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A Sociolinguistic Study of Language Variation (Study in Dagbani)

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Abstract: *The goal of this paper is to examine the nature and functions of language use and variation taking into account PHONOLOGICAL variation within the dialects of Dagbani, a language belonging to the South-Western languages of the Western Oti-Volta subgroup of the Gur group of languages. The paper considers the possible variation of linguistic items that seem to be alternating within and among the dialects of Dagbani. The paper also examines possible factors responsible for the observable phonological variation in the recent times. I also propose some social variables responsible for the variation; which are, age (young and the old), gender and education. The paper also provides statistical distribution to the phenomenon to ascertain the dominant choice of linguistic items as well as the external linguistic factors. I give the paper a comparative flavor by drawing data from the three dialects of the language to buttress my claim based on empirical evidence that the phenomenon discussed is quite pervasive in this language. The study objectives are tested by data from interviews. Participants used in the studies were young and old male and female native speakers of Dagbani across the three dialects. The paper selected forty (40) participants for the study who used language for their everyday interactions and they are familiar with the two variables; layiri and liyiri. The participants were purposefully and randomly selected for the study. The methodology and the analysis are basically from a Labovian sociolinguistic perspective (Labov, 1963). The paper analyzed the data using an SPSS software to generate tables and findings are drawn from the data. Upon careful analyses of the data collected, the study observed the following: the choice between the two variants [liyiri] or [layiri] is social stratified in the speech community. It is observed that [liyiri] is the less dominant variant but it socially marked for male and older generation. The study also observed that [layiri] appears to be a more dominant variant and socially marked for female and the younger generation. I conclude that the interaction between the people through communication and time, accounts for language variation in the society.*

Keywords: *Dagbani, Variation, Variants, Social variables, Speech Community, Gur, Layiri, Liyiri, Variables & Linguistic Variables.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language has been studied for many years and from different perspectives. At first, language was studied in terms of its structure; however, with the advent of sociolinguistics, it began to be studied in relation to the society which uses it, which makes language described in an objective way, as there was a more scientific and descriptive approach to linguistic analysis with emphasis on the spoken usage. The advent of sociolinguistics has attracted the interest of many researchers, and it is concerned with the connections between language and society and the way we use it in different social situations. It describes language variation in its social context and it was William Labov who opened the door to such a study, which had been neglected completely in linguistic theory. Speech variation as an important subject has been discussed by many sociolinguists in different dimensions. Sociolinguistics, as a huge field, studies the wide variety of dialects across a given region, to the analysis of the different social variables influencing the speaker's language. It often shows us the humorous realities of human speech and how a dialect of a given language can often describe the age, gender, and social class or level of education... of the speaker. (Naima, 2012).

This paper is poised to analyze the nature and functions of language use and variation taking into account language variation and change within the dialects of Dagbani (South Western Oti-Volta), a central Gur language spoken by the Dagbamba in Northern Ghana. The canonical word order of Dagbani is basically Subject, Verb, and Object (SVO), also called Agent Verb Object. Dagbani has three major dialects which include: Tomosili, (the Western dialect) spoken in Tamale and its surroundings, Nayahili (the Eastern dialect), spoken in and around Yendi, and Nanuni, which is also spoken around Bimbilla and its surroundings. Noticeable dialectal differences are basically phonological and lexical without any known syntactic/structural differences. The data for the study is drawn from oral conversations through interview. The use of data from oral conversations have been motivated by the fact that in general, it is better to get someone else's speech in linguistic analysis, since it is not influenced by the particular research agenda. Though a native speaker of the Nayahili dialect myself, the generalizations concerning the alternations of linguistics items within the speech communities could not be limited to a particular dialect of Dagbani, since interactions with speakers of the other three dialects show that similar phenomenon exists in Tomosili and Nanuni as well. (Samuel 1971, Greenberg 1963, Wilson 1970a, Issah, 2008, and Fusheini 2006).

1.1 THE LANGUAGE AND ITS SPEAKERS

Dagbani is a Gur language widely spoken by the Dagbamba in the Northern part of Ghana. This language belongs to the Niger-Congo language family. Native speakers of Dagbani are called Dagbamba (plural) or Dagbana (singular). These have been modified to Dagombas and Dagomba respectively. The geographical area within which Dagbani is spoken is called Dagboŋ. Dagbani has been classified as belonging to the Moore Gurma sub-group of African languages: Bendor-Samuel (1971), Greenberg (1963), and Wilson (1970a). Though Dagbani has a continuum of dialects, two major dialects stand out: Tomosili (the Western dialect) and Nayahili (the Eastern dialect). Whilst the former is spoken in and around Tamale, the political capital of the Northern Region, the latter is spoken in and around Yendi, the seat of the traditional head of Dagboŋ. Fusheini (2006) argues that Nanuni be part of the dialects of Dagbani making it three contrary to other literatures. The data used for analysis in this thesis are based on the three dialects of Dagbani. Though Dagbani is a tonal language, this work, following the orthographic conventions of Dagbani, does not mark tone.

1.2 SPEECH COMMUNITY

The widest context of verbal interaction for sociolinguistic research is usually taken to be the speech community. The study of speech communities has interested linguists for a long time; there has always been a lot of disagreement over exactly what a speech community is.

One of the definitions of 'speech community' given by John Lyons is as all the people who use a given language (or dialect). According to this definition, speech communities may overlap (where there

are bilingual individuals) and need not have any social or cultural unity. Hudson is of the view that it is possible to delimit speech communities in this sense only to the extent that it is possible to delimit languages and dialects without referring to the community that speaks them. Charles Hockett defines a speech community as: "the whole set of people who communicate with each other, either directly or indirectly, via the common language" In this definition, the condition of 'communication within the community' is added and so if two communities speak the same language but has no contact at all with each other they would be treated as two different speech communities.

Leonard Bloomfield views a speech community as "a group of people who interact by means of speech". Such a definition hints at the possibility that the group need not be entirely of people who speak the same language. Some may speak one language and others another language. Gumperz's view on speech community is any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use. For William Labov the speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation, which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage.

According to Morgan (2004) cited in Korsah (2012), a speech community refers to a particular group of people who use a particular language or language variety and are guided by the same set of linguistic norms. And for one to claim membership of a speech community, one must be conscious "... of the way language choice, variation, and discourse represent generation, occupation, politics, social relationships identity and more". In this study, the speech communities are speakers of Dagbani which comprise the three dialects in Dagbani.

2. THE PRESENT STUDY

This paper seeks to quantitatively highlight how 'liyiri and layiri' are used by members of the three dialects of Dagbani in the Northern part of Ghana to mean 'money'. The study demonstrates how the users of this language use the two lexical items as two variants of the same variable in their everyday interaction. It further tries to show how wide or otherwise is the use of the standard and the non-standard forms of the two items. This paper also seeks to investigate how different people use different variants based on their age, education, gender and dialect.

In this current study, the researcher investigates the usage of these lexical items by the speakers of Dagbani. The researcher observes that in the Dagbani speech communities, speakers use the two words to refer to the item (money). The researcher refers them as old and new forms in the usage.

2.1 Standard form (Old form):

The researcher's definition of standard form in this paper is the widely accepted lexical item used within the Dagbani speech communities. The lexical item, "liyiri" is unanimously agreed and used by the people across the three dialects of the language. Irrespective of which area the person is coming from, "liyiri" is the standard form to be used for 'money' but not "layiri". There is no dialectal difference with regards to the use of that lexical item.

2.2 Non- standard form (New form):

In this current paper, the non-standard form is explained as the unacceptable usage of a form in the language. In this case the words that are not approved by the users of the language are said to be non-standard forms if they are used either by native speakers or non-native speakers of the language. For this case, **layiri** is said to be a non-standard form if it is used for money instead 'wooing'. **Layiri** as a lexical item exists in Dagbani to mean 'wooing/'dating' for the progressive form and **layi**, 'woo' simple present tense form.

Some other old and new forms identified in Dagbani presented in table below; table 1.1

Old form	New form	Gloss
liyiri	layiri	‘money’
kpini	kpana/kpaansi	‘guinea fowls’
binyera	binyerima	‘things’
wabigu	wabiga	‘an elephant’
binsheyu	binshesheli	‘something’
yeltɔya	yeltɔyisi	‘sentences/conversation’

2.1 RELATED STUDIES

There have been many studies in the language use and linguistic choices in speech communities as far as sociolinguistics is concerned. These include; Labov (1966) study in New York city, Korsah (2012) in University of Ghana, Fischer (1958), Trudgill (1974), Hudson (1988) among others. However, little or no similar study has been done in Dagbani. The only work that comes to mind is Inusah (2017), which looked at the sociolinguistic variation of [r] in Dagbani. Unfortunately Dagbani has received little or no scholarly attention as far as sociolinguistic study is concerned. Both past and recent researchers have channeled their energy towards the grammar, phonology and syntax of Dagbani neglecting the sociolinguistic aspect of the language. This present study finds it prudent to look at an aspect of language use in the Dagbani speech communities. Thus, language variation of ‘layiri and liyiri’ in Dagbani.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopted the Labov’s sociolinguistic paradigm of language study to examine how three dialects of Dagbani use ‘layiri and liyiri’ in their everyday conversations. Labov as a sociolinguistics researcher, had used this approach to the study of language change and variations within a speech community or the other. This approach has been tested and used to elicit natural data from participants. Many researchers in sociolinguistic study have gone Labovian to investigate variations in languages across the world. Prominent among them include but not limited to; Labov (1966), Trudgill (1974), Hudson (1980), Korsah (2012), Inusah (2017), Labov (1963), Fischer (1958) to mention a few. William Labov’s model of narrative analysis differs from some of the earlier approaches in that his method focuses on oral narrative instead of written text. Earlier linguists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure, believed in a structural approach. This meant that language had to be approached as a fixed, clearly defined set of symbols, which furthermore had to be studied in isolation.

However, it appears that later linguists, among them Uriel Weinrich, Labov’s mentor, believed that the structural approach failed to assist us in understanding “the transition of a language from state to state” (Labov 1972). Labov’s focus has been to study language as it is spoken, as a fluid and constantly changing dynamic. Most of Labov’s model of narrative analysis is based on his belief that “one cannot understand the development of a language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs” (1972:3). He feels strongly that observing and recording sound changes is not enough to understand the process of change that one has to view that change within the context of the community in which it is being made. Using this theory, he carefully chose communities where he felt he could do this most effectively. For example; the in-depth studies he conducted in Martha’s Vineyard, a small, closed island community located in Dukes County, Massachusetts, the New York City study focused on Black English as it was used in certain parts of the city, specifically Harlem among other studies conducted by him and other researchers.

This current study finds it necessary to also adopt the Labovian approach or the Variationist model of language change to study the variation in Dagbani but focusing on the two forms as mentioned earlier.



2.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper seeks to answer the following research objectives:

1. Which of the linguistic variant is more dominant in the speech community?
2. Which linguistic variant is more frequent in terms of gender?
3. What is the relationship between social variable and a lexical items?

3. VARIATION

Variation in my point of view is the different use of certain available variables by varieties of languages and dialects found in a language society. As languages depend on the society, so the society depends on the language for communication. As a result of this, languages develop and grow and compete among themselves and users of the language either shift to one code or the other or use the emerging codes interchangeable for communication as language by one of its features is dynamic. Variation can occur within one language in terms of phonological, morphological, syntactic as well as lexical variations within the same language.

3.1 VARIATION IN DAGBANI

Dagbani is borne with so many variations and these can be attributed to dialectal differences in the language. Within a word level, the three dialects of the language use vowels to differentiate them. It has been marked as Eastern and Western dialects of Dagbani. (cf.1.1). For example;

Table 1.2 Variation in Dagbani

Western dialect	Eastern dialect	Gloss
barigi /barigi/	b̄origi /b̄origi/	‘to lose something’
bahim /bahim/	b̄ohim /b̄ohim/	‘learn’
bierigi / bierigi/	barigi /barigi/	‘over cooked’

3.1.2 LINGUISTIC VARIABLE

Linguistic variable are the specific things in that language that co-vary with some sociological factor. These variables exist at all levels of the grammar. In the word of Hudson (1980), a variable is a collection of alternatives which have something in common and identifies an essential characteristic of sociolinguistic variables which variants can be recognized and counted. Korsah (2012) observes that a variable is the particular (abstract) linguistic form that is capable of being realized differently under the influence of various social factors while a variant is any of the (actual) differently-realized forms of the variable. The variables [*liyiri.*] and [*layiri*] used in this study are two lexical items used by speakers of Dagbani to mean one thing which can be substituted for each other without changing the meaning of what these words mean. This is demonstrated in the sentences (1a and 1b).

(1a) **Adam borila *layiri* ni o da cheche.**

Adam need. perf money conj. buy perf bicycle
 ‘Adam needs money to buy a bicycle’

(3b) **Adam borila *liyiri.* ni o da cheche.**

Adam need. perf money conj. buy perf bicycle
 ‘Adam needs money to buy a bicycle.’

The sentences in (1a and 1b) present the alternative use of the variables by two speakers to make the same meaning. The paper therefore seeks to account for change and provide evidence about the group of some speakers who use [*liyiri.*] as standard and [*layiri*] as non-standard. In the grammar of the language, sentence 1a, would have been considered ill-formed or ungrammatical. Reading from the minds of the speakers of the language, the two words seem to be in free variation considering the sounds /a/ and /i/ in /*layiri* / and /*liyiri*/ respectively. In other words such linguistic variations in the language are viewed as instances of free variants, that is to say, alternate forms of the same expression or a dialect mixture (i.e. the existence of two or more dialects in a given speech community. However, this paper thinks either wise. I



argue that there is a variation in such words from the perspective of Labov’s view that the variations are important factors to better appreciate how languages change in a situation where the changes can be quantified. In this study I pose that /liyiri/ is the linguistic variable whilst [liyiri] and [layiri] are variants of the variable. Thus, speakers of the language alternate between the two variants of the variable.

3.2 SOCIAL VARIABLES

Social variables are the external linguistics variables used to examine the linguistic variables within a particular speech community. Trudgill (1983) enumerates social variables such as gender, age, social class, social network, education, ethnicity and religion as factors that affect the probability of linguistic variant selection. The current study focuses on age, gender, generation and dialect.

3.2.1 GENDER

Sex is also another important factor in the study of language variation. Sex is the biological state of male or female. Sexual differences are institutionalized in most languages as grammatical category of gender. Examples include French, Russian, Arabic and Swahili. Cross- Cultural reviews of differences between linguistics forms used by male and female show much wider range of lexical and phonological features as well as morphological differences in pronominal use (Hass, 1944). Much sociolinguistic research has established that the linguistic behavior of men and women differs. In Western societies women have been found to be more sensitive to prestige linguistic forms than men and to use more of them in their speech. These findings establish that sex of the speaker is an important social variable to be included in any study that investigates the correlation between social factors and linguistic behavior. (Trudgill, 2003) In one of the most widely studied English variables (ing),the alternation of [n] and [ŋ] in unstressed /ing/, males are found to use the colloquial form [in] more than females in New England (Fischer, 1958), New York (Labov, 1966), Detroit (Wolfram, 1969), Norwich (Trudgill,1974) and others. However not all sociolinguistic variables show sex difference (Habiya, 1988). She found no significant sex differences for several Tokyo variables that she studied. The present study seeks to find whether sex difference affect the choice of a particular variant.

Table 1.4 Distribution of participants based on gender

GENDER	Total	Percentage 100%
Male	20	50%
Female	20	50%
Total	40	100%

3.2.2 AGE

Linguistic usage is like clothing fashions in that it can change over time. Pronunciations, words, and the meanings of words can all change. Within the speech community speakers of different age groups belong to different generations, and so their experiences of learning and using their language will vary according to their ages. For this reason, age of the speaker is another important social variable. The contribution of age in sociolinguistic study of language change cannot be underestimated. Age is an important factor in a variationist or distributionist study. Eckert (1997) recommends an approach to age that is based on life stages rather than simple chronology. She notes that “age has significance because individual’s place in society, the community and the family changes through time”. Hence she sketched a three-way division of life stages distinguishing childhood, adolescence and adulthood with each involving important subdivisions. Milroy and Gordon (2003) state that, chief among social factors is age, since establishing that a pattern of variation represents a change in progress typically requires the consideration of speakers of different generations. Early studies by Britain (1992), Chambers (1995), and Bailey et al (1991) used apparent time hypothesis to explain language change. The rule maintains that people of different ages can be taken as representative of different times. Milroy and Gordon (2003) also state that, chief among social factors is age, since establishing that a pattern of variation represents a change in

progress typically requires the consideration of speakers of different generations. Early studies by Britain (1992), Chambers (1995), and Bailey et al (1991) used apparent time hypothesis to explain language change. The rule maintains that people of different ages can be taken as representative of different times. The present study will investigate whether age difference can contribute to the choice of one variant over the other in Dagbani or not.

Table 1.3. Distribution of participants based on age

Age	Total	Percentage 100%
10-20	8	20%
21-30	10	25%
31-50	11	27.5%
Above 50	11	27.5%
Total	40	100%

3.2.3. EDUCATION

The researcher also finds it prudent to capture education as social variable in the study to ascertain whether or not it has some bearing on the choice of variants. Many other researchers have also considered education as a social variable in their similar studies which confirms that education influences the way people pronounce certain words or sounds in their language and other's. For example, Labov (1963) in another study tried to investigate whether the linguistic variable (r) is a social differentiator in all levels of New York speech. To carry out the research, he used three large departments to show different social classes: high mid and low. Some factors have been of importance to the researcher: sex, age, occupation, and race. The results were amazing. A total of 62 percent high ranking employees and 20 percent of low ranking employee used containing not pronouncing it. The sampled male and female participants with some level of education, some to the secondary level and others to the tertiary level. In my hypothesis, I argue that some educated participants will produce the new form than those who will produce the old form.

Table 1.5 Distribution of participants based on Education

EDUCATION	Total	Percentage 100%
Educated	17	42.5%
Uneducated	23	57.5%
Total	40	100%

3.2.4 DIALECT

Every language has its varieties or dialects, when a certain variety of a language is used according to the users then it is called dialect, dialects are normally determined by speaker's geographical background, O Grady et al. Defines dialect as "A regional or social variety of a language characterized by its own phonological, syntactical, and lexical properties". If we take English as an example, in Britain, there are huge numbers of dialects of English which differ from each other according to the geographical area e.g. the Scottish dialect, Yorkshire dialect, Lancashire dialect. Dialect is a distinctive form of a language, it is associated with some social regional, group and ethnic, it differs from other varieties of a language by its own linguistic features such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar. Dialect in the classical form is a dialect of certain region; dialect is different way of saying the same thing where it reflects the social structure as gender, class origin. (Mohammed et al, 2015:3)

Like Dagbani, all the Ghanaian languages have dialects and they serve as varieties of the languages in the speech communities. Dagbani has three dialects namely; Nayahili, Tomosili and Nanuni which are mutually intelligible. As already discussed in (1.1). This paper also considers dialect as one of the social variables in determining the outcome of this study in language variation. The researcher argues that the linguistic variables under study, are not used by the speakers of the language base on dialect. In order to



prove this argument or otherwise, the researcher deems it necessary to add dialect as one the social variables to determine the effect this variable will have on the choice of the linguistics variables by the speakers of Dagbani. The researcher sampled participants based on their dialects to have a fairly representation. In the data collection, the researcher could not control this variable because of the time factor but I made sure that each dialect was represented. The number was not distributed equally. The present study therefore, seeks to find whether dialectal difference affect the choice of a particular variant.

Tomosili Dialect (table 1.6)
AGE * GENDER * EDUCATION Cross Tabulation

EDUCATION			GENDER		Total
			male	female	
educated	AGE	Count	2	1	3
		10-20 % within AGE	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		Count	1	0	1
		21-30 % within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Count	1	1	2
	31-50 % within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	
	Count	1	0	1	
	Above 50 % within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	5	2	7
		% within AGE	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
uneducated	AGE	Count	1	2	3
		21-30 % within AGE	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		Count	1	1	2
		31-50 % within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		Count	2	2	4
Above 50 % within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%		
Total	Count	4	5	9	
	% within AGE	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%	

Nayahili Dialect distribution (table 1.7)
AGE * GENDER * EDUCATION Cross Tabulation

EDUCATION			GENDER		Total
			male	female	
Educated	10-20	Count	2	1	3
		% within AGE	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	21-30	Count	1	0	1
		% within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	31-50	Count	1	1	2
		% within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Above 50	Count	1	0	1
		% within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	5	2	7
		% within AGE	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
Uneducated	21-30	Count	1	2	3
		% within AGE	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	31-50	Count	1	1	2
		% within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Above 50	Count	2	2	4
		% within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	4	5	9	
	% within AGE	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%	



Nanuni Dialect distribution (table 1.8)
AGE * GENDER * EDUCATION Cross Tabulation

EDUCATION			GENDER		Total	
			male	female		
educated	AGE	10-20	Count	1	0	1
		% within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
		21-30	Count	1	1	2
	% within AGE	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%		
	31-50	Count	1	0	1	
	% within AGE	100.0%	.0%	100.0%		
	Total	Count	3	1	4	
% within AGE	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%			
uneducated	AGE	10-20	Count	0	1	1
		% within AGE	.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	31-50	Count	0	2	2	
	% within AGE	.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
	Above 50	Count	2	1	3	
% within AGE	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%			
Total	Count	2	4	6		
% within AGE	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%			

Summary of the dialect distribution (table 1.9). AGE * EDUCATION * DIALECTS Cross Tabulation

DIALECTS	EDUCATION			Total	
		EDUCATED	UNEDUCATED		
TOMOSILI	AGE	10-20	3	0	3
		21-35	1	3	4
		36-50	2	2	4
		ABOVE 50	1	4	5
		Total	7	9	16
NAYAHILI	AGE	10-20	3	0	3
		21-35	1	3	4
		36-50	1	3	4
		ABOVE 50	1	2	3
		Total	6	8	14
NANUNI	AGE	10-20	1	1	2
		21-35	2	0	2
		36-50	1	2	3
		ABOVE 50	0	3	3
		Total	4	6	10

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study purely employed quantitative research approach to elicit data from the participants for the study through interview as a quantitative design. This approach was used to test the selected social variables against the linguistic variables under study. The researcher believed that by adopting this approach, it will help find answers to the research questions set for the study. It will also throw light on the relationships that exist between the variables. (Creswell, 2014)

The objectives of this study were tested by the data the researcher collected from the interviews. The participants used in the study were both young and old male and female native speakers, both educated and uneducated across the three dialects of Dagbani.

All the participants selected for the study constituted samples from the social groups. These are people who use the language for their everyday communications. The researcher was convinced beyond doubt that reach data would be gotten from the participants since they use the variables.

4.1 HYPOTHESIS

The following are the hypotheses for the research:

- [layiri] is the more dominant variant.
- [liyiri] would be used more by male respondents than females.
- [layiri] would be used more by females than males.
- The younger generation would be comfortable to use (new form) [layiri]
- The older generation would be using the standard variant (old form) [liyiri].
- The uneducated are likely to be more frequent in the use of the new variant [layiri].



4.2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As discussed earlier in the methodology, the study adopts varied question to elicit natural data from the respondents. Below are some of the questions being asked by the researcher in this study:

- Ala n-nyɛ a dobino ɲɔ?
- Di nyɛla (Ghc 5.00).
- Boomi ka n da.
- Di (layiri / liyiri) m-bala.
- Ala n-nyɛ a nyuli ɲɔ?
- Di nyɛla (Ghc 10.00).
- Boomi ka n da.
- Di (layiri /liyiri) m-bala.
- Ka bɔ n-tahi a na kpe?
- N yen yihila (layiri / liyiri).

4.3. GLOSSING

1. How much is your dates?

It is Ghc 5.00

Reduce for me to buy.

That is the price.

2. How much is your tubers of yams?

It costs Ghc 10.00

Reduce the price for me to buy.

That is the price.

3. What brings you here?

I am here to withdraw/ send in money.

4.4. SAMPLING

A successful data to analyze any relevant linguistic variable, depends heavily on the participants. A researcher has to select or sample his or her population to get the best participants for a study to reflect the objectives of the study questions. This current study used 40 participants who were purposely selected. Unstructured survey interview was used as the data instrument for this study. This instrument was chosen because the researcher wanted to employ varied questions to elicit responses from the participants in its natural form. The forty participants represented the three dialects of Dagbani whose responses would be significant enough to reflect the entire population.

4.5. OBTAINING THE DATA (data collection procedure)

The interviews were done in natural settings where participants were very comfortable doing their daily activities. The researcher visited a number of places like; markets, schools, homes, banks and social gatherings. To put it on record, some interviews lasted for about between 10 and 15 minutes. Here, the researcher was really behind time and needed to go back to campus to take other lectures. The interview was conducted in four different areas; Tamale, Yendi/Gushiegu and Bimbilla in early May to late June sometimes on both working days and weekends. In Bimbilla, I used a friend who is a native speaker as my research assistant to help me conduct the interview. As mentioned earlier, oral interview and participant's observation were used to elicit data from the participants. This study adopted the method used by Labov's study in New York City (fourth floor'). I must put on record that varied questions and methodology were used for the participants depending on the work they do and condition in which they were to get the natural data. For instance, the researcher went to the market to interact with the traders there where different questions were used for them. The researcher asked for the prices of items from traders after they mention, the researcher asked for reduction and pays attention to the response from the traders. They would respond by saying 'di ... m-bala' 'literally that is the price'. Meaning they would not reduce the price any further.



From their response, they either pronounce the old form or the new form. After getting the response, the researcher quickly told them that he did have intention to buy the items but only wanted to hear how they would produce ‘money’ in the Dagbani. The researcher then asked about their age and education background and the dialect they speak just to confirm. The researcher also went to mobile money merchants and some Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in the research sites where people queued to transact business, and he quickly asked them to know what they came to do. There, participants responded by saying either they came to deposit/send money or withdraw money. In Dagbani they say ‘**N yɛn yihi la (layiri/ liyiri)**’ or ‘**N yɛn yo la(layiri/ liyiri)**’. ‘I am sending (layiri/ liyiri)’ or withdrawing (layiri/ liyiri)’ respectively.

5. ANALYSES OF DATA

In this section, the study presents the results from the data collected in the interviews conducted. The study summarized those using tables to highlight the findings from the linguistic variables as well as the social variables used in the study. The data are analyzed using an SPSS software through a cross tabulation to generate tables to give a clearer picture of the data. The findings are described below the tables. The readings are done from left to right to get the understanding of the data collected using the tables. Those that were captured in the data are age, gender, education and dialect. The presentation of the hypotheses are also discussed in this section.

5.1 ESTABLISHING THE VARIATION

The purpose of this section is to show the variation in this study. To do that, the study presented a table (10) below to indicate how the variation do occur across the social variables adopted in the study.

a. GENDER * LIYIRI/LAYIRI * DIALECTS Cross Tabulation

DIALECTS				LIYIRI/LAYIRI		Total
				LIYIRI	LAYIRI	
TOMOSI LI	GENDER	MALE	Count	3	5	8
			% within GENDER	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
	FEMAL E	Count	1	7	8	
		% within GENDER	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%	
Total		Count	4	12	16	
		% within GENDER	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	
NAYAH LI	GENDER	MALE	Count	4	3	7
			% within GENDER	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	FEMAL E	Count	5	2	7	
		% within GENDER	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%	
Total		Count	9	5	14	
		% within GENDER	64.3%	35.7%	100.0%	
NANUNI	GENDER MALE	Count	4	1	5	



	% GENDER	within	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
FEMAL E	Count		2	3	5
	% GENDER	within	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		6	4	10
	% GENDER	within	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%

b. DIALECTS * LIGIRI/LAGIRI Cross Tabulation

				<u>LIYIRI/LAYIRI</u>		Total
				LIYIRI	LAYIRI	
DIALECT S	TOMOSI LI	Count		4	12	16
		% DIALECTS	within	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	NAYAHIL LI	Count		9	5	14
		% DIALECTS	within	64.3%	35.7%	100.0%
	NANUNI	Count		6	4	10
		% DIALECTS	within	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total		Count		19	21	40
		% DIALECTS	within	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%

From the data represented in table 10, it can be observed that the native speakers of the Tomosili dialect which represented about 40% of the total number of respondents used in the study, those who produced the old form dominate those who produced the new form. However, from the Nayahili respondents, those who produced the old form dominate those who produced the new form. Same can be seen in the Nanuni respondents. In terms of the old form, majority of both the Nayahili and Nanuni respondents maintained but no reason has been established to that effect. Judging from the data, generally, the use of the new form dominate the use of the old form. This analysis confirmed relatively a variation between the old form and the new form. Thus, the Tomosili dialect seems to be leading.

This phenomenon cut across all the three dialects. This confirms my argument that these two variants are used in the dialects under study and has no bearing with dialect and cannot be dialectal even though there is a difference of 5% between the productions of the two variants.

5.2 GENDER

This section focuses on the variation based on gender within each dialect used for the study. The table below shows how the variants were produced from gender perspective.

Table 11. GENDER * LIYIRI/LAYIRI Cross Tabulation

		Liyiri/Layiri		Total	
		Liyiri	Layiri		
GENDER	MALE	Count	11	9	20
		% within GENDER	55.0%	45.0%	100.0%
	FEMALE	Count	8	12	20
		% within GENDER	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	19	21	40	
	% within GENDER	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%	

It can be observed from table 11 that in terms of the new form, females dominated males in the pronunciation on a record whilst the males dominated females in the use of the old form. Hence, on a whole, those who pronounced the new form dominated those who pronounced the old form which represented by 52.5% and 47.5% respectively. In this regard, females seems to be leading the change to the new form. This confirms Labov’s (1990) claim that in change from below, women are most often the innovators. This may be due to the prestige attach to the use of the new form where women want to maintain the prestige and stigmatize the use of the old form which is the preserve of the males.

5.3 AGE

The study used age as one of the social variables against the linguistic variables. In this regard, the table below, shows the variation of the linguistic variables based on age. The choice of variant is represented in the table 12 below;

AGE * LIYIRI/LAYIRI Cross Tabulation

		Liyiri/Layiri		Total	
		Liyiri	Layiri		
AGE	10-20	Count	1	7	8
		% within AGE	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
	21-35	Count	4	6	10
		% within AGE	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	36-50	Count	4	7	11
		% within AGE	36.4%	63.6%	100.0%
ABOVE	Count	10	1	11	



	50	% within AGE	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	19	21	40
		% within AGE	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%

Given the present data, it could be inferred from the above table that there seem to be a clear variation and change among the young age group towards the use of the new form (variant) than the older generation. From the table, respondents between the ages of 10-36 are likely to use the new variant than those above 36 years. This could also be attributed to the fact that the younger generation cherish the prestigious form to the less ones. The older generation seem to stick to the older form which could be attributed to the fact that they want to keep their identity the older generation and preserving the language.

5.4 EDUCATION

This section examines variation based on gender within each dialect used in this study. The analyses are done based on the table below;

Table 13. Distribution of production by Education
EDUCATION * LIYIRI/LAYIRI Cross Tabulation

		LIYIRI/LAYIRI		Total	
		LIYIRI	LAYIRI		
EDUCATION	EDUCATED	Count	7	10	17
		% within EDUCATION	41.2%	58.8%	100.0%
	UNEDUCATED	Count	12	11	23
		% within EDUCATION	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	19	21	40	
	% within EDUCATION	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%	

From the above table on education as a social variable, it can be seen that, the educated respondents are seen to be leading in the pronunciation of the new form but in cross tabulation between the gender and education, it is however observed that both female and male educated respondents seem to be leading in the use of the new form with 75.0% and 53.8% respectively. In all, the data showed that in the pronunciation of the two variants, relatively the new form is observed to be used more in both gender.

5.5 TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

This section examines the hypotheses that the study hypothesizes. The study makes some hypotheses to guide the objectives of the paper. It is crucial to point to the fact that not all the hypotheses were achieved. In the data, it is confirmed that [layiri] is the more dominant variant in the speech community across the social variables in the study. It is also seen that [liyiri] would be used more by male respondents than females. It confirms the hypothesis that the younger generation and females would be more comfortable to use the non-standard form but however, the study hypothesizes that the uneducated are likely to be more frequent in the use of the new variant but this proved either wise in the data.

6. DISCUSSION OF ANALYSES

In this study, the statistical evidence as shown from tables 10 to 13 seem to suggest that the speech communities of Dagbani is linguistically complex in nature as many other speech communities in Ghana. The view of this paper is that the linguistic variations exhibited by respondents in the data in the Dagbani speech community are evidently not by chance and that could be clear indicators of the social orientation of members and respondents in the speech community as observed in the above analyses.

6.1 The more dominant variant in the speech community.

The study was conducted to test the linguistic variable that is more dominant in the speech community of Dagbani respondents, the older or the younger generations (age), education, dialect or gender. The findings show that [laiyiri] is more frequent in the speech of the younger generation and the females while [liyiri] is frequent in the speech of the older generation and males.

6.2 Sociolinguistic variable that influences the use of [layiri] in the speech community

The study was again done to test the sociolinguistic variable that influences the choice of [layiri] as a new form over [liyiri]. In the data, the results on gender use of [layiri] confirms that [layiri] is a more in the speech of the female respondents representing 60% and males representing 45% used [layiri]. The results indeed point to the fact that all the social factors are capable of using the new form [layiri] variant.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper sought to look at the distribution of the use of either [liyiri] or [layiri] in the Dagbani speech communities, a Gur-language widely spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana as an indicator of social stratification within the communities to assume that [liyiri] would be more used and that more female and young people would use it more than male and adult generation from the researcher's hypotheses. Upon careful analyses of the data collected, the study observed the following: the choice between the two variants [liyiri] or [layiri] is social stratified in the speech community. It is observed that [liyiri] is the less dominant variant but it socially marked for male and older generation. However, [layiri] seems to be a more dominant variant and socially marked for female and the younger generation. It is covertly examined within this group as more prestigious and its use or otherwise could be in my view attributed to age and gender factors.

Furthermore, the paper found that even though female seems to be leading the actual change, this was led by educated female respondents which the study finds interesting. This may be due to the fact that educated females seem to be unaware and unconscious of the change that is taking place in the speech communities. In the introduction, the paper claims that although there are variations in Dagbani from linguistic perspective, it however argues that certain variations cannot be said to be dialectal. The paper makes argument that the variations under study, are not dialectal. It argues that the variation observed has to do with a change in the use of a linguistic variable with its variants by speakers of Dagbani. The study confirmed that claim where the use of the new form seems to manifesting in all the three dialects of Dagbani, but in terms of dialectal, the Tomosili could be leading the change where no reason has been established to that effect.

As pointed out earlier, the paper examines the phonological or otherwise social variation of [liyiri] or [layiri] in Dagbani speech community confirming that [layiri] is more frequent and dominant in the speech of the younger and the female generations while [liyiri] is frequent and more dominant in the speech of the older generation and males. The paper also argues that the variation is manifested across the dialects of Dagbani and the variation and change taking place is not dialectal even though one dialect seems to be leading in the pronunciation of the new variant. The paper argued from the data available that 52.5% of female used the new form as the non-standard form while 47.5% male prefer the old form which is the standard form which shows that there seem to be a change. It is again observed in the data that educated respondents produced the new form than the uneducated with 58.8% and 47.8% respectively but with the female and male educated respondents leading the change with 75.0% and 53.8% respectively.

However, the data showed that in terms of education as a social variable, the educated respondents do appear to be leading in the use of the new form than the uneducated but relatively the new form is observed to be used more in the speech community and this result is likely to be prevalent in Dagbani speech community even though the study finds it interesting.

In conclusion, in this study, the paper disagrees Labov's first principle that men use a higher frequency of the non-standard form [layiri] than women in his study. The paper however partly agrees with the second principle according to the data which showed younger generation as the agent of change and not women. In this study, it relatively points to the fact that, if there is a change in the Dagbani speech community, women are the agents of linguistic change. This paper therefore proposes that younger generation, women and the educated are generally the innovators in linguistic change. The paper suggests that in embarking on a future study, the number of participants be increased to a reasonable number so that some of the assertions in the paper can be ascertained.

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