).

Daniel Hole for comments and discussion.

(2)   Tí   bà   wúm   kwálíngálá.
       3SG   PROG chew colanut
       'He is chewing colanut.'

At the phonological level, Gùrùntùm is a tone language with two level tones H
(´) and L (`), plus a falling (^) and (very rarely) a rising tone combination
(Haruna 2003:26).

2   The Basic Pattern of Focus Marking in Gùrùntùm

This section presents the basic pattern of focus marking in Gùrùntùm. The
central observation is that focus in Gùrùntùm is morphologically marked by a
focus marker *a*: With focused terms, such as arguments and adjuncts, *a* precedes
the focus constituent. A second observation concerns the phonological
behaviour of the focus marker *a*: If *a* follows directly on the main verb, e.g. if it
marks the following object for focus, it cliticizes onto the verb prosodically.

In 2.1, we show that focus marking consistently occurs with all major
constituents. In 2.2, it is shown that focus marking is consistent across tenses or
aspects. In 2.3, we show that the focus constituent can occur *in situ* or *ex situ*, as
long as it is preceded by the focus marker *a*.

2.1   Consistent focus marking on all major constituents

The following data show that morphological focus marking by means of *a* is
consistent across categories in Gùrùntùm. Compare the neutral (all-new)
sentence in (2), with instances of narrow constituent focus in (3) and (4). (3a)
and (4a) illustrate subject focus, (3b) and (4b) illustrate focus on the direct
object. Throughout, we mark the focus constituent in the Gùrùntùm examples by
italics, and narrow constituent focus in the English paraphrases by capitals.

(3) a. **Á** *kwá* bà   wúm kwálíngálá-ì?
         FOC who PROG chew colanut-DEF
         'WHO is chewing the colanut?'

         Á *fúrmáyò* bà   wúm kwálíngálá.
         FOC fulani   PROG chew colanut
         'THE FULANI is chewing colanut.'

     b. **Á** *kããã* mài tí   bà   wúmì?   Tí bà   wúm-**á**   *kwálíngálá*.
         FOC what REL 3SG PROG chew   3SG PROG chew-FOC colanut
         'WHAT is he chewing?'   'He is chewing COLANUT.'

(4) a. **Á** *kwá* bà   nyòolí gʸòo-i?
         FOC who PROG write   message-DEF
         'WHO is writing the message?'

         Á *Hàfsá* bà   nyòolí gʸòo-i.
         FOC Hàfsá PROG   write   message-DEF
         'HAFSA is writing the message.'

     b. **Á** *kããã* mài tí   bà   nyòolí?   Tí bà   nyòol-**á**   *gʸòo*.
         FOC what REL 3SG PROG write   3SG PROG write-FOC message
         'WHAT is he writing?'   'He is writing A MESSAGE.'

Notice that the focus marker prosodically cliticizes onto the immediately preceding verb in (3b) and (4b). There are two kinds of evidence for cliticization of the focus marker on the preceding verb: First, verb and focus marker are prosodically phrased as one unit, and the following constituent as another. This means that if there is a pause in the clause, it will be located between focus marker and object, and not between verb and focus marker. Second, the final vowel of the verb is elided, as is normally the case before direct objects, and the focus marker is assigned the tone of the elided vowel, thus preserving the underlying tonal structure of the verb. In section 5.3, we will turn to the tonal behaviour of the focus marker *a* in more detail. It will be argued that the focus marker *a* is lexically unspecified for tone, and that its surface tone

systematically follows from its syntactic and phonological context. For the moment, suffice it to say that the surface tonal shape of *a* is not fixed in Gùrùntùm. In some cases, *a* carries a low tone, in others it carries a high tone.

The examples in (5) and (6) illustrate constituent focus on indirect objects and on locative adjuncts, respectively. Compare, once again, (6a) with focus on the locative *gã̀ã̀ shìndí* 'on the stone' with its neutral (all-new) counterpart without focus marker in (6b).

(5)   Tí   bà   wúr   má-ì   **à**   *kwá*?
        3SG PROG bring water-DEF FOC who
        'TO WHOM is he bringing the water?'

        Tí   bà   wúr   má-ì   **à**   *báa-sì*.
        3SG PROG bring water-DEF FOC father-his
        'He is bringing the water TO HIS FATHER.'

(6) a. Tí   bà   dáan-**à** *yâu*?   Tí   bà   dáan-**à** *gã̀ã̀ shìndí*.
        3SG PROG sit-FOC where   3SG PROG sit-FOC head stone
        'WHERE is he sitting?'   'He is sitting ON THE STONE.'

    b.   Tí   bà   dàa gã́ã̀ shìndí.
                                              3SG PROG sit head stone
                                              'He is sitting on the stone.'

So far, we have restricted our attention to focus marking on nominal categories such as arguments and adjuncts. In section 3, we will see that focus marking is also possible on predicative expressions, such as VP and V, with one additional complication.

2.2 Consistent focus marking across aspects/tenses

Focus in Gùrùntùm is consistently marked across aspects and tenses by means of the focus marker *a*. Focus marking in the progressive aspect has already been illustrated in (3) to (6). (7a-c) illustrate morphological focus marking in the

perfective aspect. In (7ab), focus is on the direct object. In (7c), focus is on the temporal adjunct.[1] Again, *a* cliticizes onto the immediately preceding verb.

(7) a. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí wúmì?   Tí wúm-**à** *kwálíngálá.*
        FOC what REL 3SG chew   3SG chew-FOC colanut
        'WHAT did he chew?'   'He chewed COLANUT.'

    b. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí vúní nvúrí?   Tí vún-**á** *lúurìn.*
        FOC what REL 3SG wash yesterday   3SG wash-FOC clothes
        'WHAT did she wash yesterday?'   'She washed CLOTHES.'

    c. Tí vún lúurìn-ì *vùr múkã̃ã*?   Tí vún-**à** *nvúrí.*
        3SG wash clothes-DEF when   3SG wash-FOC yesterday
        'WHEN did she wash the clothes?' 'She washed them YESTERDAY.'

Finally, (8ab) show focus marking in the future tense. In (8a), focus is on the direct object. In (8b), focus is on the subject.[2]

(8) a. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài Àdàmú à pánì?   **Á** *máa* mài Àdàmú à pánì.
        FOC what REL Adamu FUT carry   FOC water REL Adamu FUT carry
        'WHAT will Adamu carry?'   'Adamu will carry WATER.'

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[1] The temporal *wh*-pronoun *vùr múkã̃ã* 'when' represents an exception to the rule in that it is preceded by the *a*-marker.

[2] We have found no evidence for focus marking in subjunctive clauses, e.g. in complements to intensional predicates, cf. (i):

(i) Q: **A** *kã̃ã* mai ti ba ɓaa Hawwa ti pani?
        FOC what REL 3SG PROG want Hawwa 3SG carry
        'WHAT does he want Hawwa to carry?'

    A: Ti ɓaa Hawwa si ti pan *maa.*
        3SG want Hawwa COMP 3SG carry water
        'He wants Hawwa to carry WATER.'

Possibly, the absence of the *a*-marker has to do with a general impossibility of focus marking in intensional contexts. A similar situation obtains in Hausa, where (syntactic) focus marking is also blocked in subjunctive contexts (Tuller 1986).

b. **Á** *kwá* à   pân   má-ì ?   **Á**   *Àdàmú* à   pân   má-ì.
    FOC who FUT carry water-DEF   FOC Adamu   FUT carry water-DEF
    'WHO will carry the water?'   'ADAMU will carry the water.'

2.3 Realising focus in situ or ex situ

In addition to the focus marker *a*, a non-subject constituent can be marked by realizing it *ex situ* in a left-peripheral position. More frequently, though, the focus constituent remains in its base position (*in situ*). Both options are also attested for inherently focused *wh*-expressions in *wh*-questions (see also Haruna 2003:126ff.).[3]

In (9a), the focused object is realised *ex situ* in the *wh*-question and *in situ* in the corresponding answer. In (9b), we have the same *wh*-question, but this time with the focused *wh*-expression *in situ*.[4] The focus constituent in the corresponding answer is likewise *in situ*.

(9) a. **Á** *kã̌ã* mài tí   yáb ngʷáì?   Tí   yáb-**à**   *dòoróo* ngʷáì.
         FOC whatREL 3SG sell out   3SG sell-FOC goat   out
         'WHAT did he sell?'   'He sold A GOAT.'

     b. Tí   yáb-**à**   *kã̌ã* ngʷáì?   Tí   yáb-**à**   *gʸùurí* ngʷáì.
         3SG sell-FOC what   out   3SG sell-FOC millet out
         'WHAT did he sell?'   'He sold (THE) MILLET.'

In (10), the focus constituent is realised *ex situ* both in the *wh*-question and in the corresponding answer:

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[3] Exceptions are the *wh*-expressions *yàu* 'where' and *kə́mã̌ã* 'how', which can only occur in their base position at the end of the clause (cf. Haruna 2003:130f.).
[4] Other examples with in situ *wh*-expressions are found in (5), (6a), and (7c).

(10) **Á** *kã́ã* **mài** tí náa   wálì?
　　　FOC whatREL 3SG catch farm
　　　'WHAT did he catch on the farm?'

　　　Á *fúl* **mài** tí náa   wálì.
　　　FOC cow REL 3SG catch farm
　　　'It is a COW that he caught on the farm.'

The *ex situ* realization of non-subject foci employs a relative structure containing the relative marker *mài* (Jaggar 1988:181, Haruna 2003:121).

(11)　　Tí   tùu már **mài** wúr   móláŋ-y-à.
　　　　3PL pay man REL bring fish-DEF-FOC
　　　　'They paid the man that brought the fish.'

The presence of relative syntax argues for a cleft-structure for the *ex situ* focus-construction. Interestingly, the relative marker cannot occur with focused subjects, indicating that clefts are impossible with (focused) subjects in Gùrùntùm.[5] In (12) (tones not marked) the relative marker *mai* is absent both in the *wh*-question and in the corresponding answer.

(12)　**A** *kwa* basi gobilish-i?　　**A** *Hafsa* (*mai) basi gobilish-i.
　　　FOC who read book-DEF　　　　FOC Hafsa REL   read book-DEF
　　　'WHO read the book?'　　　　　'HAFSA read the book.'

It is worth pointing out that the absence of *mai* in (12) does not follow from a general impossibility of subject relativization, as witnessed by the subject relative clause in (13):

5　Parallel facts are reported for Margi (Hoffmann 1963). The reverse pattern is found in Hdi, where focused preverbal subjects are followed by a comment marker *ta*, whereas this marker is absent with all other fronted constituents (Frajzyngier 2002).

(13)   Gumar **mai** pan daabii ti   ba   maa bavuli.
        boy   REL carry basket 3SG PROG go   market
        'The boy that carried the basket is going to the market.'

Notice that the clefted constituent in *ex situ* constructions always has to be accompanied by the morphological focus marker *a*. In this respect, Gùrùntùm resembles intonation languages such as German or English, in which focus marking by means of accent can also, but need not be accompanied by clefting:

(14) *Context: What did Peter sell?*
     a.   He sold A CAT.
     b.   It was A CAT that he sold.

We conclude that the primary means of focus marking in Gùrùntùm is the morphological focus marker *a*. Concerning the motivation for clefting, this may have to do with pragmatic notions such as surprise, or the degree of (un)expectedness of a focus constituent in a particular discourse context: The more unexpected or surprising a focus constituent is in a particular context, the more likely is it to be realised *ex situ*. This explanation follows Hartmann and Zimmermann (t.a.), who argue that the *ex situ* realisation of focus constituents (or parts thereof) in Hausa, another West Chadic language, is best accounted for using the pragmatic notions of surprise or unexpectedness.[6] The data in (15) suggest that this pragmatic explanation may be correct for Gùrùntùm, too. In an elicitation study, our informant was asked to provide spontaneous answers to *wh*-questions of the form *What did Audu catch?* Interestingly, he chose the *in situ* variant with domestic animals, such as dog and horse (cf. 15a). With rare wild animals such

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[6]   That material which is more surprising, more important, or more relevant is marked in a special way is already coded in Gundel's (1988) *First Things First Principle*, Givón's (1988) principle *Attend to the most urgent task first*, or in Legendre's (2001) constraint *Align Noteworthy*.

as crocodile and leopard, on the other hand, he chose the *ex situ* variant (cf. 15b).

(15) a.   **Á**   *kã̱ã*   mài Audu náa?
      FOC what REL Audu catch
      'WHAT did Audu catch?'

      Tí ná-**a**   *dùu* / *dàa*.   *in situ*
      3SG catch-FOC horse / dog
      'Audu caught A HORSE / DOG.'

    b.   **Á**   *kã̱ã*   mài Áudù náa?
      FOC what REL Audu catch
      'WHAT did Audu catch?'

      Á   *gàmshí* / *gúù*   mài Áudù náa.   *ex situ*
      FOC crocodile / leopard REL Audu catch
      'Audu caught A CROCODILE / LEOPARD.'

Summing up, in addition to being marked by the focus marker *a*, non-subject foci can also be realised in a clefted structure. The obligatory presence of the morphological focus marker indicates the focus status of the constituent, whereas the trigger for clefting seems to be more pragmatic in nature and may have to do with the status of a non-subject focus constituent as surprising, noteworthy, or unexpected in a particular discourse situation.

2.4 Summary

The main observations of section 2 can be summarised as follows: First, constituent focus on arguments or adjuncts in Gùrùntùm is marked morphologically by a focus marker *a*, which precedes the focus constituent. Second, the focus marker *a* occurs in all aspects. Third, focus constituents can occur *in situ* or *ex situ* (in a cleft-like structure).

3   Focus Ambiguity and Syntactic Restrictions on Focus Marking

In this section, we consider how focus is marked on VP- or V-predicates and on parts of associative NPs. The central observation is that even though the morphological focus-marking system of Gùrùntùm allows for a lot of fine-grained distinctions in the focus structure, the language is not free of focus ambiguities. In particular, predicate focus on VP or V and object (OBJ-) focus are marked alike by placing the focus marker before the object. Likewise, focus on subparts of an associative NP and focus on the entire NPs are marked alike by putting the focus marker before the associative NP. We argue that the two instances of focus-ambiguity in Gùrùntùm follow from syntactic restrictions on the placement of the focus marker *a*.

3.1   Predicate Focus on V and VP

Turning to predicate focus first, (16a-c) show that OBJ-, V-, and VP-focus are marked in identical fashion, resulting in focus ambiguity. Even though the focus constituent is the VP in (16a) and the main verb in (16b), the focus marker does not precede the verb (phrase) as we would expect given the generalization from section 2.1. Instead, the focus marker follows the verb and precedes the direct object. The resulting structures are ambiguous to sentences with constituent focus on the direct object, as in (16c).

(16) a.   **Á**   *kã́ã*   mài tí   bà   pí?
          FOC what REL 3SG PROG do
          'WHAT is he doing?'

          Tí   bà   *ròmb-**á***   *g^wéì.*   *VP*
          3SG PROG gather-FOC seeds
          'He is GATHERING THE SEEDS.'

b. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà pí náa gʷéì?
FOC what REL 3SG PROG do with seeds
'WHAT is he doing with the seeds?'

Tí bà *ròmb-**á*** gʷéì.   *V*
3SG PROG gather-FOC seeds
'He is GATHERING the seeds.'

c. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà rómbì?
FOC what REL 3SG PROG gather
'WHAT is he gathering?'

Tí bà ròmb-**á** *gʷéì.*   *OBJ*
3SG PROG gather-FOC seeds
'He is gathering THE SEEDS.'

(17a-c) illustrate the same focus ambiguity with another example:

(17) a. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà pí?
FOC what REL 3SG PROG do
'WHAT is he doing?'

Tí bà *wúm-**á*** *kwálíngálá.*   *VP*
3SG PROG chew-FOC colanut
'He is CHEWING (A) COLANUT.'

b. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà pí náa kwálíngálá-ì?
FOC what REL 3SG PROG do to colanut-DEF
'WHAT is he doing with the colanut?'

Tí bà *wúm-**á*** kwálíngálá-ì.   *V*
3SG PROG chew-FOC colanut-DEF
'He is CHEWING the colanut.'

c. **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà wúmì?
FOC what REL 3SG PROG chew
'WHAT is he chewing?'

Tí   bà   wúm-**á**   *kwálíngálá.*   *OBJ*
3SG PROG chew-FOC   colanut
'He is chewing COLANUT.'

Interestingly, a parallel focus ambiguity between VP-, V-, and OBJ-focus is found in Tangale, a relatively close relative of Gùrùntùm from the West Chadic group, see Hartmann & Zimmermann (2004).

The ambiguity between VP-focus and OBJ-focus is found in a wide variety of languages[7] and can be accounted for in terms of focus projection from the focus-marked constituent, the object, to a focus constituent containing the focus exponent, the VP (see Selkirk 1984, 1995). The ambiguity between narrow focus on the verb and OBJ-focus, however, is a case that has – to the best of our knowledge – never been discussed in the literature. Nor is it accounted for by standard theories of focus (projection), such as Selkirk's (1984, 1995). The main question is why narrow focus on the verb should be marked on the following object, or alternatively why the focus marker cannot precede the verb in (16b) and (17b), as well as in the VP-focus cases in (16a) and (17a).

A potential solution, suggested by Büring (2006), is that the focus marker does indeed precede the verb or the VP at an earlier stage of the derivation. In the course of the derivation, the verb moves to a higher functional head F, leaving the focus marker behind in a position preceding the object. This potential derivation is sketched schematically in (18ab):

(18) a.   underlying structure:
            [$_{FP}$ SUBJ   F a [$_{VP}$ V OBJ]]

     b.   surface structure:
            [$_{FP}$ SUBJ   V+F a [$_{VP}$ t$_V$ OBJ]]

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[7] See e.g. Selkirk (1984, 1995) for English, Uhmann (1991) for German, Schwarz (2005) for Kikuyu, and Eaton (2005) for the Khoisan language Sandawe.

The structure in (18ab) is supported by the fact that such a process of verb movement to *Infl* has been proposed by Tuller (1992) for Tangale.

Tempting as the analysis in (18ab) may be, there are good arguments against it. First, verb movement to *Infl* in Tangale is argued to take place only in the perfective aspect because this is the only aspect without a preverbal aspectual marker. As a result, the verb has to move to *Infl* in order to enter into a checking relation with this functional head and pick up the required aspectual specification (Tuller 1992:311). In contrast, the *Infl*-position in (16) and (17) is lexically filled by the progressive auxiliary *bà*. Thus, if there was head movement of the verb in (16) and (17), leaving behind the focus marker as in (18), this movement would have to target a functional projection lower than *Infl*. We would need to stipulate this functional projection only for the sake of the movement account, somewhat reducing its appeal.

There is also a strong empirical argument against the movement account, which comes from the behaviour of sentences with narrow verb focus and a 3sg object pronoun. In Gùrùntùm, object pronouns are cliticized on the verb. Furthermore, 3sg object pronouns are covert, at least in the variant of Gùrùntùm that we investigated (see Haruna 2003 for variants in which 3sg object pronouns are overtly expressed). Interestingly, focus marking on the verb is absent with zero 3sg object pronouns, as shown in (19) and (20). Compare (19b) and (20b) with a full lexical object NP and the focus marker preceding the object NP, with (19a) and (20a), which contain a zero object pronoun and *no* focus marker:

(19) *Context: What is he doing with the car?*

    a.   Tí   bà   kr**í**.
           3SG PROG repair
           'He is REPAIRING (it).'

b. Tí   bà   kr-**á**   dùsó-ì.
    3SG PROG repair-FOC car-DEF
    'He is REPAIRING the car.'

(20) a. Ti   da   wasar laam-i-**a**   da, ti   kur**i**.[8]
         3SG NEG   fry   meat- DEF-FOC NEG 3SG cook
         'She did not fry the meat, she COOKED it.'

b. Ti   da   wasar laam-i-**a**   da, ti   kur-**a**   laam-i.
    3SG NEG   fry   meat-DEF-FOC NEG 3SG cook-FOC meat-DEF
    'She did not fry the meat, she COOKED the meat.'

The empirical generalization seems to be that focused verbs without a following overt nominal object cannot be focus-marked by *a*. The movement account does not capture this generalization because it would predict the focus marker to follow the verb in (19a) and (20a), as it does in (19b) and (20b).[9] Instead, we propose the following categorial restriction on focus marking in Gùrùntùm:

(21) FOCNOM:
      Focus Marking is licit only on nominal categories.

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[8] The preverbal negation marker in (20ab) appears to be not genuine to Gùrùntùm, but probably a structural borrowing from Hausa, in which negation is marked by the negative parenthesis *ba ... bá*. As for the VP-final focus marker in the negated first clause in (20ab), as well as in (31ab) below, it does not mark narrow focus on the verb. In sections 5 and 6, it will emerge that the *a*-marker can also serve to focus on, or highlight bounded events as a whole when in sentence-final position. The *a*-marker appears to fulfill the same function in (20ab).

[9] The absence of the focus marker in (19a) and (20a) does not follow from independent phonological reasons, as will emerge in sections 5.2.1 and 6. In principle, the *a*-marker can occur in sentence-final position, following the transitive verb and a zero object pronoun (see also fn. 8). Indeed, sentences such as (i) (example taken from Haruna 2003:78) are grammatical on a neutral interpretation (wide focus). Section 6 looks at sentence-final occurrences of *a* in more detail.

(i)   Tí   yíl-**à**.
          'He took (it) there.'

(21) requires that the focus marker *a* must precede an NP. Notice that a comparable bias for focus marking on non-verbal constituents is found in several other Chadic languages, see Hartmann & Zimmermann (2004) for details.[10] The restriction in (21) accounts for the absence of the focus marker in (19a) and (20a). Furthermore, it also accounts for the focus ambiguity between VP-, V-, and OBJ-focus with lexical object NPs, illustrated in (16) and (17). Because of (21), the focus marker *a* must precede the object in transitive VPs no matter whether object, verb, or VP is in focus.[11]

3.2 Associative NPs

A second instance of focus ambiguity is found with complex associative NPs of the form *N₁ of N₂*. It shows that narrow focus on the N_2-part and wider focus on the entire associative NP are marked in identical fashion: The focus-marker must precede the complex NP, no matter whether the complex expression *N₁ of N₂* is focused (22-Q1), or just N_2 (22-Q2). Again, an analogous ambiguity is found in Tangale (Kenstowicz 1985).

(22) Q1: **Á** *kã̃ã* mài tí bà pí méerè?
        FOC what REL 3SG PROG do theft
        'WHAT is he stealing?'

   Q2: **Á** [dòoré-i *kwá*] mài tí bà pí méerè?
        FOC goat-DEF who REL 3SG PROG do theft
        'WHOSE goat is he stealing?'

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[10] Observe that (21) is not violated by instances of focus marking on locative adverbials, such as *gã̃ã shìndí* 'on the stone' in (6a). As in other Chadic languages, Gùrùntùm has few prepositions proper: Locative and temporal relations are typically expressed by means of nominal expressions such as *gã̃ã*, which literally translates as 'head'. Consequently, the occurrence of the *a*-marker before the relational noun in locative adverbials is expected.

[11] All by itself, (21) does not explain why the focus marker *a* cannot occur before the subject NP with V- or VP-focus. Its obligatory occurrence before the object NP with V- and VP-focus follows from an additional locality principle, which requires a focus to be marked on, or as close as possible to the focus constituent, see Zimmermann (2006).

    A: Á   [dòoré-i *rèená*] (mài tí   bà   pí méerè).
          FOC goat-DEF king   (REL 3SG PROG do theft)
          'He is stealing THE KING'S GOAT. / He is stealing THE KING'S goat.'

In view of the data in (22), we propose a second descriptive restriction on focus marking in Gùrùntùm in (23):

(23)   FOCNP$_{MAX}$:
          If the focus constituent is part of a complex NP, focus must be marked on the complex NP.

We can see at least two possible reasons for why (23) should hold, remaining neutral on which one is more adequate in the absence of further empirical evidence. First, it could be that the nominal parts of the associative NP are not NPs, but nominal heads. An N-N structure for structurally analogous associative NPs has been proposed for Bole by Schuh and Gimba (2004). If this is the right analysis for associative NPs, FOCNP$_{MAX}$ in (23) would generalize to FOCXP, which says that focus can only be marked on maximal projections. The assumption of FOCXP is motivated by the fact that there is no evidence for focus marking on sub-phrasal constituents, for instance on aspectual markers, in our corpus, nor is focus on subconstituents attested in other Chadic languages (see Hartmann & Zimmermann t.a.).

      Second, (23) could follow from prosodic requirements on focus marking. In particular, it could be a consequence of Truckenbrodt's prosodic constraint WRAP (Truckenbrodt 1999), which requires that lexical XPs not be 'split up' into several prosodic phrases. Assume for instance that the focus marker *a* is placed at the prosodic boundary preceding the focus constituent in the normal case. Now, WRAP says that if a maximal projection XP contains another maximal projection YP, both are mapped onto a single prosodic domain. In the case of associative NPs, this would mean that the smaller NP$_2$ and the containing

NP_{max} are mapped onto a single prosodic phrase, which is then preceded by the focus marker. An immediate problem with this account arises in connection with VP-focus, as discussed in section 3.1. There, it was shown that the focus marker does not precede the VP, but the object NP, which is contained inside the VP. In other words, WRAP would be violated because the NP is not mapped onto a single prosodic phrase together with the containing VP. One way out of this dilemma is to assume that WRAP is a violable constraint that is outranked by FOCNOM in (21) in the case of VP-focus. We will take up the issue of violable constraints on focus marking in the next sub-section.

3.3 On the interaction of IS-constraints and structural constraints in focus marking

In the preceding two sub-sections, we have encountered two facts about the distribution of the Gùrùntùm focus marker *a*, which are surprising when seen from the perspective of European intonation languages. First, the focus marker *a* does sometimes not precede the focus constituent. This happens with instances of V- and VP-focus. Second, the focus marker is sometimes completely absent. This happens with instances of narrow verb focus in the presence of a pronominalized (zero) object.

As a solution to these puzzles, we suggested that the distribution of the focus marker *a* is subject to *information-structural* as well as *syntactic* constraints with sometimes conflicting requirements. A likely candidate for an information-structural constraint is Focus Prominence (*FP*, see e.g. Schwarzschild 1999, Büring 2001, Selkirk 2004), which is satisfied by the focus marker *a* on the focus constituent in Gùrùntùm.

(24)   FP:
         The focus constituent must be made prominent.

In addition, there are the two syntactic constraints FOCNOM and FOCNP$_{MAX}$ (where FOCNP$_{MAX}$ is possibly a special instance of FocXP, or a derived effect of the more general prosodic constraint WRAP), which interact with FP in determining the position of the focus marker.

This is reminiscent of intonation languages where the placement of the focus-marking pitch accent is also subject to interacting, and sometimes conflicting information-structural, phonological, and syntactic constraints (cf. Büring 2001, Büring & Gutiérrez-Bravo 2001). The main difference between Gùrùntùm on the one hand, and intonation languages like German (as explicated by Büring) on the other, is that the focus marker need not be located directly on the focused constituent in Gùrùntùm, but that it can shift to the following nominal constituent, e.g. with predicate focus. In extreme cases, focus marking may even be completely absent. This happens with narrow verb focus when there is no overt object NP to serve as the carrier of the focus marker *a* in accordance with FOCNOM in (21). The cross-linguistic differences follow directly if we assume a different ranking of the IS-constraint FP and the structural constraints in the two languages. In intonation languages, the IS-constraint FP in (24) is undominated, hence never violated (Schwarzschild 1999, Büring 2001), and outranks all structural constraints governing the placement of the pitch accent. As a result, a focus constituent is always marked prosodically by means of a pitch accent somewhere on the constituent. In Gùrùntùm, on the other hand, it is the structural constraint FOCNOM in (21), which is undominated, hence outranking the IS-constraint FP (and possibly other structural constraints, such as WRAP, see the end of the preceding sub-section). The cross-linguistic differences in ranking are illustrated schematically in (25):

(25) a.   Ranking in Gùrùntùm: FOCNOM >> (WRAP) >>   FP
     b.   Ranking in intonation languages: FP >> … structural constraints

Summing up, the dislocation or absence of the focus marker *a* in Gùrùntùm follows from the fact that structural constraints outrank the IS-constraint FP, which requires that focus must be marked on the focus constituent.[12]

4   Focus Marking and Focus Types

This section discusses the grammatical realisation of various focus types, as introduced in section 1. It is shown that the focus marker *a* marks all types of constituent focus, such as new information focus, selective focus, corrective focus, and contrastive focus. Furthermore, *a* occurs in predicative constructions. In sum, Gùrùntùm provides evidence for a uniform category of constituent focus that is unanimously marked by the focus marker *a*. Moreover, the discussion shows that there is no 1:1-correlation between a specific focus type and its syntactic realisation as *ex situ* or *in situ*. Instead, most focus types can be realised either *ex situ* or *in situ*, depending on the pragmatic objectives of the speaker (see section 2.3 above). Finally, we will turn to instances of presentational focus, showing that these also involve an *a*-marker, but that they differ from the other focus types in another respect.

4.1   New information focus

As shown in section 2.3, new-information foci can be realised either *in situ* or *ex situ*, as long as they are preceded by the focus marker *a*. (26ab) are repeated from (15ab) for convenience:

(26) a.   **Á**   *kã́ã̃*   mài Áudù náa?   Tí   ná-**a**   *dùu.*   *in situ*
          FOC whatREL Audu catch   3SG catch-FOC horse
          'WHAT did Audu catch?'   'Audu caught A HORSE.'

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[12] In practice, the matter is of course more complicated than sketched here. See Zimmermann (2006) for a more articulate OT-style analysis of focus marking in West Chadic.

b. **Á** *kã́ã* mài Áudù náa?   **Á** *gàmshí* mài Áudù náa.   *ex situ*
    FOC whatREL Audu catch   FOC crocodile REL Audu catch
    'WHAT did Audu catch?'   'Audu caught A CROCODILE.'

4.2 Selective focus

Instances of selective focus, which are used to choose from an explicitly given list of alternatives, are likewise preceded by the focus marker *a*. Again, the focus constituent is realised either *in situ* (cf. 27) or *ex situ* (cf. 28):

(27)   Nvúrí   **á** *kã́ã* mài Mài Dáwà shí? *Yáà*   kóo **á** *móláŋ?*
       yesterday FOC what REL Mai Dawa eat   chicken or FOC fish
       'Yesterday, WHAT did Mai Dawa eat? CHICKEN or FISH?'

       Nvúrí   Mài Dáwà sh-**á** *yáà*, bà **á** *móláŋ* dà. *in situ*
       yesterday Mai Dawa eat-FOC chicken, NEG FOC fish   NEG
       'Yesterday Mai Dawa ate CHICKEN, not FISH.'

(28)   Mài Dáwà bà   sh-**á** *yáà*   kóo **á** *móláŋ?*
       Mai Dawa PROG eat-FOC chicken or FOC fish
       'Is Mai Dawa eating CHICKEN or FISH?'

       Á *yáà*   mài Mài Dáwà bà   shí.   *ex situ*
       FOC chicken REL Mai Dawa PROG eat
       'Mai Dawa is eating CHICKEN.'

4.3 Corrective focus

Instances of corrective focus, which are used to correct a previous speaker's statement, are also preceded by the focus marker *a*. Again, the focus constituent is realised either *in situ* (cf. 29) or *ex situ* (cf. 30):[13]

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[13] As already mentioned in fn. 8, the VP- or sentence-final occurrence of the focus marker in (29A) and (30A) does not indicate narrow focus, but rather seems to focus on the perfective event as a whole. See sections 5.2.1 and 6 for more discussion.

(29) A: Músá yâb fúl-**à**   nvùrì.
          Musa buy cow-FOC yesterday
          'Yesterday, Musa bought a cow.'

     B: Á'à, tí   yáb-**à**   *mbóorò,* bà   **á** *fúl* dá.   *in situ*
          no   3SG buy-FOC sheep   NEG(Ha.) FOC cow   NEG
          'No, he bought A SHEEP, not A COW.'

(30) A: Hàwwá pân yáŋsí ìsh-**à**.
          Hawwa carry wood fire-FOC
          'Hawwa carried fire wood.'

     B: Á'à, bà   **á** *yáŋsí ìshí* mài tí   pân dà, ...
          no   NEG(Ha.) FOC wood fire REL 3SG carry NEG, ...
          'No, it is not FIREWOOD that she carried, ...

          ... **á**   *máa* mài tí   pánì.   *ex situ*
          ... FOC water REL 3SG carry.
          ... it is WATER that she carried.'

4.4 Contrastive focus

Instances of contrastive focus, in which two elements of the same syntactic category and semantic word field are juxtaposed, are likewise preceded by the focus marker *a*:

(31)   Ti da   yab *ful*-**a**   da, ti yab-**a**   *duu*.
          3SG NEG buy cow-FOC NEG 3SG buy-FOC horse
          'He did not buy a cow, he bought A HORSE.'

4.5 Predicative constructions

The focus marker *a* also shows up in verbless predicative constructions, in which it precedes the predicate:[14]

(32) a. Bíin-ì   **á**   *gàarì.*   b. Mbáldà-í **á**   *gí mbàlí.*
          house-DEF FOC old   lion-DEF FOC of red
          'The house is OLD.'   'The lion is RED.'

The occurrence of *a* in these contexts is not unexpected given that – in the unmarked case – the predicate in predicative constructions constitutes a new-information focus. After all, the predicate specifies a hitherto unknown property of a known entity, the topic. In Gùrùntùm, then, the focus status of the predicate is consistently marked by *a*. See also Green (2004) for a parallel claim that the particle *nee/cee* in Hausa predicative constructions indicates focus on the predicate.

Summing up so far, Gùrùntùm provides ample evidence for a uniform category of constituent focus: All types of constituent focus are marked alike by means of the focus marker *a*. The next subsection deals with a slightly different type of focus, namely with presentational focus in all-new sentences, which is marked in a slightly different way.

4.6 Presentational focus

Presentational focus is found with all-new utterances that depict a temporally or spacially bounded scene or situation. In Gùrùntùm, presentational constructions also feature an *a*-marker:

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[14] Predicates in Gùrùntùm cannot only be nominal, but also adjectival, such as *gàarì* 'old' in (32a). The occurrence of the focus marker *a* before adjectives is captured by the categorical constraints FOCNP in (21) on the common assumption that adjectives have the feature specification [+N, +V].

(33)   Zí gí mài tí   wáani dà   tí   vùl bà   wùun-**à**.
        PL of REL 3PL healthy NEG 3PL many place medicine-FOC
        'There are many patients in the hospital.'
        (lit.: Those that are not healthy, they are many in the hospital.)
        (*wùunu* 'medicine')

These instances of presentational focus differ in two respects from the other kinds of focus that we have seen so far. First, the *a*-marker does not precede the focus constituent, but it occurs in sentence-final position. Second, presentational constructions do not involve narrow focus on a single constituent, but rather wide focus over the entire clause. Below in section 6, we will argue that the two properties are related. We will further argue that the *a*-marker has a double function as a foregrounding device: At the sentential level, it serves to mark the focus constituent, which it precedes. At the supra-sentential level of discourse structure, on the other hand, it follows on all-new clauses and marks these as foregrounded, more prominent, or more relevant relative to other parts of the discourse, in the sense of Hopper (1979).

5   On *a's* Double Role as a Marker of Focus and Perfectivity

Before turning to the *a*-marker's double role as a foregrounding device in section 6, it is necessary to look at another purported function of the *a*-marker. Jaggar (1988) and Haruna (2003) treat *a* in perfective clauses as a perfectivity marker. Opposing this view, we argue that *a* never functions as a perfectivity marker, but always as a foregrounding or focusing device. The observed affinity between (sentence-final) *a*-marking and perfectivity will then follow from a general affinity between foregrounding and perfectivity, as discussed in Hopper (1979). Section 5.1 sketches Jaggar's and Haruna's analysis of *a* as a perfectivity marker. In section 5.2, we present syntactic and semantic evidence in favour of our analysis of *a* as a focus marker in perfective contexts as well. The section

concludes with an aside on the tonal shape of the focus marker *a*, which depends on the phonological context. In particular, *a* is not always low-toned when it occurs in perfective clauses, contradicting claims in Jaggar (1988) and Haruna (2003).

5.1 *A* **as a perfectivity marker**

Jaggar (1988) and Haruna (2003) argue that perfective aspect is marked by a low-toned suffix *–à* in Gùrùntùm. Consequently, they would analyse the *a*-suffix in the perfective examples in (7) and (9) above as a perfectivity marker, rather than as a focus marker. The paradigm in (34) shows that *a* would be peculiar as an aspectual marker in that it would be the only one that is suffixed to the verb (Haruna 2003:86), see (34d). In contrast, the markers of progressive (*bà*), future (*á*) and habitual (*á ɗí*) aspect, respectively, all precede the verb (cf. (34a-c)):

(34) a.   Tí **bà**   wùmì.   'He is chewing.'
  b.   Tá **á**   wùmì.   'He will chew.'
              (*tá* < *tí* before *á*, see Haruna 2003:84)
  c.   Tá **á ɗí** wùmì.   'He usually chews.'
  d.   Tí   wúm-**à**.   'He chewed.'

A second peculiar property of the purported perfectivity marker *a* is that it can be suffixed 'either to the verb stem or to a VP-final constituent' (Haruna 2003:86, see also Jaggar 1988). The different possibilities for the distribution of *a* in perfective contexts according to Haruna and Jaggar are schematized in (35):

(35) a.   SUBJ [VP V-a (OBJ)]
  b.   SUBJ [VP V   OBJ-a]
  c.   SUBJ [VP V   ADJ-a]

In the following, we provide evidence against this analysis of the *a*-marker in perfective clauses. Rather, we argue that *a* is a focus marker in perfective contexts, too.

5.2 *A* as a focus marker in perfective contexts

There are two kinds of evidence, syntactic and semantic, against the analysis of *a* as a perfectivity marker, and for the analysis of *a* as a focus marker in perfective contexts.

5.2.1 Syntactic evidence

A closer look at *a* in perfective clauses shows that its syntactic distribution depends directly on information-structure, namely on focus. The *a*-marker must precede the focus constituent in the perfective, as it does in all other aspects. In (36a) and (37a), *a* precedes the focused direct object, cliticizing onto the preceding verb. This corresponds to the configuration in (35a). In (36b) and (37b), in contrast, *a* precedes a focused locative phrase and (optionally) cliticizes onto the preceding direct object.

(36) a.   **Á**   *kã̃ã*   mài tí   vúní nvùrì?   Tí   vún-**á**   *lúurìn*.
         FOC what   REL 3SG wash yesterday   3SG wash-FOC clothes
         'WHAT did she wash yesterday?'   'She washed CLOTHES.'

     b.   Tí   vún lúurìn-í-**à**   *yáù*?
         3SG wash clothes-DEF-FOC where
         'WHERE did she wash the clothes?'

         Tí   vún lúurìn-í-**à**   *bíiŋ*.
         3SG wash clothes-DEF-FOC home
         'She washed the clothes AT HOME.'

(37) a.   **Á**   *kã̃ã*   mài tí   pánì â   díngà-i?
         FOC what   REL 3SG take   from shelf-DEF
         'WHAT did he take from the shelf?'

Tí pán-**à** *súurí* â díngà-i.
3SG take-FOC knife from shelf-DEF
'He took A KNIFE from the shelf.'

b. Tí pân súurí **à** *yâu*?
3SG take knife FOC where
'WHERE did he take the knife from?'

Tí pân súurí-**à** *gã̃ã díngà*.
3SG take knife-FOC on shelf
'He took the knife FROM THE SHELF.'

The analysis of *a* as an aspectual marker of perfectivity has nothing to say about the different placement of *a* in the a- and b-sentences. The analysis of *a* as a focus marker, on the other hand, directly accounts for these distributional differences.

An even stronger argument for the analysis as a focus marker comes from the behaviour of perfective clauses with subject focus in (38). It shows that, whenever the subject is focused, *a* appears sentence-initially *and not as a suffix on V or VP*. That is, in perfective sentences with subject focus there is no *a*-suffix on verb or VP at all.

(38) a. **Á** *kwá* wûm kwálíngálá-ì?   **Á** *rèená* wûm kwálíngálá-ì.
FOC who chew colanut-DEF   FOC king chew colanut-DEF
'WHO chewed the colanut?'   'THE KING chewed the colanut.'

b. **Á** *kwá* ròmbí g^{w}éì?   **Á** *zí bóŋ* ròmbí g^{w}éì.
FOC who gather seeds   FOC PL child gather seed
'WHO gathered the seeds?'   'THE CHILDREN gathered the seeds.'

Again, the analysis of *a* as an aspectual marker cannot account for the absence of an *a*-suffix in perfective clauses with subject focus, whereas it follows directly on the analysis of *a* as a focus marker.[15]

A final observation concerning the distribution of *a* in perfective clauses is that sentence-final occurrences of *a* are restricted to instances of all-new or sentential focus.

(39) a. Tí   vún   lúurìn   nvùrì-**à**.   all-new
         3SG wash clothes yesterday-FOC
         'She washed clothes yesterday.'

   b. Tí   pân   súurí gãã díngà-**à**.   all-new
       3SG took knife on   dinga-FOC
       'He took the knife from the shelf.'

   c. Tí   náa   fúul à wál-**à**   / à gãã nvúrí-**à**.   all-new
       3SG catch cow   at farm-FOC / at head day-FOC
       'He caught a cow at the farm / in the morning.'

   d. Tí   yâb gʸùurí ngʷái-**à**.   all-new
       3SG sell millet out-FOC
       'He sold the millet.'

The situation is entirely parallel to that found with the all-new presentational focus constructions in (33) in section 4.6. In section 6, we will therefore argue that the sentence-final *a*s in (39) are likewise focus markers attached to the

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[15] Interestingly, Jaggar (1988:181) cites an example of the same form as (38ab). In (i), there is no *a*-suffix in the presence of subject focus. Instead, the *a*-marker precedes the focused subject:

(i) Q: A kʷaa pan ndanshi bàn gìdi?   A: A bà-sì   pan-di.
        FOC who carry hoe   into room   FOC father-his carried-it
        'WHO (sg.) carried the hoe in the room?'   'HIS FATHER carried it (in).'

predicate or the clause, which serve to *foreground* a bounded event denoted by the perfective clause in the sense of Hopper (1979).[16]

5.2.2 Semantic evidence

The semantic evidence for analysing *a* as a focus marker also in the perfective aspect comes from the interpretation of perfective sentences containing adverbial quantifiers, such as *always* or *usually*, the interpretation of which is known to be sensitive to the focus/background structure of a clause (see Lewis 1975, Rooth 1985, 1992, Partee 1991, von Fintel 1994, Herburger 2000 among many others). We show that the position of the *a*-marker affects the truth-conditions of clauses with adverbial quantifiers in Gùrùntùm in line with what semantic theories would predict if *a* were indeed a focus marker.

The sentences in (40) illustrate the focus sensitivity of adverbial quantifiers for English:

(40) a.   John always ate RICE$_{FOC}$.
          'Always, if John ate something, he ate RICE.'

b.   JOHN$_{FOC}$ always ate rice.
     'Always, if somebody ate rice, it was JOHN.'

c.   [John always ate RICE]$_{FOC}$.
     'Always, in a given (contextually-specified) situation, John ate rice.'

The empirical generalization is that the focused material, which is marked by a nuclear accent, must not occur in the restrictor, but in the nuclear scope of the adverbial quantifier.

The sentences in (41) show that a different position of *a* in perfective clauses has an analogous effect on the interpretation of adverbial quantifiers in

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Gùrùntùm.[17] In (41a), *a* precedes the direct object and the latter is interpreted in the nuclear scope of the adverbial quantifier, as witnessed by the consultant's comment in brackets. In (41b), *a* precedes the subject, and the subject is interpreted in the nuclear scope of the quantifier. Finally, in (41c), *a* attaches to a full (core) sentence, *tí shí gànyáhúà*, which is consequently mapped onto the nuclear scope in its entirety.

(41) a. Kóo   vùr mə́ká̋ã̀ Mài Dáwà sh-**á**   *gànyáhú*.   *OBJ*
         every when   Mai Dawa eat-FOC rice
         'Always Mai Dawa used to eat RICE. ("this is about what Mai Dawa
         ate")' = Always, if Mai Dawa ate something, it was rice.

     b. Kóo   vùr mə́ká̋ã̀ **á**   *Mài Dáwà* shí   gànyáhú.   *SUBJ*
         every when   FOC Mai Dawa eat   rice
         'It is only MAI DAWA that always used to eat rice.'
         = Always, if somebody ate rice, it was Mai Dawa.

     c. Kóo   vùr-mə́ká̋ã̀ *Mài Dáwà sái   tí   shí gànyáhú*-**à**.   *Clause*
         every when   Mai Dawa then 3SG eat rice-FOC
         'Always, Mai Dawa used to eat RICE.' = Always, in a given
         (contextually-specified) situation, Mai Dawa ate rice.'

The perfective clauses in (41) show that all instances of *a*, including sentence-final *a*, behave alike: The syntactic position of *a* has an effect on the semantic interpretation. The a-marked constituent is interpreted in the nuclear scope of the adverbial quantifier. Given the parallel facts observed for English, the differences in interpretation between (41a-c) will follow directly if *a* is treated as a focus marker.

Summing up, the preceding two sub-sections have shown that the distribution of *a* in perfective clauses and its interpretive effects follow from

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[17] The first line of the paraphrases cites the paraphrase/translation provided by our native speaker.

focus structure. Based on this, we therefore conclude that *a* is a focus marker in perfective clauses, too. A further consequence of our reanalysis is that perfectivity in Gùrùntùm is not marked by a perfective suffix. Rather, it is marked by zero marking, i.e. by the absence of an overt aspectual marker, which is accompanied by a tonal change in the stem vowel of the verb from L to H with certain verb classes (Haruna 2003: 77). From a cross-linguistic perspective, the marking of perfectivity by the *absence* of any overt morphological marking is not restricted to Gùrùntùm. See e.g. Hyman et al. (2002) on zero perfective marking in Leggbó. Finally, we would like to contend that the affinity of focus marking on sentences to perfectivity or completeness observed in Gùrùntùm (cf. 39a-d), is not uncommon in the languages of the world, and may well reflect a universal tendency, see Hopper (1979). We will return to this point in section 6.

5.3   Tonal properties of *a*

Before going on, we turn to the tonal properties of *a* in perfective clauses. Even though a comprehensive study of the prosodic system of Gùrùntùm is still lacking, the evidence concerning the tonal shape of *a* is sufficiently robust to warrant a few conclusions. In particular, we show that *a* does not always carry low tone when it appears on V or VP in perfective clauses, contrary to claims in Jaggar (1988) and Haruna (2003). This shows at least that there is no low-toned perfective suffix *–à*. The varying tones on *a* do not argue against an analysis as an aspectual marker *per se*. However, the *a*-marker in perfective clauses resembles the focus marker *a* in other contexts in that both have no fixed tonal appearance. Given this similarity in tonal behaviour, the varying tonal shape of *a* constitutes indirect phonological evidence for the analysis of *a* as a focus marker in perfective contexts, too.

The relevant generalisations concerning the tonal appearance of *à* in perfective clauses can be summarised as follows. First, with HH verbs such as

vúní 'wash', and LH verbs such as *ròmbí* 'gather', *a* carries H tone if a complement follows the verb.

(42) a. Tí vún-**á** lúurìn.   b. Tí ròmb-**á** g^wéì.
          3SG wash-FOC clothes   3SG gather-FOC seeds
          'He washed CLOTHES.'   'He gathered SEEDS.'

Second, with monosyllabic H verbs, such as *shí* 'eat', *a* also carries H tone.

(43) Nvúrí   Mài Dáwà sh-**á** yáà,   bà   á   móláŋ dà.
       yesterday Mai Dawa eat-FOC chicken, NEG(Ha.) FOC fish   NEG
       'Yesterday Mai Dawa ate CHICKEN, not FISH.'

Third, *a* carries L tone with HL verbs, such as *wúmì* 'chew' or *yábì* 'sell'.

(44) Tí wúm-**à** kwálíngálá.
       3SG chew-FOC colanut
       'He chewed COLANUT.'

Fourth, *a* always carries L tone when it occurs at the right edge of VP, i.e. when it occurs on verbs without overt complements, or when it occurs on the last constituent within the VP:

(45) a. Tí vún lúurìn-í-**à**]_{VP} *bíiŋ*.   (= (36b))
          3SG wash clothes-DEF-FOC house
          'She washed the clothes AT HOME.'

     b. Tí yâb g^yùurí ng^wái-**à**]_{VP}.   (= (39d))
          3SG sell millet out-FOC
          'He sold the millet.'

Based on evidence from other West Chadic languages[18], we tentatively assume that the right edge of VP constitutes a prosodic phrase boundary in Gùrùntùm, thus separating the VP from any optional locative or temporal adjuncts.

Finally, in phrase-initial position, *a* carries H tone before focused non-*wh* NPs (46a). In contrast, *a*'s tonal realization (although still quite high) is not as high as that of following *wh*-expressions, which are always realized at a very high pitch level. There are at least two possible phonological explanations for this. Either *a* carries an initial boundary tone H%, which is phonetically realized lower than the ideophonic extra high tone of the *wh*-expression. Or *a* carries no phonological tone whatsoever, and its medium to high phonetic realization follows from its integration into the general intonational contour on the way to the extra high tone. In the absence of the required data for an evaluation of these possibilities, we mark all phrase-initial occurrences of *a* with H tone (46b).

(46) a. $_\Phi$[á NP$_{FOC}$]   b. $_\Phi$[á *wh*$_{FOC}$]

Setting aside phrase-initial occurrences of *a*, the different tonal realization of the *a*-marker in non-initial position seems to follow from a number of general prosodic processes that are operative in the language. First, the focus marker *a* does not carry inherent lexical tone. Second, in VP-final or sentence-final position (cf. (45)), an L%-boundary tone (Pierrehumbert 1980, Beckman & Pierrehumbert 1986) associates with the toneless focus marker *a*, as illustrated in (47):

(47)   [… - à]$_\Phi$
                    L%

Third, if *a* cliticizes onto the verb and is not located in phrase-final position, it associates with the tone of the final vowel of the verb, which it replaces after

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vowel elision. This is illustrated schematically in (48) for four different tonal patterns. Recall from section 2.1 that the final vowel of the verb is elided before a following object, while the tone of the vowel is preserved.

(48) a.   shí   + a ➔ sh**á**   'eat'
          H   H

     b.   ròmbí + a ➔ ròmb**á**   'gather'
          L H   L   H

     c.   vúní   + a ➔ vún**á**   'wash'
          H H   H H

     d.   wúmì + a ➔ wúm**à**   'chew'
          H L   H   L

That tone is indeed preserved under vowel elision can be seen from forms such as *wûm* in (38a) and *pân* and *yâb* in (39bd), respectively, where the H tone on the remaining vowel combines with the L-tone of the elided vowel to form a falling HL-sequence.

     Summing up, although many questions remain, we have shown that the tone of the *a*-marker in perfective contexts is not constant, but varies depending on its tonal context. Since the focus marker *a* also varies in tone, we take this as additional evidence in favour of our analysis of *a* as a focus marker in all aspects, including the perfective.

6   Sentence Final *a* as a Foregrounding Device

Let us finally turn to the remaining puzzle concerning the nature of sentence-final *a* in presentational constructions (see section 4.6) and in perfective clauses (see section 5.2.1). The puzzle is presented in section 6.1. After a brief look at a number of parallel facts in Malay in section 6.2, we will propose an analysis of

the sentence-final *a* in section 6.3. In particular, we argue that sentence-final *a* functions as a foregrounding device at the discourse level, in the sense of Hopper (1979).

6.1   The puzzle

At the end of section 5.2.1, it was shown in connection with (39ab), repeated as (49), that all-new sentences in the perfective aspect are explicitly marked by the focus marker *a* in sentence-final position.

(49) a.   Tí   vún   lúurìn   nvùrì-**à**.
          3SG wash clothes yesterday-FOC
          'She washed clothes yesterday.'

     b.   Tí   pân   súurí   gã́ã̃   díngà-**à**.
          3SG took knife on   dinga-FOC
          'He took the knife from the shelf.'

Notwithstanding the unusual position of the *a*-marker, which precedes the focus constituent in all other contexts, its presence in (49) seems to owe to the fact that the entire sentence is in focus. Somewhat surprisingly, though, all-new sentences are unmarked in all other aspects, for instance in the progressive (50a), the future (50b) and the habitual (50c).

(50) a.   Tí   bà   nyóolì   góobílìshí.
          3SG PROG write   letter
          'He is writing a letter.'

     b.   Tá-a   má   íyà   tɘ́u-gàná   gáb.   (Haruna 2003:91)
          3SG-FUT go   after moment   small
          'She will go after a short while.'

     c.   Tá-a   dì   wárí.   (Haruna 2003:89)
          3SG   HAB come
          'She usually comes.'

The picture becomes even more complicated if we look at presentational sentences again, which also occur with a sentence-final *a*, see (51ab) (and section 4.6). If the *a*-marker appears in a non-final position (cf. (51c)), or if it is absent altogether (cf. (51d)), presentational sentences are ungrammatical.

(51) a.   Zí dùusó vùl   gã́ã nʸúngsù kwàr-**à**.
          PL car   many on   street   today-FOC
          'There are many cars on the road today.'

   b.   Kwàrì zí dùusó vùl   gã́ã nʸúngsù-**à**.
        today PL car   many on   street-FOC
        'There are many cars on the road today.'

   c. * Kwar-**a** zi duuso vul gã nʸungsu.

   d. * Kwari zi duuso vul gã nʸungsu.

The puzzle can be summarized as follows: Why would the marking of sentence focus be restricted to perfective and presentational sentences? Before we will propose a tentative solution to this question, we present some facts from Malay, which features a morphological focus marker that resembles the *a*-marker in Gùrùntùm in an intriguing way.

6.2 Focus and foregrounding in Malay

Malay has a morpheme *lah*, which is traditionally described as a marker for focus and perfectivity. In his extremely insightful article, Hopper (1979) derives the at first sight mysterious connection between focus and perfectivity from a unified analysis of *lah* as a foreground marking device. In this section, we present Hopper's analysis in some detail, as it will lay the ground for our analysis of the *a*-marker in Gùrùntùm.

First, the particle *lah* is used for marking *ex situ* focus constituents, see (52) (Hopper's example (1)) where fronting of the focused direct object gives rise to a relative construction.

(52)   Anjing-lah yang   hilang, bukan kuching.
             dog-PRT   which lost   NEG   cat
             'It was a dog I lost, not a cat.'

Secondly, the particle *lah* appears suffixed to the verb in perfective sentences, which has led grammarians to the assumption that *lah* is an aspectual marker of perfectivity.

(53)   Pergi-lah   ia.
             go   3SG
             'He went.'

The basic insight of Hopper (1979) is that these two apparently unrelated functions of *lah* are different reflexes of one and the same phenomenon, that is foregrounding. A foregrounded constituent is informationally more prominent in relation to other ones in the background. A major instantiation of foregrounding is, of course, focus. Given this, it is not surprising that *lah* appears after fronted focus constituents, such as in (52).

The presence of *lah* on the verb in the perfective sentence (53) is due to the fact that the whole event is foregrounded. The central relation between foregrounding and perfectivity follows from a universal implicational relation: In order for an event to be foregrounded, it must be bounded or completed. Second, a typical (though not the only) way of presenting an event as bounded or completed is to present it as anterior to subsequent events. Finally, anteriority is typically expressed through perfectivity. Ongoing or overlapping events are unsuitable for foregrounding (Hopper 1979:39,47). Thus, since *lah* functions as

a focus or foregrounding marker, it only appears in sentences which denote completed events. This is illustrated in the following example from Hopper (1979:48).

(54) a. Maka apabila *masok-lah* kedalam hutan,
         maka *bertemu* dengan a Jakun.
         'And when they *entered* the forest, they *met* a Jakun.'

    b.   Maka apabila ia *melihat* orang datang, maka *lari-lah* ia masok hutan.
         'And when he *saw* the men coming, he *ran* into the forest.

In (54a), it is evident that entering the forest is completed before the meeting of the Jakun takes place. The two events do not overlap. Consequently, the first verb can be followed by *lah*. No such connotation of anteriority is present in the temporal *when*-clause in (54b) where the events denoted by main and subordinate clause are construed as simultaneous or overlapping, see Hopper (1979:48), and where *lah* is absent.

It should be clear by now why *lah* is traditionally assigned the function of a perfectivity marker: Being foregrounded, the events it marks must be bounded or completed, and completion is usually associated with the perfective aspect. To sum up, the morpheme *lah* operates at the discourse level where it marks focused or foregrounded constituents. As Hopper says: "These two functions – foregrounding and focusing – are not separable, but are aspects of one and the same principle" (p. 47).

6.3 Foregrounding in Gùrùntùm

We propose that the final *a* marker in Gùrùntùm works the same way as Malay *lah*: The function of sentence-final *a* is to foreground the sentence as a whole, just like sentence-internal *a* serves to foreground narrowly focused constituents. For this reason, event or sentence focus marking in Gùrùntùm is restricted to the

two proto-typical constructions that present situations or events as completed and whole entities: presentational constructions and constructions in the perfective or completive aspect (see also Comrie 1976:18). Hopper's universal implicational relation between foregrounding and perfectivity therefore also holds in Gùrùntùm: The foregrounding marker *a* is *in*compatible with progressive, future and habitual sentences, which do not denote completed events, explaining its absence in (50a-c).

The analysis of sentences with final *a* as foregrounded structures is supported by the following observations. First, the analysis implies that sentence focus will not be automatically marked in Gùrùntùm, not even in the perfective aspect (see below), but only if the sentence denotes a foregrounded event. Because of this, sentence-final *a* is not obligatory in sentences with perfective interpretation, cf. in narrative sequences such as (55) from Haruna (2003:139) (our glosses):

(55)   Zi mùuzìi kàram ba   pàn yaŋsi, ti   *yu*   wùshù bàn yaahu,
        PL woman go   PROG carry wood 3PL see snake in   grass
        tì   *pàn* yaŋsi tì   g^yù da.
        3PL carry wood 3PL kill ??[19]
        'The women *went* to carry firewood and they *saw* a snake in the grass
        and they *took* a firewood and *killed* it.'

According to Haruna (op. cit., our italics), the sequential construction "imparts unity to the actions depicted, and conversely, it enables these actions *to be described without giving them unwanted prominence.*" In other words, the events denoted in (55) are presented as parts of a complex event. As such, the

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[19] Unfortunately, Haruna provides no interlinear glosses, but only the paraphrase given. As far as we know, and as shown in (20), the sentence-final marker *da* is the negative marker. So, perhaps the final clause in (55) should better translate as '…*but* they *didn't* kill it.'

individual events are not foregrounded and, although interpreted as perfective, are not marked by final *a*.

Secondly, final *a* can occur on the last of a series of sentences that combine to form a bigger event. In (56), final *a* occurs on the final clause, which denotes the main event in the sequence.

(56)   Kadə ma sai ti   karmi bavuli. Ti kadi   *ti mai gãa yuŋs*-**a**.
        3SG too then 3SG   go   market 3SG return 3SG err on way-FOC
        'She too, she went to(wards) the market, she returned, she got lost on her way.'

This is again quite similar to the facts reported from Malay. The foregrounding function of *lah* is also used to structure narrative texts (Hopper 1979:46). *Lah* appears on verbs describing events that constitute the main story line. These are events which are new and highly relevant to the story. Events that are not marked with *lah* are used to set the scene, they describe side-episodes of minor narrative relevance or parts of the event that are considered not so important. In the Gùrùntùm example (56), the episode ends with the girl (*kadə* 'she') getting lost. This narrative turning point is indicated by the focus/foregrounding *a*-marker.

To conclude, in this section we argued that the focusing effect of the *a*-marker is also observed with events. The puzzling fact that non-presentational clausal focus marking is excluded from non-perfective sentences was analysed as a consequence of event foregrounding. Since an event or situation must be completed in order to be foregrounded, ongoing, overlapping or habitual events are unsuitable for foregrounding and therefore not suffixed with *a*. In this respect, Gùrùntùm constitutes another nice example for Hopper's universal implicational relation between foregrounding and perfectivity.

7   Conclusion

In this article, we presented an in-depth analysis of focus marking in the West Chadic language Gùrùntùm. Focus in Gùrùntùm is marked morphologically by means of the pre-focal marker *a*. It is marked consistently across all syntactic constituents and across all aspects and tenses. It marks new information focus as well as other kinds of focus, such as selective, corrective or contrastive focus. It also appears in predicative and presentational constructions. The focus constituent can be either realised in its base-position, or it can be fronted. We speculated that the choice of position is dependent on the notion of noteworthiness, but this assumption has to be corroborated by future research. We also showed that Gùrùntùm exhibits focus ambiguity when it comes to predicate focus: focus is realised on the object even if the verb or the VP is focused. We proposed that focus ambiguity can be traced back to a syntactic restriction: Gùrùntùm has a bias for nominal focus marking, just as many other Chadic languages. We defended our analysis against a claim from the literature that *a* is an aspectual marker of perfectivity. Evidence in favour of our proposal came from syntactic and semantic considerations. Finally, we showed that the affinity of sentence-final *a* to perfective interpretations follows from *a*'s nature as a foregrounding marker, both intra- and intersententially.

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