

Left dislocation in Dagbani

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Excluding predominantly topic-comment languages (see Li & Thompson 1976), left dislocation (LD) has been described as largely or entirely associated with oral communication and unplanned discourse (Barnes 1985; Givón 1983; Keenan & Schieffelin 1976). Givón (1983:347), for example, claims that left dislocation “appear[s] only in the informal, colloquial, spoken register of English.” The appearance of LD constructions in Dagbani, on the other hand, is closer to that described for Spanish by Hidalgo (2002), who finds that “the use of left-dislocation is pervasive of all oral genres” and that “examples can also be found in some written genres.”

The first part of this paper presents quantitative analysis of the occurrence of LD constructions in Dagbani, where, for purposes of consistency, LD is tracked as all disjoint topic NPs with no overt grammatical marking coindexed with a distinct resumptive weak pronoun. Statistical analysis of a corpus of 163 text excerpts averaging 880 words each and representing 32 genres reveals LD in Dagbani to cooccur both with features associated with unplanned discourse and those associated with ‘orality’ (including the specialized genre of oral history). The statistical association with the spoken medium is stronger than that of unplanned discourse.

*Nonetheless, the occurrence of LD in Dagbani is neither entirely exclusive to the spoken medium nor to unplanned discourse. Furthermore, the quantitative results do not account for the various motivations for employing these constructions (such as simplification of discourse processing by highlighting a topic, dealing with weighty NPs, conventional constructions, etc.) nor certain structural variations such as collocation with the focus particle *ka* or the use of a strong versus a weak resumptive pronoun. The second part of this paper thus takes a qualitative look at the motivations for the use of LD with special attention to instances that deviate from the statistical norms.*