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Principles of information packaging in Baatonum (Gur)

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This talk presents a study on information structure in the under-documented Gur language Baatonum (Bénin and Nigeria, language code bba). The investigation is based on a corpus that was recently set up in collaboration with Sayane Gouroubéra and that comprises translated as well as (semi-)spontaneous speech instantiated by experimental tasks, such as:

Two speakers talking about a comic strip (see Skopeteas et al. 2006):

Speaker A:	'Here is a child that takes his dog out for a walk.'
Speaker B:	'It is rather a man, don't you see his bald head?'
Speaker A:	'Right, my friend, it is a man.

Ű	ǹ	bìī	**mí̋**,	ú	kpírìbúu	sáā-**wà**	**ré́**.
3SG	NEG	child	PTL	3SG	short	COP-FM	PTL

He is NOT a child, he is just SHORT.'

The following questions will be addressed:

1. Which information-structural categories are commonly encoded on the sentence-level? The potential variables encompass notions such as topic, focus, contrast, exhaustiveness, variations of focus scope, presupposed and asserted information (see Féry et al. 2007, for instance).
2. How obligatory respective optional is the expression of these categories? Do certain grammatical environments (such as negation or WH-questions) trigger the presence or absence of specific information-structural devices irrespective of the actual pragmatic conditions?
3. To what extent are intonational, morphological and syntactic means involved in the information packaging and do the observations match the expectations derived from cross-linguistic studies? For instance, does the existence of lexical and grammatical tone diminish the application of pitch and intonation for information-structural distinctions, rather enhancing other expressions? And do the basic word order distinctions between Baatonum (SOV) and various other Gur languages (SVO) affect the information structural encoding?

A first exploration of the data reveals several parallels to Gur languages of the Oti-Volta branch, as morphological devices in form of various particles and verb morphology are of particular information-structural relevance in Baatonum.

Reference

Féry, C., Fanselow, G. and M. Krifka. 2007. *The notions of information structure.* Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure 6. Working Papers of the SFB 632. Universität Potsdam.

Skopeteas, S., Fiedler, I., Hellmuth, S., Schwarz, A., Stoel, R., Fanselow, G., Féry, C. and M. Krifka. 2006. *Questionnaire on information structure (QUIS)*. Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure 4. Working Papers of the SFB 632. Universität Potsdam.