SELECTED PAPERS
From the
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE
DOCUMENTATION AND TRADITION
with a special interest in the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush valleys, Himalayas

Edited by:
Carol Everhard & Elizabeth Mela-Athanasopoulou

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A Brief Sketch of Arabic Influence in Dagbani

Sergio Baldi

Dagbani belongs to the Western-Oti-Volta branch of the Gur languages, which is a part of the larger Niger-Congo language family (Olansky 1996: 3). It is spoken in the Eastern part of the Northern Region of Ghana by 746,924 people according to the 2000 Ghana Population Census and in north-western Togo by less than 150,000 people. Tamale and Yendi are the main towns in Ghana, where the largest communities are found.

There are no special names for dialects. But the main dialects, centred on Tamale in the West, and Yendi in the East, are generally accepted. The differences mainly concern pronouns and vocabulary, while the structure of the language remains uniform throughout the area. The number of speakers is probably about equal for the two main dialects.

Historically the dialect of Yendi, the capital, was the standard, but nowadays the dialect of Tamale as the administrative and publishing centre is the standard.

Dagbani is one of the six Ghanaian languages used for official publications and broadcasting. There is an officially approved alphabet by the Bureau of Ghanaian Languages. Dagbani has 10 short vowels, but ω is very restricted.

The name Dagbani is used by English speakers, the speakers call themselves Dagbanba (English Dagomba). They call their territory Dagbong (English Dagbon).

H. M. Kenrick and J.G. Christaller were the first to use the term 'Gur'. The term is based on the fact that the syllable 'gur' occurs in names such as Gumma, Guren, Guresha, Gumma, Guri, Liguri and Guruba. Delafosse (1911) appears to have been the first to use Voltaic (in French Voltaïque), see Bendor-Samuel (1971: 141).

One of the languages officially recognized by the Ghanaian government, thus it is taught in schools (Olansky 1996: 2).

Dagboma numbers about 79,000 (according to the 2000 Ghana Population Census) and can be considered a recent breakaway group of Dagaambas. They speak a dialect of Dagbani which differs from the other two dialects mainly in pronunciation.

Language Guide (Dagbani Version) gives at p. 6 the following letters: a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z. Strangely there are listed q and x, which do not occur in Dagbanba, while ω vowel and η and ξ consonants are missing.

In Dagbanba the contrast between i and ï is neutralized in some environments, notably, whereas a alone occurs, and utterance finally, where i alone appears (see Bendor 1996, ISL, note 23).
and 9 long vowels. All Dagbani vowels occur doubled, except a. Consonant clusters do not occur at all in many Gur languages and, where they are found, they are limited to a very small number of consonants and, in most instances, occur frequently. Dagbani is an exception to this and though only a restricted number of consonants are involved in clusters such consonant clusters occur frequently.

"The detailed history of Islam in the Volta region seems tangled and difficult to follow, but the broad sweep of it is simple. It came first as a small wave of the tide of Islam that swept the Mali empire. It became firmly established as a result of a second, more powerful wave that came from Hausaland and Borno", as Professor Hiskett (1984: 120) affirms in his book *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, where he goes on to say: "Dagomba is the most southerly, Mamprusi the central and Wagadugu the most northerly of the three major Mossi kingdoms that lie in the Volta Basin. The first two, Dagomba and Mamprusi, were the creation of mounted invaders from the north. These invaders set up centralised states where previously there had been family-and-clan-group people whose only authority was that of their Earth priests.

This conquest by mounted invaders may have taken place as early as the 7/13 century, although the kingdom of Dagomba, like the other Mossi kingdoms, seems to have emerged as a distinct entity only in the 9/15 century. Na Gbewa, or Na Bawa, is remembered as the founder of both Dagomba and Mamprusi. Tradition says his sons quarrelled and broke apart, thus creating the two separate kingdoms of Dagomba and Mamprusi.

Islam is traditionally said to have been introduced into Dagomba by the chief Na Zangina, c. 1111/1700, although his successor returned to the traditional cult. There may have been Muslims resident in Dagomba during the 11/17 century, or perhaps earlier. Some were probably linked to the Dyula scholarly community in Timbuktu and had arrived at Dagomba as a result of Dyula trading activities. Others may have been sakkare from Gonja, or people from the independent Muslim community of Larabanga. The early Dyula Muslim Community in Dagomba was represented by the yarnas, a Mande word applied to the leaders of Dyula Muslim communities.

Later, the Islam of the yarnas was challenged by that of the Hausa and Borno indans, prayer leaders who also give guidance in the proper observance of Islam. Their presence was due to the expansion of trade with Hausaland and Borno that had begun to develop even before the end of the 10/16 century. They were usually more learned and more strict than the yarnas. They represented a new trend in Islam in the Volta region, less tolerant of mixing than that of the Dyulas. This was especially so after the triumphant jihād in Hausa and of 1219/1804 to 1227/1812." (Hiskett 1984: 121-122).

As far as oral tradition is concerned, the Dagbon ("Dagomba") state has received most attention, although it should be noted that the traditions of the
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Mamprugu (‘Mamprusi’), Nanum (‘Nanumba’) and Dagbon ultimately merge and refer to common ancestors and movements. Early European references to Dagbon traditions include Ferguson’s reports of 1892–6, but it was only in the 1920s that serious collection of traditions began. Rattray (1932) worked in the north between 1928 and 1930 and collected versions of Dagbon history and political organization, apparently from the Ya-Na’s elders. It is worth noting that Rattray’s field notes or the North are available in London.7

The Arabic words which found their way into Dagbanian did not arrive directly, but through other languages, mainly Hausa. On the basis of words I was able to collect at the beginning of my study on Dagbani, I will try to give a sketch of the phonology of the Arabic loans in Dagbani:8

AR /ʔ/ > DA ʔ;
AR /b/ > DA /l/;9
AR ?al-barka ‘blessing’ > (HA âlbarkâ >) DA âlibarka; AR tauba ‘reper-
AR /l/10 > DA /l/;10
AR tib... ‘tabacco’ > DA tabâa; AR ?al-kitâb ‘book’ > DA litaafî; AR ?as-sâb ‘Saturday’ > DA Asibiri;
AR /l/12 > DA /l/.

7. Field notes on Nankani, Nana, and Dagomba, Dagaba, 1928–30, Ms. 1093, Royal Anthropological Institute of G.B. and Northern Ireland Library.
8. In this section all quotations for Arabic are from Wehr’s dictionary and for Dagbanian from sources indicated in the final list or from my informant, Mahmoud Adam, if not differently stated. The abbreviations employed here are: AR(abic), DA(gbani), HA(usa), KA(nuri), SO(nghay). For Hausa, all quotations are in the transcription common to Hausaists, but the /r/ is unmarked, being always rolled in loans. More data in my Dictionnaire etc. (Baldi 2008).
9. It is a voiced labial, see Bateson (1967: 4).
10. It is a plosive labial, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
11. It is an unvoiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).
12. It is a plosive alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
13. It is an unvoiced interdental, see Bateson (1967: 4).
AR waṭīq ‘document, paper’ > DA waṣṭīka ‘letter’;
AR /j̱/ > DA /ʒ/.\(^{14}\)
AR jam ‘gathering’ > DA jamii ‘society’; AR ḥa?ajab ‘astonishment’ > DA ḥalāziḥa ‘amazement’; AR ğaaj ‘pilgrimage to Mecca’ (> HA hajī/hajji) > DA hazi; But AR /j̱/ > DA Ǿ for a SO/HA intermediary: AR ğaajam ‘barber’ (> Tuareg wa-ǵaajam > SO wànzäm > KA wànzäm ‘barbering’ > HA wànz-aamii ‘barber’) > DA wanzam;
AR /ʕ/ > DA /ʔ/.\(^{15}\)
AR /ḵ/ > DA /k/.\(^{16}\)
AR ḥu? ‘Friday sermon’ (> HA ius ‘abaa/hudubaa’) > DA hudubu; AR kair ‘benefit, advantage; welfare’ > DA alhairi; AR måkłuq ‘a human being’ > DA mahludi. But AR /ḵ/ > DA Ǿ via other languages: AR ḥa-stã ‘loss’ (> HA ḥa-saarrã/ ‘ñasarrã’) > DA ashaara; AR ḥa-kãmii ‘Thursday’ (> HA ḥa-mãmis) > DA Alamiiisi;
AR /ḏ/ > DA /d/.\(^{19}\)

\(^{14}\) It is a voiced palatal, see Bateson (1967: 4).
\(^{15}\) It is a fricative alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
\(^{16}\) It is an unvoiced pharyngeal, see Bateson (1967: 4).
\(^{17}\) These two consonants [r̊r̊ and /h/] are restricted in their distribution and probably not originally derived from Proto-Gur; instead they may have been adopted from languages like Twi, Hausa, Arabic or English (which are typical contact languages from which Dagbani has borrowed a number of lexical items). In addition, /r̊/ and /h/ are found as allophones of /d/ and /s/, respectively, in Dagbani, as in other Gur languages.” (Olawsky 1996:4).
\(^{18}\) It is an unvoiced velar, see Bateson (1967: 4).
\(^{19}\) It is a voiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).
\(^{20}\) It is a plosive alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
\(^{21}\) It is a lateral alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
\(^{22}\) See note 17.
AR /d/ > DA /d/:  
AR ?al-ʔadān ‘call to prayer’ > DA lándàni ‘muezzin’. But AR /d/ > DA /s/:  
AR gāmb ‘sin, crime’ > DA sàmba ‘calomniateur’; AR qānūb pl ‘sin’ > DA qūnūbi;  
AR /r/ > DA /r/:  
AR qarfas ‘paper’ > DA takada ‘Brief (lettre)’;  
AR /r/ > DA /l/:  
AR rakhūba ‘mount, female riding camel’ > (HA rākumii ‘camel’) > DA lānhūmi, ‘camel’; AR ?as-sirr ‘secret’ > (HA ?asirii) > DA asfīli;  
AR /z/ > DA /ζ/;  
AR zakāh ‘alms tax’ > (HA zākaa) > DA zakā ‘alms related to Islamic customs’;  
AR ʔinā ‘adultery, fornication’ > (HA zīnāa) > DA zīnā; AR Ėezb ‘60th part of the Koran’ > (HA ?izīfi) > DA izībi;  
AR /s/ > DA /ζ/:  
AR /s/ > DA /ζ/;  
AR ʔakk ‘doubt’ > (HA ʔakkāa) > DA shēkka ‘doubt; hesitation’; AR ʔanū ‘witness’ > (HA šaahiddii/ʔayyādāa) > DA shāhira; AR ?al-ʔiCAFa ‘evening; evening prayer’ > (HA liška ‘period from darkness till towards midnight’) > DA lišhādi;  
AR /r/ > DA /s/:  
AR ʔadaqa ‘alms’ > (HA sadakàa) > DA sara; AR muʔba ‘misfortune’ > (HA māʃīfii) > DA masībo ‘danger’; AR naʔ ‘victory’ > (HA nasardàa) > DA nasara ‘lucky’;  

23. It is a voiced interdental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
24. It is a fricative alveolar, see Olausky (1996: 4).  
25. See note 21.  
26. It is a voiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
27. It is an unvoiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
28. It is a fricative alveolar (Olausky 1996: 4).  
29. It is an unvoiced palatal, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
30. In Dugbani writing the use of <sh> for /s/ is common, but it functioned as an allophone of /s/, see Olausky (1996: 4).  
31. It is an unvoiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
32. It is a fricative alveolar, see Olausky (1996: 4).
AR /ʕ/ \(\text{f}^{3}\) > DA /ʕ/:  
AR ?al-qā, in 'judge' > (HA ?āl-k’ālii/?āl-kaali) DA alkali/alkaya; AR far, 'religious duty' > (HA fariitā) DA farlii;  
AR /ʃ/ > DA /ʃ/: AR fāmmāţE ‘high-aspiring’ > (HA tāmāhā’a/s’ammaanī ‘expectation’) DA tammaha ‘expectation’; AR šaijān ‘satan, devil’ > (HA ši’s ‘ūn >) DA shetani; AR /iʃ/ ‘perfume’ > DA tulali;  
AR /w/ > DA /w/: AR ., hār pl of, ahr ‘midday prayer’ > (HA ?āzahār >) DA azafrā; AR wa’, ‘admonition; sermon’ > (HA waʔāzii ‘admonition’) DA waaaz ‘sermon’;  
AR /l/ > DA /l/; AR ...aib ‘absence; the invisible, divine secret’ > DA gaibi; AR bala...a v ‘to reach puberty’ > (HA balaaga v >) DA balaga ‘maturity’; AR ma...rib ‘prayer at sunset’ > (HA maqaribā/māqaribā ‘prayer at sunset’) DA magaribi;  

33. It is a voiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
34. It is an unvoiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
35. It is a voiced dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
36. It is a voiced pharyngeal, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
37. It is a voiced velar, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
38. It is a plosive velar glottal, see Olawsky (1956: 4).  
39. It is an unvoiced labial, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
40. It is a fricative alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).  
41. It is an unvoiced uvular, see Bateson (1967: 4).  
42. It is a plosive velar glottal, see Olawsky (1996: 4).  
43. See Olawsky (1996: 16): "After vowels, /g/ is realized as the (voiced) velar fricative [ʒ]. This is the only position where [ʒ] is found".
AR miqa‘ 'scissors' > DA maysi; AR faqir 'poor' > (SO ālfukäari 'poor') > DA fara 'poverty'; AR ?al-faṣīḥ 'legist, expert of fiqh' > (SO ālfā 'mirabout, letrè, imam') > DA afā 'Muslim priest'; AR qarfas 'paper' > (BK takirda/takāddaa) > DA takada 'Brief(lettre)';

Ar. qād (575a) 'window' > HA taagāa; cf. Da takor, Akan takro;

AR /k/44 > DA /k/;

AR. kāf 'antimony; kohl, a preparation of pulvered antimony used for darkening (the edges of) the eyelids' > DA chīto 'cosmeticum'; AR ?al-kafan 'robe' > DA kābāna 'linceul'; AR rak'a 'bending of the torso from an upright position' > (HA rakaʔa) > DA rakaa; AR malāʔika pl of malāk 'angel' > DA malaaika; AR širk 'idolatry' > DA shirku 'an unreligious act, blasphemy';

AR sakk 'doubt' > (HA sakkaka) > DA shakka 'doubt; hesitation'. But AR /k/ > DA O via some intermediaries: AR rukn 'support; corner; basic element' > DA heresine 'notable (Notable)'; AR ?al-kūb 'book' > (HA littaqqīt) > DA liṭallīf;

AR /l/45 > DA /l/;

AR. laimun 'lime' > (HA līmoo) > DA leem; AR ?al-balā 'misfortune, plague' > DA balaa; AR māliq 'a human being' > DA mahlūdi; AR kalwa 'privacy, solitude; seclusion, isolation, retirement; hermitage' > (HA halwaʔ 'being hermit; illegal cessation of cohabitation pending divorce') > (HA halwa) 'seclude oneself for meditation'; AR salām 'greeting' > (HA salāamā) > DA salama 'seek permission to enter room'; AR mulk 'rule, reign' > (HA mulkū 'ruin; government') > DA mulku; AR balaka v 'to perish; to die; to be destroyed' > (HA balakka) 'to destroy' > DA halaka 'to punish severely'; But AR /l/ > DA /lr/ or AR O in: AR dalīl 'sign' > DA dalīri 'reason'; AR kalza [It. calza] 'stocking' > DA kūrī pl of kurugnu 'pantalon, sarrouel'; AR ?al-bral 'onion' > (HA ?al-humāya) > DA albasa;

AR /m/46 > DA /m/;

AR muslin 'Muslim' > (HA musīlmī) > DA muslimu; AR misk 'musk' > (HA miskii) > DA miskī 'musk; perfume'; AR mulk 'rule, reign' > (HA mulkū 'rule, government') > DA mulku; AR ?umma 'but' > (HA ?ūmma) > DA amma; AR ?al-qalam 'pen' > DA alkaama. But in one case the original AR /m/ became doubled and in another the doubled AR /m/ > DA /m/ in: AR ?ṭīmān 'faith, belief' > DA immani; AR ?umma 'nation, people' > DA al-umma;

44. It is an unvoiced palatal, see Bateson (1967: 4).
45. It is a sonant lateral, see Bateson (1967: 4).
46. Abraham (1962: 19a) gives it as an Arabic lorn. I doubt this for phonetical reasons.
47. It is a sonant labial, see Bateson (1967: 4).
48. It is nasal labial, see Olawsky (1966: 4).
49. It is a nasal alveolar, see Olawsky (1996: 4).
AR /n⁵⁰ > DA /n/: AR nā'am ‘yes’ (> HA nā'am >) DA na'am; AR dunyā ‘world’ > DA duniya; AR ?abar dan ‘for ever’ > DA abada ‘eternity’; AR ?al-jinn ‘jinn, demons’ > DA alizini ‘(good or bad) spirits’;

AR /h⁵¹ > DA /h/: AR šahid ‘witness’ (> HA šahīdiyyā>yaydā >) DA shahira; AR ?a, hār pl of ‘madr ‘midday prayer’ (> HA ?azahār >) DA azafari; AR wahla ‘fright, terror’ (> HA waḥalā‘trouble’ >) DA wahala ‘suffering’; AR ?al-faqīh ‘legist, expert of figh’ > DA ʿafā ‘(Muslim) priest’;

AR /w⁵² > DA /w⁵³: AR wahla ‘fright, terror’ (> HA wāḥalā‘trouble’ >) DA wahala ‘suffering’;
AR Gēalwā ‘sweet’ (> HA ʿaleewā’ >) DA aleewa; AR ʿawara ʿIII v ‘to ask advice’ (> HA ʿawara’ ‘advice’ >) DA ʿawara ‘permission’;


References

50. It is a sorant dental, see Bateson (1967: 4).
51. It is an unvoiced glottal, see Bateson (1957: 4).
52. It is a sorant labial, see Bateson (1967: 4).
53. As in English way.
54. It is a sorant palatal, see Bateson (1967: 4).
55. As in English yes.
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