

**LANGUAGE AND GENDER:
THE CONSTRUCTION AND REPRODUCTION OF
GENDER IN DAGBANLI**

SALIFU NANTOGMA ALHASSAN



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research under the supervision and guidance of my team of supervisors. With the exception of sources which I have used or cited and which have been acknowledged by means of complete references, I confirm that this work is my own original work, and that it has not been submitted in part or as a whole to any institution for an award of a degree.

Salifu Nantogma Alhassan
(Candidate)

SUPERVISORS

1. Prof. Mary Esther Kropp-Dakubu
(Lead Supervisor)
2. Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy
3. Dr. George Akanlig-Pare



Dedication

This work is dedicated to
Abukari, Wumpaga, Wumpini, Wumya and Tiyyumba



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Dagbanli Script.

Consonants

Dagbanli orthography is unsettled and writers frequently differ in their use of characters for the different sounds. The following consonants however appear to be used uniformly by most writers:

b /b/ as in bee	p /p/ as in pen
d /d/ as in do	r /r/ is a rolled r
f /f/ as in fat	s /s/ as in sun
g /g/ as in go	t /t/ as in ten
k /k/ as in key	v /v/ as in vat
l /l/ as in leg	w /w/ as in wet
m /m/ as in map	z /z/ as in zip
n /n/ as in nose	y /y/ as in yes
ŋ /ŋ/ as in hang	

Other consonants are **ɣ**, **ŋ**, **ʃ**, and **ʒ**. Some writers, e.g. Blench et al 2004, use **g** in place of **ɣ** and **sh** (as in **shine**) in place of **ʃ**.

The diagraphs **gb**, **kp**, **ŋm**, **ny**, are used without variation, but **dʒ**, (as in **just**) and **tʃ** (as in **chin**) have been replaced by **j** and **ch** respectively by some writers. I use these last two, but where **dʒ** or **tʃ** are used in a text that I cite, I keep the original spelling of the source.

Vowels

Blench et al (2004:5) list only six vowels: *i*, *u*, *e*, *ɪ*, *o*, and *a*. Naden (1988) lists seven: Vowels may be long or short, and writers indicate long vowels by doubling. Thus Naden (1988) lists the following as the vowels that occur in Dagbanli:

Short vowels: **a**, **e**, **ɛ** **i** **o** **ɔ** **u**

Long vowels: **aa**, **ee**, **ii**, **oo**, and **uu**.

Abbreviations

1S/2S/3S – 1st/2nd/3rd person singular

1P/2P/3P – 1st/2nd/3rd person plural

ADV - adverbial

COND – conditional particle

CONJ – conjunction

COP –copular verb

DEM – demonstrative

DET – determiner

EMPH – emphatic

FOC – focus marker

FUT – future

IMPF – imperfective

INF – infinitive prefix

LOC – locative

NEG – negative

PERF – perfective

REL – relative

PART - particle

ABSTRACT

Gender is an issue of social and interpersonal relationships between males and females, a problem of differences in roles and values, and inequalities in opportunities, access to resources and power. These relationships, differences and inequalities are located in social and institutional structures and practices, but they are also firmly rooted in language. Language is a locus for the manifestation of gender because language and its usage convey not only factually objective meanings but also produce and reproduce social meanings and affect social relations.

Using an eclectic conceptual framework, the study takes into consideration gender theories, feminist linguistic perspectives, and discourse analysis paradigms to critically examine Dagbanli linguistic items and Dagomba linguistic behaviour that create and re-affirm those culturally constructed differences and inequalities between males and females called gender. I examine single lexical items, phrases, proverbs, popular sayings as well as language in active everyday use in conjunction with the social and cultural circumstances that define usage practices or add gendered meanings to the language. These were collected from written texts and from language in active use recorded electronically and transcribed, or recorded in writing during conversations.

The results show that the Dagomba hold strong views about differences between males and females and express these in various ways. Paired male/female or masculine /feminine linguistic items tend to have positive meanings for males but carry negative associations for females. There is a higher tendency of giving stereotypical and derogatory labels to females than to males. Negative representation of females is most pervasive in proverbs and contrasts sharply with positive representations of men, though the uniqueness of the woman as mother and wife is recognised. There are also some differences in the use of some linguistic items by males and females. Men use forms that are associated with higher status and power while women have to use forms that are associated with inferior status. Men and women engaged in normal interaction routinely reproduce gender stereotypes as they use language.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Background

The problem of gender manifests itself in a myriad of forms and contexts. An indication of the complexity of gender is the attention it attracts from across a wide range of academic disciplines and professional interests. In Ghana, scholars have examined gender as an issue in education: Ayertey (2004); governance and law: Manuh and Adomako Ampofo (1992), Svanikier (1997), Kotey and Yeboah (2003), Thompson (2008), Tsikata (2001, 2009); as an issue in health: Awusoba-Asare (2004); the economy: Bening and Nabila (1981), Awumbila (2001), Fayorsey (2003), Abdul-Malik (2005), Baah-Boateng (2009); religion and culture: Dolphyne (1991); agriculture and the environment: Boafo (2000), Duncan (2004), Guo (2007); the creative arts: Collins (2007); the media: Boateng (2002), Yeboah (2008); and even as an issue in recruitment and placement in the military Dzegblor (2010).

One critical fact that emerges in all these is that gender has a close link with or is embedded deep in culture. Adomako Ampofo (2010) has observed that from whichever angle one looks, culture constantly ‘(re)emerges as the place where gender is most passionately contested and (re)invented’ (Adomako Ampofo 2010: 389). Also stressing the role of culture in gender, Kwapong (2009) notes that ‘through socialization and cultural orientation, what it means to be a man and woman are deeply rooted in children’s earliest experiences and memories, and

that the family – both male and female members, community members, and peers ensure that cultural norms about gender roles are transferred to male and female children accordingly’ (Kwapong 2009: 3).

Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) have shown that the processes of acquiring and becoming accomplished in one’s culture do not occur apart from the process of language acquisition. Children acquire language and culture together in what amounts to an integrated process. As we learn the language of the culture into which we are born, we learn also the roles we are to play in life. This makes language an important arena for the investigation of gender.

Gal (2001) notes further that language is a rich repository of historical, cultural, and social information about the people who use it. By studying different aspects of the language of a people and general usage patterns of a language, we can make important inferences about the lives of members of communities, their shared or predominant attitudes, values and ideologies connected with identity, race, ethnicity and gender (McConnell-Ginet et al 1980). Similarly Dakubu (1996) observes that most linguists have found it rewarding to use the insights gained through traditional linguistics to study not language in general as a timeless phenomenon, but the specific manifestations of languages, ‘their content or what people say and write in them, the context of language use, or the way a language is related to its social system, and the sources of the human language faculty, its psychological and biological foundation’, (Dakubu 1996:27). In other

words, we should be interested not only in language itself but also in what a language tells us about the social conditions of its users.

In the interaction between language and socio-cultural variables, language conveys not only factually objective meanings but also produces social meanings, creates subjective identities and affects social relations. Speakers routinely exploit the interplay of language and social practice as strategies to construct or reflect different kinds of relations during social interaction. In this regard language becomes a 'mediating activity' in the structuring of social relations (Duranti 1997: 281).

Drawing on these insights, language and gender scholars have focused on language in active use as a way of analyzing how language constructs and shapes gender (Brown and Yule 1983; Tannen 1993). Language and gender scholarship therefore explores how language use informs and is informed by the larger social and cultural patterns that constitute gender (Borker 1980:26).

1.1. Male-female language

Linguists had for long observed and commented on perceived or real differences in the language used by males and females. The history of the English language for example indicates that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was considerable interest and commentary in sex differences in vocabulary and usage (see Baugh and Cable, 1978; Coates, 1986). Interest in male-female differences in language continued into the twentieth century, and from the 1970's the feminist movement in the United States began to look more critically at

language use as part of a social system that treated women unfairly. Nilsen (1977) observes that the American feminist movement of the 1970's raised public awareness of sexism in the English language and popularized words like 'Ms.', 'sexism', 'consciousness raising', 'sexual politics', 'women's liberation', 'feminist', 'libber', 'chauvinist', 'male chauvinist pig' (MVP), 'linguistic sexism'. It also led to the beginnings of advocacy for the use of sex-neutral language; for example, the avoidance of words and language that unnecessarily drew attention to people's sex where the sexual identity of the person did not matter, or the attachment of sex labels to job descriptions..

1.2. Language and Gender

However, serious study of language and gender appears to have followed the publication of Lakoff's (1975) *Language and Woman's Place* (Coates 1986, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Tannen 2003, Talbot 2003). Lakoff observed differences in the way males and females use language and explained these differences in terms of power and assertiveness, and powerlessness and timidity. She characterized women's speech as non-assertive or 'powerless language' and argued that women use powerless language because they are forced through the pressures of patriarchy to learn and speak that way. According to Lakoff the characteristics of 'women's language' are a result of linguistic subordination.

The effect of linguistic subordination is that it submerges a woman's personal identity by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly on the one hand and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and

uncertainty about it; and when a woman is being discussed by treating her as an object (sexual or otherwise) but never as a serious person with individual views (Lakoff 1975: 243).

Many of the observations about male and female language however tended to be based on linguists' personal biases or were made to fit cultural stereotypes. Lakoff for instance is believed to have relied heavily on her own impressions without the support of empirical evidence, and subsequent research has challenged many of these assertions or qualified them. Her work however introduced the power paradigm into the alleged differences in the language of males and females and stimulated interest in the study of the relationship between language and gender from different viewpoints and across different disciplines and in other languages besides English (Nilsen 1977, Tannen 1993). According to Bonvillian (1998), research in other languages has shown that men and women across languages, cultures, and circumstances exhibit different linguistic behaviours. Male and female differences in morphology and lexis have been recorded in many languages like Japanese and some Native American languages, whilst Keenan's (1989) study shows difference in male and female speech in Madagascar. Gregersen (1988) and Romaine (1999) have also indicated that the practice of linguistic taboos in some African cultures sometimes produces differences in the speech of males and females.

Interest in language and gender covers all aspects of language use from language socialization in young children to lexical differences, phonological differences,

morphological and syntactic differences in the language used by men and women, discourse strategies, sexist language and stereotyping, language and power, language and sexuality and so on.

1.3. Language and Gender in African contexts

In Africa, language and gender study may be put into two broad areas; the first is the study of gender in the use of European languages by Africans in areas like education (Balfour 2003, De Kadt 2004, Madu and Kasanga 2005; in law and governance (Atanga 2006 and 2009, Wanitzek 2002, Hirsch 2002); in the media and in literature (Salami 2004) as well as in their day to day interactions (Yusuf 1994a, De Kadt 2002, Akinbiyi 2010).

The second area is the examination of gender in indigenous African languages. In this area some scholars look at the representation of gender in oral literary forms like folktales (Naana Opoku-Agyemang 1998) or dirges (Nanbigne 2003). Other studies of gender in African languages look at the production and reproduction of gender and gender stereotypes in the day-to-day use of language. This thesis falls within this latter area of study. Previous research in this area includes Obeng and Stoeltje (2002), Clark (2002), and Rapoo (2002). Other studies (Yusuf 1994b, 1995, 1998, 2002; Machoboane 1996; Ntshinga 1996, Ssetuba 2005) have been on gender in African proverbs. Although these could be considered as falling within the area of oral literature, I consider proverbs in this study as a form within everyday language use.

In the study of language and gender, the researcher may look at language used about males and females or language used by males and females. The former deals with biases which are associated with linguistic items or biases which reflect users' own prejudices. The latter approach may cover differences between the way men and women use the language at the phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical levels (Coates 1998:7) and discourse or conversational styles of males and females. In this study I adopt both approaches as I look at how male and female speakers of Dagbanli use some aspects of the language differently and also how the language is used by speakers to talk about males and females and the gendered implications of these usages.

1.4. Problem Statement

As a modern nation state, Ghana is governed by a deliberately crafted legal framework or constitution. The constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all persons irrespective of their sex, age or other social categorizations. Within this modern nation state are several local indigenous societies which have their own traditional political and socio-cultural systems operating alongside the modern system. The traditional systems are defined and regulated by values and practices that are rooted in what Nukunya (1992) describes as long-held beliefs, customs and authority of the ancestors. In these systems biological and natural attributes of sex and age as well as other socially and culturally determined categories are the main determiners in the distribution of economic resources, rights, privileges, power, authority and status. Dagbon, the

location of this study, is one of the Ghanaian societies in which traditions still hold a strong influence in the people's lives.

Dagbon is a patriarchal society. The structure of social institutions vests men with power and authority and accords them more rights and privileges than women. Men are placed at the top of a hierarchy of statuses and women at the lower end. The position of chief is a male one, but there a few of such positions reserved for a select group of women (Odotei 2006, Mahama 2004)¹. At the family or household level the man is the head of the household, family or the lineage.

Attitudes about males and females are shaped and maintained by the traditions and beliefs that inform the structuring of society. This traditional system is further supported and strengthened by the influence of Islam which Dagbon has had contact with since about the 1700's or earlier (Staniland, 1975) and which sharply delineates male and female territories and authority.

Mahama (2004) observes that among Dagombas the husband usually has the last word in any issue concerning the household and its members. This must be understood both literally and figuratively, for as Nabilla (2000) points out, Dagomba women are not supposed to talk in public in the presence of men, such as their husbands, (and when they talk to their husbands or render services to them they are expected to go down on both knees). Husbands and wives do not work together, except when more hands are needed to sow or harvest cereals like maize or groundnuts). They do not eat together, go out together, share domestic

¹Only daughters of a Ya Na (King of Dagbon) can be appointed to any one of this small number of chiefship positions.

tasks or share same friends (Nabilla 2000:71). According to Nabilla, a Dagomba will say that if he does any of these with his wife, '*O nini ni kpema*' (literally, 'her eye will enter me'; in other words she will become too familiar, or she will consider me her social equal). Indeed, there are several uncomplimentary terms or names given to men who are seen often in a tête-à-tête with their wives or other women (see section **4.3.a.**).

But one cannot assume that Dagomba society and its traditions have continued to be in a pristine state completely insulated from the modernizing influences and changes going on in the larger society. Much of the change has come as a consequence of the changing circumstances and exposure of a traditional way of life to powerful external influences. Traditional subsistence agriculture is no longer able to provide enough food to feed the family throughout the year. Others have been consciously introduced through government policy over the years. Poverty reduction strategies and women's economic empowerment interventions by government and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) have made women more and more economically capable and sometimes totally independent (Korten 1997, Nabila 2000). Many women now not only provide supplementary incomes for their families but sometimes the bulk of their needs, especially their children's basic needs like clothes. The proliferation of Fm radio stations and sponsorship of women's programs on radio by NGO's have made a strong impact in creating awareness of the importance of women's roles and the benefits to the individual and the family of improving opportunities for women.

A cursory glance at the society suggests that these innovations may be nibbling away at the foundations of traditional social and power structures. The roles of men and women may be changing, even if infinitesimally, and women may be taking on new responsibilities as economic resources are no longer the exclusive preserve of men. However, social and power structures have not been completely supplanted.

1.5. Research Questions

In view of the link between language and culture, can a study of the Dagbanli language help us understand better the structuring of relationships between men and women in Dagbon? How does the language reflect and shape gender, or attitudes and relations between males and females? How do Dagomba talk about men and women and what are the effects of such talk on how men and women perceive themselves and others? Have the changes that are taking place in Dagomba society had any effect on the linguistic behaviour of men and women, or do men and women still talk about each other and about themselves in the ways of the traditions? These are some of the questions I shall answer in this study.

1.6. Goal

The goal of this study is to examine the role of language and its use in the construction and maintenance of gender and gender relations among speakers of Dagbanli.

1.7. Objectives

My specific objectives are to:

- identify linguistic items (like vocabulary) that may have sexist connotations or may be used in sexist ways;
- identify linguistic forms that are used differently by males and females and the gendered implications of such differences in usage;
- identify linguistic items that may be used exclusively by females or by males, or tend to be preferred by one sex or the other and to examine the implication of such choices in relation to gender;
- examine the representation of males and females in Dagomba proverbs, and
- examine how gender and gender relations are shaped, maintained or contested in male/female conversational interaction.

1.8. Relevance of the Study

As noted above, gender research in Ghana has largely been done within the social sciences, and appears to be largely aimed at improving gender advocacy and removing gender inequalities. However, as Adomako Ampofo (1992) reminds us, simply improving the material aspects of women's lives does not necessarily translate into more egalitarian relationships between men and women. She proposes the investigation of both the material and non-material aspects of women's lives. Gender is constructed, reproduced and sustained through language as a key component in the socialization process; and we need to appreciate the various ways in which this is done before we can begin to deconstruct gender.

The various forms in which women are excluded from decision making is well documented in the literature, but little interest has been shown in studying the role of language in constructing and maintaining gender imbalances in Ghanaian societies. A couple of studies; namely, Dakubu (1997b) Obeng and Stoeltje (2002) and Clark (2002) that deal with language examine the exclusion of women in juridical processes or their performance in such contexts. Though these studies give some insight into the presence or absence of women's voices in decision making, their contexts are formal or quasi-formal juridical situations.

Gender does not exist only in formal and quasi-formal structures and situations but is also played out at the personal level between individuals. In this study I look at commonplace interactions between men and women and at the linguistic resources both have access to and how the use of these affects relationships between them. This will add a new perspective to the existing studies on language and gender in Ghana, and should also stimulate interest in further sociolinguistic research in Dagbanli in particular.

The greater amount of research on gender in African languages has concentrated on proverbs. These studies have however relied on the generalized interpretations of the proverbs without describing the different socio-cultural and discourse contexts in which they are used. The study of gender within the context of discourse rather than from isolated proverbs will enable us provide more insightful interpretations and a fuller appreciation of the social values and ideologies that produce and feed these statements.

1.9. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with background information on the place of language and gender studies in understanding gender and drawing attention to the deficit in Ghanaian scholarship on gender. In this chapter, I have also defined the research problem, and stated the goal and objectives of the study and its relevance.

In Chapter 2, I briefly discuss some theories of gender on which this study is anchored. I also make note of some perspectives of gender by some African scholars and discuss the approaches to gender studies. A review of relevant literature and a profile of the Dagomba people are also given in this chapter. Chapter 3 presents the research design and methods used to collect and analyze the data.

I present and discuss my findings in Chapters 4-7. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings on individual vocabulary items and phrases or expressions that refer to males and females and discuss how various social meanings associated with these items and constraints on the usage of some reflect and reproduce different and unequal social values for the male and the female. In Chapter 5, I discuss the presentation of the male and the female in Dagbanli proverbs. The defining qualities of malehood and femalehood are emphasized in Dagbanli proverbs in a recurrent pattern of images and attributes.

In Chapter 6 I identify two important linguistic forms, summons and response and address forms that show differences in usage by males and females. I show

how these differences create and maintain an ideology of male superiority and in Chapter 7, I analyze and discuss sample conversations in which males and females interact in ways that bring out gendered meanings and relationships. Chapter 8 closes the study with conclusions drawn from the findings and some recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

The term ‘gender’ has, in recent times, almost become a household word. In the past, at least for many people, it was used interchangeably with sex, the category of a person’s reproductive anatomy. However, the emergence of gender as a social, economic, political, and a human rights issue has helped to make a distinction between the two terms. Sociologists advocate the use of ‘sex’ only when referring to specifically biological facts or mechanisms and ‘gender’ when discussing the social, cultural and psychological traits, norms, stereotypes and roles considered typical and desirable for those whom society has categorized as male or female. Strobel (1984) notes that sexual differences are a fact of biology but societies attach to these sexual differences different significances and expectations created out of human cultural experiences and values. It is the different significances or meanings which society attaches to the biological fact of being boy or girl, and the different treatment and expectation of the two that constitute gender.

2.1. Theories of gender

Several theories have been proposed to explain the phenomenon of gender. These include, among others, the psychoanalytic theory, the cognitive development theory, the social learning or socialization theory and the social construction theory.

The psychoanalytic theory of gender postulates that gender is rooted in biology, and consciousness of gender begins with attachment of both boys and girls first to the mother, and later with the same sex parent. The theory puts too much weight on identification with same sex and completely ignores the role of socio-cultural factors in the development of the individual. The cognitive developmental theory explains the development of gender identity as part of the mental development process of children. Children see the world around them as organized on the basis of sex differences and the division of labor, and thus consider gender as the basic organizer and regulator of the world. They develop the stereotypic conceptions of gender from what they see and hear around them about boys/men or girls/women. Even though the theory acknowledges the role of interaction between the individual and the environment for the development of gender identity and roles, there is more emphasis on mental development and a very limited role is postulated for social influences. Also, there does not seem to be a place for language in either of these two theories.

2.1.1. Socialization or Social Learning Theory

Socialization or social learning theory focuses on the primary means by which children, and sometimes adults, influenced by differing learning environments, begin to learn behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex and acquire the skills necessary to perform as functioning members of their society. Henslin notes that an important part of gender socialization is "the learning of culturally defined gender roles" (Henslin 1999:76). Boys learn to be boys and girls learn to be girls by observing and imitating parents and people around them.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) note that once learners extract the rules and structure underlying the modeled activities they can generate new patterns of behavior that conform to the structural properties but go beyond what they have seen or heard.

2.1.2. Social Construction Theory

The social construction theory views gender as a social construct rather than a biological given. In other words, gender differentiation lies more in social and institutional practices than in fixed properties of the individual. Gender is created and recreated out of human experience and interaction. It is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:510).

According to Lorber (1994) the male-female social constructs start with the assignment to a sex category on the basis of what one's genitalia look like at birth. Once the facts of external genitalia or sex organs of a new born are known, the society begins to put different significances to these facts, significances derived from the specific culture into which the child is born. In that respect individuals are born sexed, not gendered, but society creates the differences in which these two sexes are treated and ultimately see themselves.

Children are treated differently (from the clothes they should wear to the objects they can play with) on the basis of their sex categorization and they respond to the different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently. Throughout their lives individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in

expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order (Lorber, 1994).

Gender is also a system of allocation (based on sex-class assignment) of rights and obligations, freedoms and constraints, limits and possibilities, power and subordination and supported by structures of convention, and ideology (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:34). To some extent gender may not be the result of individual choices and behaviors but a set of socially established and sanctioned practices which result in relations that are not equal for males and females (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). The individual follows convention or customs in doing things without questioning why he or she does them. Sometimes the reason lies only in sets of beliefs or ideologies used to account for or justify our behavior and to interpret and assess others. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin thus define gender as

‘...an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference. (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999: 191),

In this definition gender is presented as a structure of relations organized around the sex categories of ‘male and female’ but it does show that the categorization produces different institutionalized and unequal social practices and relations between the two.

The social learning theory emphasizes vicarious learning provided through observation of models and explicit rewards and punishments for behaving in sex-appropriate ways. In the social construction theory gender is thus accomplished

through an active process of interacting with others in a particular social context and in the process society imposes its conception of what it considers appropriate for the individual based on his or her sex category.

This study is anchored in the social learning and social construction theories. The emphasis of both theories on interaction between the individual and his social environment presupposes a role for language in the construction of gender.

2.1.3. Post-modernist theories of gender

The conception of gender based on a two-sex categorization has in recent times come under revision, especially in western scholarship. The current views of gender, described by Cameron (2005) as ‘post-modernist theories’, oppose the dual sex-based theorization of gender. The argument is that the facts of biology and individuals’ acknowledged sexual choices do not support the binary sex categories around which earlier definitions of gender were built (McElhinny 2003, Cameron 2005). According to Cameron ‘since the 1990’s a paradigm organized around the concept of binary gender difference has been superseded, for the most part, by one that is concerned with the diversity of gender identities and gendered practices’ (2005: 482). In the post-modernist view, sex itself and sexuality are not ‘natural’ or fixed categories but are socially constructed and therefore cannot be the foundation of gender (Cameron 2005:484). Thus, neither sex nor gender is fixed; both are what the individual chooses to be and do at any given time.

The post-modernist view is itself as problematic as the theories it seeks to challenge, especially when it comes to the discussion of sex and gender in Africa.

2.1.4. Some African Perspectives on Gender Theory

In dealing with the problem of gender from their own cultural experiences, African scholars have put forward some theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon. One group of scholars reacts against the post-modernist theories that reject the dual-sex models of gender. Kiteku (2006), for instance, argues that in Africa gender categories are mapped onto biological sex. Gender differences are perceived as ‘normal’ and male and female are ‘different but complementary’ (Kiteku 2006: 9). She further questions notions of the oppressed woman in the African context, arguing that in some African cultures women were heads of households and clans, and guardians of family property (2006:8).

Olajubu (2002) also insists that gender classifications have always existed among the Yoruba, but the gender construct is mediated by the philosophy of the complementarity of gender roles and relations, which is rooted in the people’s socio-religious experience which feeds and is fed by the belief that both male and female principles are crucial to a ‘smooth living experience’ (2002:48). The complementarity of roles is manifest in the fact that, in sharp contrast to Western theory of the division of the world into a domestic sphere for women and a public sphere for men, women’s activities in Africa relate to both domestic and public spheres; the African woman works both inside and outside the home. The African market place is dominated by women and the production of food crops on the

farm is a shared responsibility of men and women. Men are responsible for putting up the physical structure of the home and women do the finishing. Similar observations about the roles of women in and outside the home have been made by Benning and Nabila (1981), Korten (1997) and Awumbila (2001).

A second group of African scholars holds a different view. Oyewumi (2002) for instance, argues that gender is not a fundamental social category in all cultures, and that in Africa male-female differences are blurred at some levels. Also drawing from Yoruba society, she notes that in the traditional Yoruba family kinship categories and roles are not gender-differentiated, and the fundamental organizing principle that orders and divides society is not sex but seniority based on relative age.

Amadiume (1987:16) also reports of the flexibility of gender construction among the Igbo. In traditional Igbo society gender is separate from biological sex; the social role of “wife” is not inherent in the female body. The dual-sex systems are mediated by the flexibility of gender conceptualization of daughters as males, in ritual matters and particularly in relation to wives. Daughters and women in general could be ‘sons’, ‘husbands’ and ‘wives’. Among the Dagomba too the role designation of ‘wife’ (*paya*) may apply to a male and ‘husband’ (*gidana*) to a female. These references assign to them only gender roles in certain relations and not the sex roles of a female (*paya*) or male (*doo*).

Similarly, according to Yankah (1995), the Akan chief’s spokesman is described as ‘*ohene yere*, the chief’s wife’. He explains further that “even in cases where a

chief is female (*ohemaa*) and her *okyeame* (spokesperson) is male, the *okyeame* is still a ‘wife’ and the chief a husband” (1995:89). Still on the Akan, Miescher observes that in Akan society, seniority is as crucial to the construction of gender as is sex. He notes that in Akan society the social position of an *opanyin* (elder) is not gender specific; old age blurs the lines of gender and both men and women could become elders (*mpanyinfo*), and having achieved the position of *opanyin*, a man or woman embodies a different gender, though each had a different understanding of how they wield power (2007: 254). As we will see in section 5.1., this is in sharp contrast to the Dagomba society where ageing does not enhance the woman’s status but rather exposes her to various forms of discrimination.

These contrasting and sometimes conflicting realities of gender show the complexity of the manifestation of gender in the African context. If we agree that gender is first and foremost a socio-cultural construct, then we cannot assume that both the social category “woman” and her subordination are universals; the two must be analyzed in terms of cultural specificity. The analysis of gender in the African context must take into account the cultural diversities and complexities of the continent.

Thus, while drawing from the social learning and social construction theories I analyze gender as it is experienced in the Dagomba context and expressed through different forms of language and contexts.

2.2. Approaches to the Study of Language and Gender

This study adopts two approaches to the study of language and gender: the dominance framework (Zimmerman and West 1975, 1983) and difference (sometimes called the two-culture framework) Maltz and Borker (1982) and Tannen (1990).

2.2.1. Dominance Framework

The Dominance Framework proceeds from the view that though men and women inhabit the same cultural and linguistic world power and status are distributed unequally between them. This imbalance in the allocation of power and status exists not only in institutional structures but also in other cultural forms and is reproduced and maintained in everyday interactions through language (Zimmerman and West 1975, 1983, Spender 1980, Fishman 1980). Men's power and their control over the institutions of authority are made manifest in linguistic structures and in recurrent patterns of linguistic behaviour. Spender (1980) argues that men's privileged position allows them to use language to manipulate reality by classifying and ordering the world in a single male perspective to create and maintain the myth of male superiority. Their values are injected into language, and their language practices reflect and perpetuate their dominant status. Women on the other hand are an oppressed and marginalised group, and linguistic differences in women's and men's speech are a reflection of women's subordination. Meanings of linguistic structures and patterns of usage are seen as creating and maintaining male dominance.

2.2.2. Difference (Two-Cultures Framework)

The main idea in the difference or Two-Cultures Framework is that differences in male/female linguistic and communicative behaviour are a reflection of differences in the nature of males and females developed as a result of different sub-cultures which the two sexes acquire during the process of socialization (Maltz and Borker 1982). Males and females grow up acquiring and possessing different linguistic alternatives, observe different rules of conversing, and norms of interpretation appropriate to their own sub-cultures. Talk between men and women thus assumes the characteristics of cross-cultural communication (Maltz and Borker 1982) and when there are differences or difficulties, it is not so much because men are more powerful than women but because of cross-cultural misunderstanding (see also Treichler and Kramarae, 1983; Tannen 1990, 1994 and 1998; Holmes 1995; Coates 1998, Reid, Keerie and Palomares 2003). According to Tannen (1990) cultural differences exist even at the micro or sub-cultural levels of class, age and gender.

Both approaches are relevant in the study of language and gender in the Dagomba situation. There is power imbalance between men and women and there are a few linguistic forms that must be used differently by males and females. These make it relevant to investigate how these power imbalances are reflected in speech or how speech contributes to re-inforces these inequalities. It will also be interesting to find out if beyond the sex-determined forms of usage women and men make different choices in the use of other linguistic items, and how these choices contribute to the different social views about males and females.

2.2.3. Interactional Model of Language

The interactional model of language assumes that human beings are at all times engaged in a complex of interactions with other human beings and a significant fact about this behavior of human beings in relation to others is that a large part of it is linguistic behaviour. In other words, a great deal of everyday human behaviour is characterized by the primarily interactional use of language (Halliday 1973). Language is used for the most part to negotiate, establish and promote role-relationships, to delimit social groups and to identify and reinforce the individual's relations and membership of his or her social group (Brown and Yule (1983). The social construction theory of gender and the interactional model of language therefore provide common ground for language and gender researchers who view gender as a product of social behavior. Both are concerned with the study of human behavior in a social context.

2.2.4. Working Definitions of sex and Gender

2.2.4.1. Sex

In this study I follow the Dagomba conception of sex as two mutually exclusive and immutable categories of the male and female reproductive organs. The announcement of the birth of a new child is always immediately followed by the query *doo bee paya?* (boy/male or girl/female), or *paya bee doo?* (girl/female or boy/male). The phenomenon of the co-presence of the male and female organs in a single individual is not unknown to the Dagomba, but I found no Dagbanli word for a person with such ambiguous genitalia. The suggestion I got from one informant was that such persons are usually assigned a male identity. However, a

different explanation, which I find more plausible, was offered by another informant. According to him, to be considered a human being, a new born must clearly be identified as male or female. In the past, a new born which could not be classified as either male or female as a result of the co-presence of both sex organs was regarded as a ‘strange thing’ or ‘malformed thing’ (*bin’ nani*), a general term used for children born with various forms of serious deformities including hermaphroditism, autism and other forms of congenital abnormalities. Such children were not considered human and were quietly eliminated. Blench (2004) describes the Dagomba beliefs about such phenomena among living things as follows:

There is strong presumption that it is at night that identities are fluid, that animals can assume human form and humans appear as animals. Another illustration of this is the concept of *bin-nani*, literally ‘unknown thing’. These are children who are identified not as people but animals disguised in human form. The cause of this is spirits coming to dwell in the womb of the mother during pregnancy. Such children are dangerous and can cause the death of both parents, and if the community agrees on their identification then they are taken away by individuals who are charged to deal with these matters (Blench 2004:8).

The presence of a clearly defined sex organ is therefore part of the Dagomba conception of a human being (*ninsala*) (Pl *ninsalinima*) because a human being is either male or female. Throughout this report I refer to the two sexes as male, female; man, woman; boy, girl; or I use their plural forms or sometimes masculine, feminine.

2.2.4.2. Gender

I use the term ‘gender’ to refer to the different social and cultural definitions and expectations of behavior of males and females, that is the complex set of physical,

mental, and psychological, attributes, and social roles and statuses which society assigns and transmits to people based on their sex.

2.3. Literature Review

In this review I look briefly at the literature on Dagbanli before I examine literature on language and gender research from which one may draw insights relevant to this study.

2.3.1. Literature on and in Dagbanli

In the introduction to his work on aspects of Dagbanli grammar, Olawsky (1999) describes Dagbanli as “a little known Gur language” (Olawsky 1999: iv). This description is probably informed by the small amount of literature that is available in and on the language. Aspects of Dagbanli grammar have been described by Hudu (2010), Olawsky (2004, 1999, 1996), Dakubu (1997), Issah Dawuni (1993), Hyman (1993, 1988), Bendor-Samuel and Naden (1989), Bawa (1981, 1980) Yahaya (1979), and Wilson (1970, 1969, 1962a, 1962b).

There is relatively less work on the sociolinguistics of Dagbanli. Naden (1989) includes some brief notes on discourse/pragmatic features of the language, modes of asking questions, commands, narration, argumentation and style of dialogue. In an introduction to a manual for learners of spoken Dagbanli, Wilson (1972) also makes brief comments on conversational etiquette and the importance of greetings as an essential entrance into any conversation. A survey by Schaefer and others (1991) on speech use in 15 Ghanaian languages in Northern Ghana provides some information on everyday language use in Mampurli and Dagbanli. The survey

includes a listing of vocabulary items relating to language use in routine daily activities and describes speaking domains of men and women, the activities in which they engage in regular talk, and the speech behavior of men, women, the elderly and the young, but it does not deal with the question of how language affects social relations between men and women. Dakubu (2000) is a linguistic study of Dagomba naming practices, and Salifu Alhassan (2010) discusses the use of address forms in Dagbanli.

Salifu Abdulai's (2000) study of discourse at the palace of the King of Dagbon is probably the first study of the language in active use. However, the context of the chief's palace limits the focus of the study to a description of predominantly male speech, and the elaborate formality and etiquette that characterize discourse at the Chief's court.

Written literature in the Dagbanli language is equally scant, but there are two recent compilations of Dagbani-English dictionaries: Mahama (2003) and Blench et al (2004 on-line), and a collection of 3,027 proverbs by Lange (2006) that are relevant to this study. An index at the end of collection groups the proverbs under themes such as appreciation, boasting, cooperation, courage, destiny, honesty, patience, and so on. The themes do not include 'gender' but there are several proverbs that deal with the subject of men, women, masculinity, femininity, sex, sexuality, roles, status, relations between men and women. There are also a number of monographs by Tia Sulemana (1969) on Dagomba traditions and dances, and Musah Sugre (1969) and Andani (n.d.) on Dagomba marriage practices and responsibilities of husbands and wives.

2.3.2. Studies on Language and gender

1.3.2.1. Unequal Access to Speech

An important issue in language and gender studies is the apparent inequalities in the communicative space available to women and men (Talbot 2003). Dakubu (1997b) describes a situation where a group of women who were involved in a fight at a watering place near Bolgatanga are excluded from the juridical process for a settlement because such processes are usually an all-male affair. Yankah (1998) notes that in certain cultures in Africa there are physical forms of speech inhibitions where lip plates and restraining locks made from pieces of bone, wood or some other metal are used to control the speech of women.

Yankah argues that women's relative silence within the domain of mixed group (male-female) interaction may be an enactment of their social status which is an integral part of the social norms of communication. This acknowledges the cultural prescription of unequal speaking roles for men and women but does not tell us why this is necessary.

2.3.2.2. Gender in African proverbs

An area of language that has been of particular interest to language and gender scholars in Africa is proverbs. Kolawole has observed that in Africa, myths, legends, proverbs, folktales, riddles and other cultural productions are highly gendered. Several negative women's stereotypes are embedded in these linguistic artifacts (Kolawole 1998:12). Indeed, the articulation of gender in African proverbs has attracted the most interest from language and gender scholars in

Africa. Studies on proverbs include Hussein (2005) Ssetuba (2005) Rapoo (2002) Yusuf (2002, 1998, 1996), and Oha (1998) Ntshinga (1996). Hussein (2005) studies the role of proverbs in creating and perpetuating gendered cultures and ideologies in Africa. Citing proverbs from several languages across Africa, he argues that masculine hegemony and feminine subsidiarity are constructed through this pervasive linguistic artifact. According to Hussein the meanings of some African proverbs about women have 'harmful effects' on womanhood (1995: 61). He shows however, that the African view of gender is not entirely misogynistic. There are proverbs in which the complementarity between men and women and the expressive and supportive role of women are recognized, supporting the arguments of Kiteku (2006) and Olajubu (2002) discussed above. Ssetuba (2005) finds that Ganda proverbs depict women as they are seen and wanted in the patriarchal Baganda society of Uganda: weak, inferior, subsidiary and mere passive objects. His conclusion is that such proverbs are implicit attempts by predominantly patriarchal societies to preserve and sustain patriarchy through language use (2005: 38). Ssetuba challenges the generally accepted claim of the proverb to truthfulness and wisdom, and argues that it reflects the user's or society's aspiration for control and desire to impose a given view of life as unshakeable and accepted.

Yusuf (1998) makes a comparative study of English and Yoruba proverbs, and finds that the proverbs in both languages create negative images and stereotypes of women and entrench gender biases. There is a profusion of animal, food and plant imagery and allusions to property and trouble. The effect of the imagery is a

sense of ‘cumulative misogyny’ (Yusuf 1998: 63) as it trivializes, depersonalizes and dehumanizes women. Like Ssetuba (2002), Yusuf argues that on the basis of this, ‘wisdom’ and ‘truth’ cannot be regarded as essential characteristics of the proverb. This however raises more questions; whose wisdom and whose truth? So long as the messages in the proverbs adequately express the world view of the speakers, we may do no more than try to understand them if only to disagree with them.

Oha (1998) and Ntshinga, (1996) also deal with proverbs in the Igbo and Xhosa languages respectively. Like the others they also find that African proverbs are the expressions of men’s stereotypical views of women. They reveal a severe negation of the value of women in society, typically portraying them as senseless, morally debased, devilish, childish, and weak (Oha 1998:86).

Closely related to these studies on proverbs is Rapoo’s (2002) study of gender bias in naming practices in the Setswana language. In the culture of the Tswana, a common practice is to consider the circumstances prevailing at the time of naming a child, but there also seems to be a convention of giving boys names with a human reference, while girls’ names generally have an inanimate reference. According to Rapoo the traditional naming system is an example of the way traditional Botswana society uses language to legitimize gender imbalances and sexist discourse.

Generally, the findings from studies of proverbs show a regular pattern of negative representation of women with a few exceptions conceding the complementarity of males and females.

2.3.2.3. Other Linguistic forms of Stereotyping

Besides proverbs, other forms of language have been found to be used to stereotype men and women. Stereotyping has been found to be a common feature particularly in vocabulary across languages and the literature on this is large (see for instance Lei 2006; Grad 2006; Pauwels 2003; Yusuf 2002; Richardson 2001; Cameron 1998; Nilsen 1977; Gershuny 1977; Martyna 1980; Spender 1980).

2.3.2.4. Linguistic Taboo and Gender

Studies of the practice of some forms of linguistic taboos also show some elements of gender bias. Linguistic taboo is based on the belief that the utterance of some words may give offence or incur some spiritual sanctions. In many African cultures, linguistic taboo may include among others avoidance of reference to certain animals, objects, past events or the mention of names of persons who stand in certain relations to the speaker (Agyekum 1996, Romaine 1999). Linguistic taboo is gendered in two ways; firstly, in many forms of linguistic taboo the rules apply differently to males and females (Moshi 1985, Romaine 1999, Mbaya 2002). Romaine (1999) reports that in the Nguni culture in Southern Africa women are expected to honor their husbands' families by practicing what is called *hlonipha*, that is avoiding the use of any word containing a syllable also contained in their husband's name, but the men are not similarly affected by the taboo. Moshi (1985) also reports that among the Zulu, women of

the royal family taboo all sounds in the names of all the King's deceased forebears, lineal and collateral. Mbaya, (2002) notes that among the Oromo ethnic group of Ethiopia, a taboo prohibits wives from mentioning the birth names of their husbands, their in-laws and members of their extended families, all of who must be referred to by substituted forms (2002: 227).

Secondly, Agyekum (1996) notes that in Akan (and in other languages) where euphemisms are used in order to avoid mentioning of sexual organs, the expressions represent the female organs in food images and the male organs in images of weaponry. The euphemisms for the male and female organs and the sexual act itself tend to be suggestive of female passivity (like food to be eaten) and male activity or dominance.

2.3.2.5. Gender in linguistic interaction

Other areas of interest are the differences in the interactional style of men and women and researchers have looked at various speech forms of male-female interaction. In light of suggestions that women's speech is more polite than men's speech (see for instance Trudgill, 1978 and Lakoff, 1975). Brown (1980) examines the use of politeness markers in the speech of Mexican Indian women and finds that the women use more weakening particles in their speech than the men and that the general quality of interaction between women is more polite than that for men (1980: 129). Analyzing the distribution of a number of different kinds of speech acts in the conversation of men and women in New Zealand,

Holmes (1995) found the women complimenting more and apologizing more than the men, and she argues that the women were more polite than the men.

Obeng and Stoeltje (2002) examine the speech styles of female and male disputants in the courts of queen mothers in Ashanti and Akyem-Asuom and report that in managing communicatively difficult speech, including disagreements, complaint narratives, requests, and denials, female and male disputants use language differently and for different purposes. They note that contrary to the language ideology of the Akan that women are not as communicatively competent as men in juridical genres, they found that women use specific language strategies that are generally categorized as powerless and ineffectual, but which help them gain interactional advantage over men. They observe that the women often use the language of politeness such as indirectness, deferential addressives, hedging, and downtoners, more than their male counterparts. In contrast men, in a bid to exhibit power, normally do not employ these strategies because they view them as an act of powerlessness.

In sharp contrast to these findings Keenan (1989) found that in the speech styles of women and men of the Vakinankaratra people of Malagasy, men are generally seen as linguistically more polite than women. Men avoid open and direct expression of disagreement, disapproval or criticism of the actions of others so as not to put them in an uncomfortable or unpleasant situation where loss of face could result. Directness is associated with children, and women and foreigners (1989: 131). It is normal and allowable for women to be direct and open in

expressing their sentiments towards others and to confront them in without any niceties.

2.3.2.6. Gender in the use of Address terms

One of the speech forms that index the dimensions of distance and hierarchy, or power and solidarity between participants (Brown and Gilman 1960) is address forms. Relative social position can be marked by the choice of address forms, use of titles or honorifics and in some languages the choice of second-person pronouns. Wolfson and Manes (1980) find that the use of address forms by speakers of American English in conversational interaction in public places like service encounters, reflect women's inferior status. They found that both sexes may be addressed using the appropriate respect form *ma'am* or *sir*, or the zero form. But they also found that in public places females are consistently addressed by the so called terms of endearment as *honey*, or *dear* no matter their age and status. (1980: 79-80). Wolfson and Manes argue that the use of such forms carry the implication that the addressee is somehow subordinate to the speaker. Thus language and gender research covers every aspect of language and its use as a system that produces, strengthens and transmits cultural ideologies about males and females.

2.4. The Dagomba and their Language

The Dagomba call themselves *Dagbamba*, (singular, *Dagbana*), their land *Dagbon* and their language *Dagbanli*, commonly referred to as *Dagbani* or *Dagbane* in the literature. Throughout this essay I use the native form *Dagbanli* for the language and the more familiar form *Dagomba* for the people.

Dagbanli belongs to the Mole-Dagbani sub-group of the Gur language family spoken in the three northern regions of Ghana and in the south east of Burkina Faso. This sub-group includes the Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba in Northern region of Ghana and the Mossi in Burkina Faso (Naden 1988, Olawsky 1996). According to the 2000 population figures, the Dagomba represent 65.4% of the Mole-Dagbani group in the Northern Region². The principal towns of the Dagomba are Tamale, which is also the administrative capital of the Northern Region, and Yendi, the traditional capital and seat of the King of Dagbon. Other big settlements are Savelugu, Kumbungu, Gushegu, Tolon, Karaga and Diare.

2.5. Dagbon

Dagbon is located almost in the centre of the Northern Region. The area constitutes seven of the twenty administrative districts of the Northern region. These are the Tamale Metropolitan area, and the Tolon-Kumbungu, Savelugu-Nanton, Yendi, Gushegu, Karaga, and Zabzugu-Tatali districts. Three new districts; Kumbungu, Sagnarigu and Sanj, created in 2011, are yet to be fully established.

2.5.1. Political and Social Structure

Most accounts of Dagomba history trace the roots of the people to Zamfara in the Hausa land of North-Eastern Nigeria. They are believed to be the descendants of a mythological figure, Tohajie, ‘The Red Hunter’, who migrated from Zamfara and whose grandson, Na Gbewa settled at Pusiga near Bawku, in the north-eastern

² At the time of writing, the summary of the 2010 Population and Housing Census results showing regional figures had been released, but the break down of the regional figures was not yet available.

corner of modern-day Ghana. Three of his sons migrated further south and, after invading and conquering the aboriginal peoples in these areas, founded the separate states of Mamprugu, Nanun (or Nanumba) and Dagbon (Tamakloe 1931; Staniland 1975; Ibrahim 2004). The descendants of the invaders remain the chiefs and rulers of the three states to this day. The precise dates of these movements and the founding of the three states are a matter of speculation, but some sources date these events between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Tamakloe 1931).

According to Tamakloe, the name Dagbamba belonged to the aboriginal people of these territories, about who little is known except that they were believed to speak a language belonging to the Gur language family and were acephalous groups of people with earth priests (*tindamba*; *tindana* (sing) who exercised a mild form of social control. The invaders may have imposed their political structures on the indigenous people, while adopting the language of the natives.

Dagbon has a centralized political structure where authority is vested in a hierarchy of chiefs with the Ya Na at the apex. The Ya Na appoints variously ranked divisional, sub-divisional and village chiefs. These ranked chiefs in turn have villages or communities under their jurisdiction to which they appoint minor chiefs.

Political and juridical authority at all levels is vested in the chiefs, who appoint elders to help them administer and maintain social order within their towns, villages and communities.

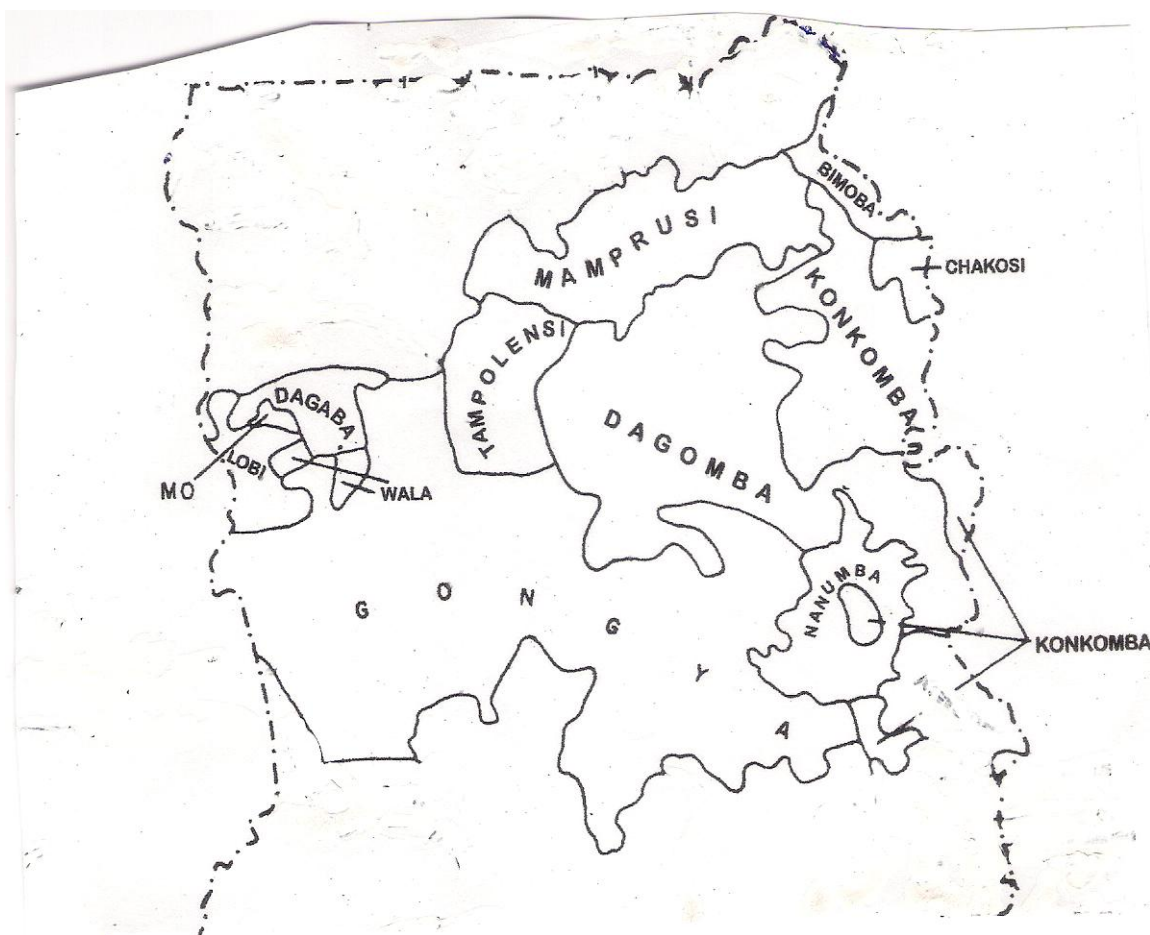


Figure 1 Languages of the Northern Region

Source: Bening, R. B. 2010. *Ghana Administrative Areas and Boundaries*.

The position of chief is a male preserve, but there are a number of substantive chieftaincy positions reserved for women, specifically daughters or grand daughters of Ya Nas (see Ibrahim 2003, Odotei and Awedoba 2006)³.

2.5.2. The Household

The basic unit of social organization in Dagbon is the household (*yili*), a domestic unit comprising a group of people related by affinal and consanguinal ties and

³ The number of women chiefs is however very small. In Dagbon itself, out of a total of nearly 200 positions of chiefs and elders appointed directly by the Ya Na only 11 are positions for women and out of this number, 5 alternate between males and females (Ibrahim 2003:21).

living together within a walled compound. Members of a household include the male head (*yili yidana* [house husband]), his wife or wives, their children and, if they have married adult sons, their son's wives and children. It may also include the head's younger brothers or unmarried sisters, his cousins and sometimes relations of the wife or wives and extended relations like cousins, nieces, nephews, and so on.

2.6. The Dagbanli Language

Dagbanli belongs to the Oti-Volta sub-group of the Gur language family which spreads across the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana and into Burkina Faso. The Oti-Volta sub-group includes Mampurli, Nanuni, Hanga KaMara in the Northern Region and Dagaare, Gurune, Talni, Nabti, and Kusaal in the Upper East and West Regions and More in Burkina Faso (Naden 1988). Mampurli and Nanuni are the closest to Dagbanli, but Mampurli is considered a distinct language even though it is said to have about 95% lexical similarity with Dagbanli (Gordon 2005). Gordon describes Nanuni however as a dialect of Dagbanli, and Naden (1988) notes that in the Nanumba area Nanuni has largely been replaced by Dagbanli. Generally, Dagbanli speakers acknowledge some differences in the pronunciation of speakers in and around Yendi (Eastern Dagbon) and those around Tamale (Western Dagbon). Olawsky (1996) and Blench et al (2004) have also noted these differences and have both labeled them as the 'Eastern' and 'Western' dialects.

According to Olawsky (1996), Dagbanli is the mother tongue of about 650 000 speakers, but Gordon (2005) puts the total number of speakers at 800 000, though

he does not make it clear whether this figure represents mother tongue speakers only or includes non-native speakers.

Like the other Gur languages Dagbanli is a tone language in which pitch is used to distinguish words as *ingballi* [*gbállí*] (High-High) ‘grave’ vs. *gballi* [*gbàllí*] (Low-High) ‘zana mat’. The constituent clause order is SVO or Agent-Verb-Object. Dagbanli displays a rich pattern of serial verb constructions, but does not show agreement between nouns and verbs in terms of number, gender or person, though nouns must agree with determiners in terms of animacy and inanimacy. Dagbanli orthography and writing rules are unsettled (see Olawsky 1995) and many write it exactly the way they pronounce it with the result that even published texts in Dagbani vary from each other in both orthography and spelling.

2.6.1. Norms of Male-Female Language use

The Dagomba see language as a means by which a person’s upbringing, character and attitude can be measured and judged. A person who talks well is seen as someone who is well bred. The relation between language and character or manners is illustrated by the proverb:

Nir’ zinlin-nye dargu ka bimali sigri n-baṇdio puuni.
 [person tongue INF-be ladder CONJ they use go down INF-know his inside]
 We can tell a person’s character by the way he or she speaks.

Care is taken to teach the young to speak respectfully to their parents and other adults. A child is taught to greet properly and the appropriate way to address older family members and elderly people in general. To ensure that children get these basics right, when an adult person sends a child on an errand to another adult

person, he or she will instruct the child on the appropriate address term to use and also remind the child to greet the adult before delivering the message.

Children are expected to be quiet when adults are present and talking; they must not speak until they are spoken to, and when they speak especially to those older than themselves, they must do so politely. When adult conversation gets to serious or delicate matters children will quickly be asked to go and play.

A woman is expected to be restrained in speech and to talk with respect especially to men. One of the aims of the socialization process of a girl is to prepare her to be a good wife, and being a good wife is to be 'submissive and humble' to the husband. Discussing Dagomba women and traditional authority Afi Yakubu writes;

A well-bred woman is not expected to talk back when she is reprimanded by her spouse. Even when he is battering her, she is expected to kneel and beg for mercy. Children of a defiant wife, it is believed, do not prosper in life (Afi Yakubu, 1997: 2032).

A woman must respond quickly when her husband calls her or when he gives her instructions. She is expected to speak respectfully to her husband, not raising her voice above his voice or arguing with him. She must not address her husband or refer to him by his name alone (see section 5.2.2). Within the household or among themselves as they carry on their daily routines, women can converse animatedly.

While men may use proverbs freely, women have to be more circumspect in the use of proverbs, especially when they are talking with men. A woman must avoid doing face threatening acts to a man (Moshi 1985), and using a proverb that a man cannot understand will be a threat to the man's face.

A man is also expected to talk well, especially in public or when elders are present. Generally, speaking roles in public are reserved for men, but in informal situations males and females may engage in normal talk within the bounds of culturally accepted norms of male-female talk.

A Dagomba man spends more time talking with his fellow men than with his own wives and children because a man must not be seen conversing at length with his wife or wives, except when they are working together on their farm or retire to bed. His conversation with his wife at home and in public will usually be brief and will be for the purpose of giving instructions or directions. Schaefer (1991) observes that when a man has many wives there is even less companionship between him and his wives, and that 'he is more like a manager' (Schaefer 1991: 49).

A man converses with extra warmth in the company of his fellow men and, depending on the season, the talk will be about the things that concern men most, farming, rain, drought, crops, or repairing the house.

2.6.2. Summary

This chapter has provided a brief introduction of the theoretical perspectives within which this study is carried out, and a working definition of the concepts and terms central to the study. The relevant literature has been reviewed and a brief profile of the Dagomba people has been presented. The next chapter discusses the design of the research and methods of data collection.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

3.0. Introduction

This chapter has been preceded by a review of literature on the subject of language and gender. This was followed by a review of work on the Dagomba society and culture and the Dagbanli language. This review enabled me to examine the theoretical perspectives and approaches to the study of language and gender and provided the background information necessary for the design of the present research, selection of method of data collection and preparation of data collection procedures.

3.1. Design of the Research

The research is designed to examine the interplay of language and socio-cultural factors in the construction of gender. The study therefore analyses linguistic data in conjunction with the socio-cultural information that is considered relevant to the construction of gender. The linguistic data is put into three categories; namely, (i) vocabulary and set phrases, (ii) proverbs and (iii) normal everyday interactional conversation. The non-linguistic data include social information about participants and the cultural parameters of the settings and circumstances in which they interact.

The design fits into current research approaches in language and gender studies which favor an ethnographic method as described in Hymes's (1974) proposal for an ethnography of speaking. This enables the researcher to take into account the

cultural and social factors which shape and affect talk or any speech event. In an ethnographically oriented approach data is collected largely through observation, tape-recording and transcription of language as it is used in interaction by speakers, and context-sensitive analysis of the data (Tannen 1993, Cameron 1995, Bucholtz 1999).

3.2. The Data

3.2.1. Vocabulary and set phrases

Vocabulary here is used as a cover term to include not only single lexical items but also set phrases, expressions, or terms, which occur in everyday talk as labels or descriptions for people. Some descriptive terms or occupational labels, like all items of naming, are used, as a matter of necessity, for the sole purpose of identification; others are associated with social values (Fowler 1991:99).

In the past the Dagomba did not record births or deaths, and so they did not keep track of a person's age in number of years. Moreover, it was a taboo to reckon a person's years.⁴ The important thing was to recognize seniority in the order of birth of individuals not in the number of years. The stages of physical growth were used as an indicator of how 'old' a child was. For instance a child may be described as *bi' ziinigu* (child sitting) - i.e. a child who can now sit without support; *bi' gbamdigu* (child crawling) - a crawling child; *bi' chendigu* (childwalking) - a child who can walk; *nyeya ayi lana* (siblings two owner) - a child with two (younger) siblings.

⁴As a school boy I had kept in mind the birth date of one of my younger siblings, and one day I proudly announced to my friends that he was exactly six months old. Hearing this, my mother sharply rebuked me, warning that it was a taboo to 'count a person's days'.

For adults, other indicators of maturity are used in descriptive phrases. A woman may be described in terms of the number of births she has had, *dɔyim bu 'ta lana* (births times three owner), i.e. referring to a woman who has given birth three times, whilst a man is described in terms of the number of wives he has, *payaba ata lana* (wives three owner). Such descriptive phrases use culturally salient and value laden indicators and I look at them under the general label of vocabulary.

3.2.2. Proverbs

Proverbs are short compact sayings that are usually attributed to un-named or general sources and are used to make or support a general point. Yankah has described the proverb as a short, crisp statement that is often ascribed to 'authoritative, impersonal sources' (Yankah 1989:28). The authoritative impersonal sources are usually generally identified as the 'elders'. The ascription of proverbs to 'the elders' gives the proverb a claim to truthfulness and wisdom rooted in the long accumulated experience of the society from antiquity. The proverb is also noted for its artistic and rhetorical qualities, but these are not my concern here. The relevance of the proverb to this study is the content of its message, its representation of men and women in respect of its claim to truthfulness, wisdom, cultural values and its power as a shaper of thought of the society (Yankah 1989, Ssetuba 2005, Lange 2006).

I also include under 'proverbs', as I did for vocabulary, other structures that occur and function in talk like proverbs. These are statements that are sometimes described variously as 'popular' or 'wise' sayings or simply 'sayings'. Awedoba

(2000) includes such sayings (called *sinseira* in Kasem), in his discussion of Kasena proverbs. He describes *sinseira* as ‘a memorable utterance often attributed to an individual who may still be alive, which may have remained in popular memory for the fun it evokes, or its aptness’ (2000:34). Yankah (1989) also notes that in addition to proverbs, there are a number of linguistic forms which are used like the proverb in speech in a ready-made form. He argues that the term proverb may refer to the universally known short crisp form, but it also embraces ‘moral-embedded extended metaphors, illustrative anecdotes and parables when these are used to drive home a moral in an on-going interaction’ (1989:88). These may include sayings that have gained currency or become ‘popular’ but may generally not be accepted by speakers as proverbs. An anecdote is a short narrative of an incident from the speaker’s own experience or from someone else’s inserted in talk and may or may not be factual. ‘Proverbs’ in this study therefore include items identified as ‘sayings’, and anecdotes used to make a salient point.

3.2.3. Conversation

Conversation refers to normal everyday talk in interaction between two or more persons or talk heard in passing as people are engaged in their daily livelihoods. Levinson (1983) describes conversation as ‘that familiar predominant kind of talk in which two or more participants freely alternate in speaking, which generally occurs outside specific institutional settings like religious services, law courts, classrooms and the like’ (Levinson 1983: 284). Schegloff (1979) refers to conversation as ‘the most common, and, it would appear, the most fundamental condition of language use and discourse’ (Schegloff 1979:283). Conversation is a

fundamental feature of everyday life used by everybody both productively and receptively (Rühlemann 2007) and provides data for the analyst to deal with situated or contextualized meaning of linguistic forms and a wide range of paralinguistic features that reflect the attitudes of speakers to each other (Sacks 1972).

3.2.4. Non-linguistic data

The non-linguistic data includes information about speakers, their social, background, and a description of the speech events, including the setting, purpose, key, norms, etc.

3.3. Sources of Data

In sociolinguistic research collecting data from a variety of distinct sources and methods is a useful procedure for gaining different perspectives, which if properly interpreted can converge on right answers to hard questions on a problem (Stubbs 1983:225). I collected data from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were collected from published and unpublished literature and other recorded material including Dagbanli films (video). The primary data were collected through unstructured interviews with selected respondents and key informants, observation and recording of interaction as a participant and sometimes as a non-participant.

3.4. Research Area

The research area covered four of the seven districts of Dagbon, namely the Tamale Metropolitan Area, Savelugu-Nanton, Tolon-Kumbungu and Yendi

Districts (see Fig. 2 below). Each of the four district capitals and one other randomly selected community were selected as locations for the study. The other communities selected were Kogni in the Tamale Metropolis, Gbirimani in the Tolon-Kumbungu district, and Jena-Kpeng in the Savelugu-Nanton district. The only exception was the Yendi District where all participants were selected from the capital. Ten males and ten females (20 respondents) were randomly selected from each of the four districts for interview using a field lexical guide and an unstructured questionnaire.

In addition to these, 16 key informants were purposively selected from the same areas for in-depth discussion. The key informants included a chief and author, chiefs' elders, a drummer, educationists, Dagbanli language teachers, a radio presenter, a traditional singer, farmers, and housewives. Thus in all 96 respondents were directly engaged in interviews or discussions.

I also recorded or took note of relevant material that emerged from unscheduled interactions in which I was either a participant or an observer. The minimum number of people involved in these interactions was four but sometimes the occasion involved a large number of people.

As a qualitative study the emphasis of this research is more on accepted usage and respondents' insight into the language rather than statistical variations. For this reason, I accepted and recorded an opinion or usage if it was corroborated by at least one person in another district.

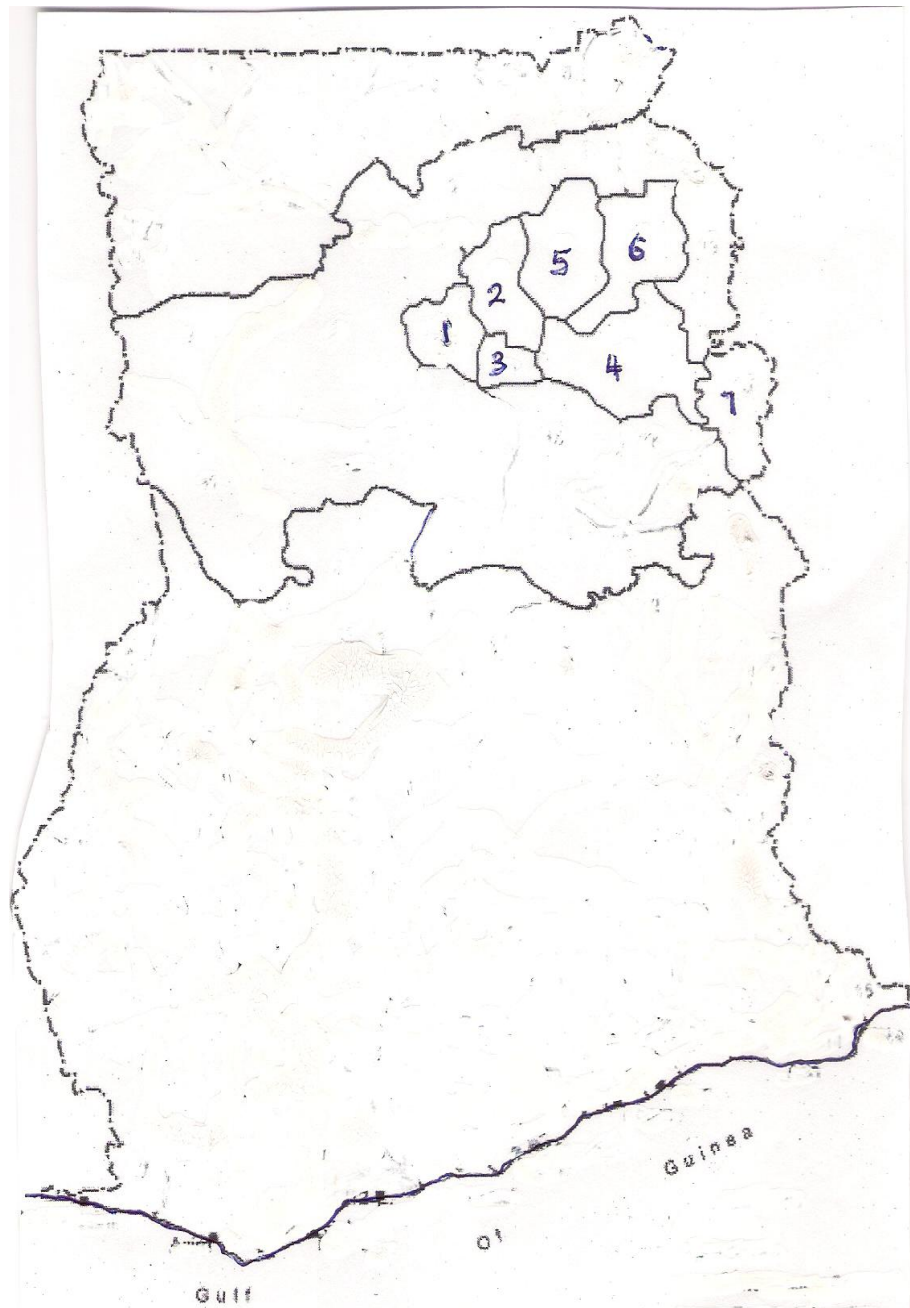


Figure 2: Administrative Districts of the Dagomba area showing the Research Area:
1-Tolon-Kumbungu; 2-Tamale Metropolis; 3-Savelugu Nanton and 4-Yendi.
(Karaga 5; Gushegu 6 and Zabzugu-Tatale 7 were not covered)

3.5. Methods of Data Collection

3.5.1. Vocabulary and set phrases

The design of the research and the combination of data from different levels of language require an approach that draws from different methods of data collection. I adapted a method proposed by Naden (2000) for the elicitation of vocabulary items and their interpretations without relying solely on dictionary definitions, especially in languages that have no literary tradition from which one can make excerpts from published literature. Following his example I compiled a 'field lexical file' (Appendix Ib) - a word list which I used together with a guide for interviews. This enabled me to cross check users' definitions of vocabulary items against the dictionary definitions. More importantly the approach accommodated the description of specific situations in which linguistic items are used and was also a means for the elicitation of more terms from interviewees.

The field lexical file was compiled mainly from the two Dagbanli-English dictionaries, Ibrahim Mahama (2003) and Blench et al (2004), hence referred to as IM and BL respectively.

Both during the respondent interviews and the discussions with key informants, I took notes and simultaneously tape-recorded the interactions. This was important and very helpful. Often, respondents drew from cultural practice or historical facts to explain the meaning or the bases of the use of some words and terms, or sometimes cited episodes from the histories of their own, or others' personal relations with males or females.

3.5.2. Collecting Proverbs

Proverbs occur naturally during speech, but not every speaker is endowed with the knowledge of proverbs and the skill of proverb use. Speakers well endowed with skills of proverbs will find a proverb to fit every occasion, but for many ordinary speakers, proverbs do not come so readily, so setting out to collect proverbs in the context of casual conversation appeared a little problematic in the beginning and even more so when I was looking for proverbs that deal only with gender. However I was guided by Yankah's (1989) example for a method of eliciting what he calls hypothetical contexts which involves interviews in which informants describe hypothetical interactional settings in which particular proverbs may be used, or recall real settings in which they were used, interpretations of these proverbs, and elicitation of additional proverbs. Michael Stubbs (1983:226) also describes a technique in discourse analysis called 'theoretical sampling' which involves seeking out people with specialized knowledge of a subject and situations which are likely to be particularly revealing or fruitful with respect to the phenomena in question. The researcher also chooses groups of situations that will help to generate to the fullest extent the properties of the theoretical categories of the research problem. Some of these situations may lend themselves to the full participation of the researcher even as he or she observes and notes elements essential to his or her objectives.

My key informants were carefully selected because of their in-depth knowledge of the Dagbanli language and culture, and two types of such situations offered themselves for me to be both a participant and an observer. Muslim marriage

ceremonies are held almost every week in Tamale and when there is one in your neighborhood attendance becomes a social obligation, sometimes even when you do not know the couple. Besides the religious ritual, pieces of advice may be given on various aspects of relations between couples, and occasionally a relevant saying or proverb would be dropped, which I took note of. Other common ceremonies that yielded talk about gender were naming ceremonies. In such situations where paper and pen were not readily available, mobile phone technology came to my aid as I would quickly make a note of the proverb in my mobile phone.

The other type of situation which I had not anticipated but which proved useful were the interview and discussion sessions themselves. Sometimes when I asked for only meanings of words I got a full discussion of issues relating to men and women during which some of the speakers used proverbs that might not have occurred to them if I had simply asked for proverbs.

As in the case with vocabulary, I began with a list of gender related proverbs from a collection by Lange (2006) and using the methods described above I was able to get the necessary contextual information and to elicit more proverbs from key informants.

3.5.3. Recording Conversations

Attempting to record personal conversations is fraught with problems and ethical questions, especially if the conversation is private. Speakers may become self conscious and speak less naturally, or they may become suspicious of the motives

of the researcher and refuse to cooperate. As a male and a native Dagomba, there were even greater social barriers to my participation in all-female activities or conversation.

I was however able to record some of the interviews and discussions with respondents and key informants as well as other casual conversations in which I was a participant. These recordings were made with the knowledge of other participants, but where it was necessary and possible to record without the knowledge of participants this was done; however, where I use such material in this report the real names of the participants have been changed.

In addition to formal interviews and discussions, and conversations in which I was a participant, I also kept my ears open for what I call 'incidental data'. Naden (2002) calls it 'slip material' and describes it as 'utterances or parts of utterances heard in everyday life and jotted down immediately because they contain a new lexical item or a new sense or usage of a new term, or are relevant exemplifications of an item' (Naden 2002: 228).

Yankah, (1989) and Obeng (2003) have also demonstrated the usefulness to the researcher of talk in interaction of keeping the ears open for snippets of conversations overheard in passing, or in casual encounters, as for example in a taxi or on the street. Discussions on radio and phone-in sessions also provided useful samples of unrehearsed conversation and bits of useful data. Because of the difficulty of recording such unplanned encounters, whenever such material

became available, I made a note of it on my mobile phone and at the first opportunity I put the information down into writing.

3.6. Presentation and Analysis of Data

In presenting the data, single lexical items or phrases are followed by their English translations. Where the Dagbanli expressions are not so long, I provide an interlineal gloss before I give the translation; but where the texts are too long I give only translations without interlineal glossing. Texts cited from published works are presented with the translations and interpretation as given by the author but without interlineal glosses. This applies mainly with the proverbs cited from Lange.

In the interpretation and analysis, I make references to definitions of some of the lexical items from the two dictionaries, but I rely more on the insights of informants, and usage practices that I have personally observed for nuances in meaning and contexts of use. I draw from other areas of linguistics, pragmatics, and conversational analysis in my analysis to show how the various items operate within their specific contexts of use to give them their gendered meanings. The next four chapters present my findings and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER IN DAGBANLI VOCABULARY

4. 0. Introduction

In this chapter I present and discuss my findings on the manifestation of gender in Dagbanli vocabulary which, for the purpose of this study, I use as a cover term for individual lexical items and set phrases or expressions that are common in everyday usage. I briefly introduce the basic meanings of each lexical item or phrase as provided by IM and BL or as explained by informants in some cases. I then discuss contexts of usage of the item and the social meanings related to gender in such usage.

The data falls into four categories:

- Semantic asymmetries
- Labels for men and women (overlexicalization of the woman)
- Sexual euphemisms
- Gendering inanimates and space.

These are presented and discussed in the following sections.

4. 1. Semantic asymmetries

Sexism is bias, prejudice or discrimination based on sex, and sexism in language (or sexist language) refers to language or language use that shows bias in favor of one sex, or discriminates, demeans, or stereotypes members of either sex (Nilsen 1977, Pauwels 2003). Sexism in language comes in three major forms: language

that excludes women, language that defines them as less significant than men, or language that outrightly demeans and deprecates the female (Henley 1987, Gomard 1995, and Romaine 1999, Ravitch 2003). Sexism may be attached to the meanings and connotations of individual lexical items or structures or it may be embedded within the framework and content of different discourse practices.

Sexism may be in the differential or asymmetrical forms of representations of women and men (Pauwels 2003). In almost every language there may be pairs or sets of words which have male/female or masculine/feminine forms or represent male/female or masculine/feminine concepts. However, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) observe, in their meanings and in discourse ‘male and female are not simply two equal sides of a coin’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:32). These masculine and feminine forms do not, as Nilsen (1977) puts it, always ‘guarantee linguistic equity’ (1977: 37). Meanings attached to the female/feminine forms or concepts are usually not exactly equivalent to those attached to the male/masculine forms as in the English *bachelor/spinster* and *master/mistress* pairs.

The data showed a number of paired linguistic structures in Dagbanli which, on the surface, appear to do no more than differentiate the sex of the referents but which, in use, carry meanings and connotations that are not the same for the two sexes. Although dictionary definitions are helpful, they do not very adequately bring out the subtle gendered nuances in meanings. Such nuances can only be fully appreciated in the context of use of these items or in the historical context in

which the item emerged. Also there are several other items which are of current usage but which have not been recorded in the two dictionaries by Ibrahim Mahama (2003) and Blench et al. (2004). As already indicated I start with definitions offered in the two dictionaries, and then I look into observed usage, informant insights and my personal intuition to get beyond the dictionary meanings to the gendered ideologies and implications in these items.

I begin with the following pairs of words and phrases:

male terms

dàkòlí (bachelor)
dòkùrúgú (old man)
képémá (elder)
dòtálí (manhood)
dàblím (penis)
payba x lana (owner of *x* number of wives)

female terms

pàkòlí (widow)
pàkùrúgú (old woman)
pàyképémá (elderly woman)
pàytálí (womanhood)
pàylím (vagina)
doyim x lana (owner of *x* number of births)

i. *dàkòlí* (bachelor, widower) - *pàkòlí* (widow)

IM (2003) and BL (2004) both give the same definitions for these words, but their spellings differ. I shall use the spelling with the ‘o’ as this more closely represents the pronunciation used by most speakers.

IM: *dakoli*; n. pl. *dakoya*; bachelor; widower (page 53)
pakoli; n. pl. *pakoyawidow* (page 192)

BL: *dakoli*; n. 1. bachelor 2. widower (page 46)
pakoli; n. a widow (page 142)

The two words are distinguished only by the prefixes *pa-* and *da-* which are the nominal roots of *paya* and *doo*⁵.

⁵ In Dagbanli noun modification, the noun precedes the adjective (noun + adjective). Some nouns lose their nominal suffixes and the adjective is attached to the nominal root. (see Olawsky 2004:132-134).

A *dakoli* is an adult man without a wife. He may be in one of three categories of wifeless men. First, a *dakoli* may be a man who has not yet married or has never married. In the second instance, a *dakoli* may be a divorced man who has not yet remarried and third a *dakoli* may be a widower; he has no other wife after losing his only wife.

A *pakoli* on the other hand refers to only one type of adult woman, a woman whose husband has died, a widow. A woman of marriageable age who is not yet married (like the first man) is not a *pakoli*, neither is a divorced woman who has not yet re-married (like the second man).

The Dagomba put a high social premium on marriage so a *dakoli*, especially the first type, has low social status and is often the butt of jokes or the subject of humorous stories. Lange's (2006) *Dagbanɔ ɔha* (Dagbani Proverbs) has 14 proverbs about the *dakoli*, and many of them, like the following, mock his situation (see Chapter 6 for proverbs that deal with bachelorhood and marriage);

a) *Dakoli difiɛli mali viɛla ku lei paya.*

[Bachelor pillow make nice NEG turn into woman]

The bachelor's pillow is beautifully made, but it will not turn into a wife. (Lange: p.128; 814).

b) *Pay'biɛyulan' so la dakoli.*

[Woman ugly owner better than FOC bachelor]

The one with an ugly wife is better than a bachelor.
(Lange: p. 325; 2158).

These proverbs have interpretations beyond the meanings of the literal statements they make, but even in their literal sense they reveal that *dakolim* (wifelessness) is a state that can be talked about in a light mood.⁶

Unlike the situation of a *dakoli*, the circumstance of a *pakoli* does not lend itself to jokes or humor. In Lange's collection there are only two proverbs about *pakoli*, and both sound admonitory.

- c) *Pakoli bi ηmani a paya.*
 [Widow NEG be like your wife]
 A widow is not like your wife. (Lange: p.330; 2195)
- d) *Pakoli ηun nintam bi naai ηuna nkuni bara.*
 [WidowREL tears NEGfinish she marry sick person]
 It is the widow who has not finished mourning the loss of her husband that marries a sick person. (Lange: p.330; 2196)

The lesson in (d) is that a widow risks shedding more tears if she marries a sick man, for she is likely to be widowed soon again.

Looking at the different circumstances in which the pair may be used, especially the restrictions on the use of *pakoli*, one is able to make an argument for an interpretation of the pair as gendered. When a husband dies his wife may be referred to as **his** *pakoli*, e.g. *Dawuni pakoli* (Dawuni's widow), but when a wife dies her husband will not be referred to as **her** *dakoli*, **Tipaya dakoli* (Tipaya's widower).⁷ Moreover, a man who loses a wife does not necessarily return to bachelorhood because he may still be married to another wife or other wives. If

⁶The interpretations given to the two by Lange are as follows (a) *You need to make your own efforts to get what you really want*, and (b) *Half a loaf of bread is better than none*.

⁷I follow the convention in linguistics of placing a star before a word, phrase or sentence that would not be acceptable.

the deceased was his only wife, he reverts to the state of *dakolim* (wifelessness) and may be called a *dakoli*, but not the wife's *dakoli*.

Thus, in a sense, a woman's identity may still be defined by reference to her dead husband (*Dawuni pakoli* - Dawuni's widow); but a surviving husband is not similarly defined. We may draw a parallel in this with the use of *Mrs.* and *Miss* in English, which feminists have criticized as sexist because it unnecessarily draws attention to the marital status of a woman (Fowler 1991), which is not the same for *Mr.* Secondly, as Richardson (2001) observes, with the continued use of *Mrs.*, a divorced woman 'is defined in terms of her no-longer-existing relation to a man', (Richardson 2001:115) just as *X pakoli* seems to do in Dagbanli.

My second argument for a view that the *dakoli/ pakoli* asymmetry has gendered implications is that whilst *dakoli* may refer to any one of three types of wifeless men, *pakoli* refers to only one type of husbandless woman, which is a term that is not generally pejorative but arouses mixed emotions. In the use of these two terms, there seems to be what Hudson (2001: 92, and Pauwels 2003:553) call a 'lexical gap', the absence of a word to refer to the unmarried or the divorced woman. This 'gap' may be filled, and has been filled with several terms like *bazawara*, *payazilinli*, *payyihij*, *paykuro* (discussed below, **4.2.1.**), all of which, unlike *dakoli* or *pakoli*, are pejorative. These terms as we shall see reflect and reinforce a higher level of social disapproval of the unmarried or divorced woman than of a man in a similar state.

ii. *dòkúrúgú* (oldman) - *pàkúrúgú* (oldwoman, witch)

Old age is respected among the Dagomba. Old men and women are revered and shown deference in speech and in attitude. Old women however arouse other sentiments, like fear, because of the association of witchcraft with old women which has produced the associated meaning of ‘witch’ for the word *pakurgu*. Commenting on some traditional beliefs that persist among the Dagomba in spite of the influence of Islam, Seidu (1989) writes:

The Dagomba have a strong belief in witchcraft, and it is believed that both men and women practice it, but generally it is associated with women. The Dagomba word *pakurugu* which means old woman is synonymous with witches and so people are usually very cautious in the use of the word in reference to old women. Whereas the word *dokurigu* (old man) if used in reference to a man is not considered an offence, the word *pakurugu* if arbitrarily used can cause tension between the user and the affected woman. (Seidu 1989:44)

Seidu suggests that it is safer to use *mpirba* (aunt i.e. father’s sister), and continues,

People in Dagbon are so conscious of the activities of witches so much so that they do not want to engage themselves in the exchange of harsh words with old women, especially because if such women feel hurt by the exchanges they could cause harm such as sickness or even death to the affected people. (Seidu, op cit)

Both IM and BL confirm Seidu’s observation about the words *dokurugu* and *pakurugu*.

IM: *dokurigu*:n. pl. *dokura*: 1.old man.
2. a name given to a boy who bears the same name as one’s grandfather, or father (page 62).

pakurigu: n.pl. *pakura*; 1.old woman; elderly woman.
2. witch (page 192)

BL: *dokur(i)gu dokura* n. old man (page 55)
pakurgu pakura n. old woman, ‘like witch, hag’ *KO* (page 142)

Like *dakoli* and *pakoli* the two are differentiated in form only by the nominal roots *do-* (man) and *pa-* (woman) prefixed to the adjective *-kurgu* (old) to give ‘old man’ and ‘old woman’ respectively. As IM has indicated, there is a second use of *dokurugu*, i. e. a ‘name given to a boy who bears the same name as one’s grandfather, or father. However, for *pakurugu*, the second meaning given in both dictionaries is ‘witch’.

Three different informants explained to me that historically, *pakurugu* did not have the associated meaning of ‘witch’. The Dagbanli words for ‘witch’ and ‘wizard’ are *sonya* [són-yá] and *bukpaha* [bukpahá] respectively (see IM: pages 225 & 38 and BL pages 161 & 26). *Pakurugu* meant only one thing, ‘old woman’, just as *dokurugu* meant ‘old man’. Both had the same positive associations (i.e. they evoked the positive sentiments attached to the aged: maturity, wisdom, geniality etc) and both terms were used as aliases for children named after a father/grandfather or mother/grandmother.⁸

However, because ‘*pakurugu*’ has assumed the negative connotation of ‘witch’ it has gradually fallen out of use as a name. Personally, I have known several males, one being a distant cousin, called *Dokurugu*, but only one very elderly female who was called *Pakurugu*.

Two of my informants gave very similar accounts of the ‘history’ of the extension of the meaning of *pakurugu* to include ‘witch’. These accounts link the origin of

⁸Dakubu (2000:61) notes that ‘Baba’ is used for a boy named after a father or grandfather and ‘Mma’ for a girl named after a mother or grandmother. ‘Baba’ is the Hausa term for ‘father’. Its use as an address term and as an alias for persons named after the father is found mostly among urban Dagomba. The traditional Dagomba names given were *Dokurgu*, and for a girl *Pakurgu*, but as indicated in the main text the latter has fallen out of use because of the negative association.

this meaning to an incident involving another Dagbon King, Na Zanjina whose reign has been put between the 17th and 18th centuries⁹. Shortly after his enskinment as Ya Na, he set out on a journey, and at the outskirts of a village not far from Yendi he came upon a camp of very elderly women living by themselves. When Na Zanjina asked why there were so many elderly women living alone, he was told they were witches (*sònìmá*, plural of *sónyá*) who had been banished from their communities and had been brought there to a witch doctor who could render them powerless¹⁰. Whilst the King was still in the community he was told that another *sónyá* had just been brought. He ordered that the ‘witch’ be brought before him and to his dismay he saw it was an old woman. ‘*Pakurugu yaha?*’ (oldwoman again?), the King was said to have exclaimed, and this, according to my informants, was how the meaning of *pakurugu* gradually came to be used to mean ‘witch’. There is no way of verifying this story, but as noted above, the disuse of *Pakurugu* as a personal name or alias for girls may be considered as evidence of its loss of respectability or acceptability. In recent times accusations of witchcraft are no longer targeted at old women only but at younger women as well, and even young girls. It is probably for this reason too that a parent will no longer give *pakurugu* as an alias to a daughter. The preferred

⁹ It is reported that Na Zanjina converted to Islam before ascending the throne of Yendi, becoming the first Muslim King of Dagbon. His reign may be described as a period of reform in Dagbon as the greatest cultural and linguistic influences from Islam through the Hausa and Wangara traders and Islami clerics occurred during this period (see Seidu 1989, Ferguson 1972, Hunwick, 1964). Apart from this incident reported here, there is another incident involving Na Zanjina which is also credited with the emergence of another linguistic item ‘*kunkumdiba*’ (see section 5.4.1.).

¹⁰ This could probably be the ‘witches’ camp at Daani, a village a few kilometers from Yendi on the way to Sabali, where Na Zanjina was reported to have gone to seek prayers immediately after his enskinment (Seidu 1989, Ferguson 1972, Hunwick 1964). See section 6.2.12c. below.

alias for a girl so named is *paykpema* (elderly woman), or *Mma* (mother) as noted by Dakubu (2000:61).

Only BL has an entry for *paykpema* which it defines as ‘elderly woman (polite)’: (page 142), indicating, as I noted above, that it is a preferred form. Interestingly, when we examine *paykpema* more closely, it too does not seem to be without a gendered coloration. The word *kpema* refers to (1) a person who is older in age or senior in rank, (BL: 99, IM: page 121), (2) a person with experience and wisdom, or (3) a juju man or a herbalist (IM: page 121). In (1) and (2) it appears to be a sex neutral word that should apply to either a male or a female. However, the combination *paya + kpema* seems to suggest otherwise, and unnecessarily draws attention to the sex of the referent, more so when there is no male equivalent **dokpema or *dakpema*¹¹. The consequence is that many speakers, like many of my informants, say they use *kpema* in the sense indicated in (2) and (3) to refer to males only.

iii. *pàytàlí* (womanness/womanhood) - *dòtálí* (manness/manhood)

The words *paytali* and *dotali* are defined as womanhood and manhood respectively in both BL and IM, but the latter gives a second meaning for each of the two words: ‘effeminate’ (page 191) for *paytali* and for *dotali* it only says ‘the behavior of a man’ (page 64) without specifying what that behavior is. The negative connotation in the meaning of ‘effeminate’ and the unspecified ‘behavior of a man’ point to the sexist biases in the two words.

¹¹The only *Dakpema* in Dagbanli is the title of a high ranking priest chief in Tamale, a title which literally means ‘market elder’ – ‘*daa kpema*’.

To get an idea of the sense of these words I asked informants to explain what they mean when they use the words *paytali* or *dotali*, or when they say for example;

O wuhi dotali/paytali

[3SshowPERF *dotali/paytali*]

(He/She has shown manhood/womanhood).

The explanations included the listing of anatomical features of males and females and their functions, the roles of males and females and the different subjectively assigned qualities and attributes of males and females; that is, the totality of the physiological, psychological and social qualities and attributes considered typical of a man or woman. One could therefore say the terms ‘manness’ and ‘womanness’ probably best capture the full content of the Dagbanli terms *dotali* and *paytali*.

I have noted earlier that the Dagomba conception of the male and female is that they embody differences that extend beyond the anatomical features of the two sexes to include different constellations of roles and different sets of personal qualities. The Dagomba conception of what is ‘maleness’ and what is ‘femaleness’ are respectively represented by the words *dotali* and *payatali*. I group respondents’ interpretations of the two words into three categories of representation:

(1) **Difference**: referring to the features and functions of male-female anatomies

e.g. the male organ, the female organ, sexual performance,

(2) **Complementarity**: referring to male-female roles e.g. farming, cooking, and

(3) **Opposition:** referring to subjective perceptions of male-female qualities
e.g.bravery, courage, weakness, fear.

(1) *Paytali - Dotali as difference in anatomy*

When the reference in the use of *paytali* or *dotali* is to the anatomical features of the female and male bodies, specifically the reproductive organs, and their natural functions the sense or the emphasis is the natural or biological differences that are the essence of each.

Dotali may therefore refer to;

- the male organ
- the ability of a man to impregnate a woman
- all the qualities of a man especially when his sexual organ is performing
- sexual virility

Paytali may refer to;

- the female organ,
- menstruation
- the ability of a woman to give birth,

Both female and male features are equally valued when they function in accordance with the people's understanding and expectations of their functions. The only remarkable thing about the two is their difference, which to the Dagomba is natural and essential.

(2) *Paytali - Dotali as complementarity of roles*

The reference of *paytali* or *dotali* may also be to the roles of females and males.

Dotali in this sense refers to:

- being a responsible man
- work regarded as exclusively for men
- farming
- providing the needs of the family: food, health

Paytali refers to:

- being a responsible woman,
- work regarded as exclusively for women,
- cooking,
- carrying/fetching water, firewood
- doing what is expected of her e.g. birth, housework.

As the examples above show, the roles implied by the two terms are also different, but it can be noted that these are differences that complement each other, e.g. cooking and farming. As Mba Alasani of Kɔgni put it;

Dotali nyela a ko ndihi a payaba ni a bihi. Doo tuma nyela kobu, ka paya mi tuma nyɛ duyubu ni yili gbibbu. Dini nnye payatali.
(Manhood is to farm and feed your wives and children. A man's work is farming, and a woman's work is cooking and taking care of the home. That is womanhood.)

As observed in the discussion of roles and statuses, Dagomba women in the past did not own farms but helped their men in sowing and harvesting. Today many rural Dagomba women have personally taken to farming. They hire labor or tractor services to till the land, then they do the sowing, weeding and harvesting themselves or with the help of others. Yet farming is still regarded as men's work and was not mentioned (either by the women or men) as one of the roles associated with *paytali*. Perhaps this is because the phenomenon of women owning farms is still relatively new and may be found only in the rural areas, or perhaps it is a persistence of long held views that women cannot do men's work.

In Dagomba cultural ideology farming on one hand, and cooking and taking care of the home on the other, are sex specific roles. No bias is implied when speakers use *paytali* and *dotali* in respect of these roles because both are considered

equally valuable for human survival and the existence of the home. As the proverb goes *Pay' suŋ n nyɛ yili suŋ* (A good wife is a good house) (Lange: p.329; 2187), and according to Mba Alasani, when you are absent from home but you have a good wife, and you are told you have visitors at home and you ask 'is so-and-so woman at home' and they "yes", then you will say 'my heart can lie down' (I can rest assured) that the visitors will not stay hungry. *Paytali* then is as much valued as *dotali*.

(3) *Paytali - Dotali as opposing personal qualities*

When speakers use *paytali* or *dotali* in respect of the subjectively evaluative intrinsic qualities of the female or the male, the meaning they assign to the two words stand in opposition to each other. These qualities are:

Dotali:

- courage,
- exhibiting braveness (given by some females in Yendi),
- respect,
- strength,
- manliness,

Paytali:

- frailty
- indecision
- timid person who fears (given by some female respondents)
- a respectful woman
- shyness (female respondent),

The qualities of *paytali*: frailty, fear, timidity, and so on stand in opposition to the qualities of *dotali*: strength, bravery, boldness. It is in this last sense of the words that there is bias or sexism. *Dotali* (manhood) or being a man is bravery and *paytali* (womanhood) or being a woman is lacking courage. Strength, bravery, boldness and all the qualities described as *dotali* are positively evaluated whilst

frailty, fear, timidity and all the qualities described as *paytali* are negatively evaluated.

When a male exhibits strength or courage, he is praised for showing *dotali*. When a female performs a courageous act or an act that requires physical strength she may be praised for being like a man ‘*O tum doo tuma*’ [She doPERF man work] (She has done a man’s job), showing that courage and strength belong only to men and outside the known qualities of a woman. Some put it obliquely as *yoli m poogi o* (she lacks a penis), i.e. she has done everything that a man can do and can be compared to a man, but she lacks a penis.

Similarly when a male shows weakness or any of the qualities that are ascribed to the female, he may not just be described as a weak or cowardly person, but he may be told thus; *A mali paytali* (you have *paytali*) or simply called a woman (see section 7.1.1).

Thus in Dagbanli concepts and words denoting maleness, like *doo* (man), *dotali* (manhood) *dablim* (penis), *bidibga* (boy) *bidiblim* (boyhood) have become metaphors for confidence, courage, bravado, heroism, power, muscle, vigor etc., all of which are positively valued characteristics. Offensive weapons like guns, machetes, bows and arrows, etc. are metaphorically referred to as *bidibbinna* (Sing. *bidibbini*) ‘boy’s equipment’, (BL: page 26). On the other hand *paya* (woman) and *paytali* (womanhood) are metaphors for negatively valued characteristics like frailty, jealousy, timidity, pusillanimity, sluggishness and so on.

Significantly both male and female speakers associate these qualities with the two sexes. The range of meanings given for *paytali* and *dotali* by female respondents and informants were identical to the meanings given by the males. The construction, representation and maintenance of gender bias through language therefore seem to be a joint enterprise of both males and females in the Dagomba society.

iv. The next three pairs of words present the same asymmetrical meaning pattern as those already discussed.

(a) *pàylím* (vagina) - *dàblím* (penis, courage, bravery, valour; sexual prowess)

(b) *bípúyìngà* (girl) - *bídìbgà* (boy, brave person)

- *bídìblím* (bravery, gallantry)

(c) *páyá* (woman) - *dóó* (man, a brave man)

In the first pair *paylim* has only one meaning, referring specifically to the female sex organ, but its masculine counterpart, *dablim*, refers not only to the penis but also means sexual prowess and attributes of valour. A similar asymmetrical association of attributes applies to the pair *bipuyinga* (girl) and *bidibga* (boy). *Bipuyinga* only identifies a child as a girl; it has no other associated meanings or denotations, but *bidibga*, whilst identifying a child as a ‘boy’ also means a ‘brave person’. As seen in **iv. (b)** the word *bidibga* has a derived form *bidiblim*, which also has the same meanings of bravery and gallantry. There is no such derived form as **bipuylim*.

In a short story, *Dimanja*, Zakaria (2007) uses the two words *dablim* and *bidiblim* in the sense that has been described above. The story is about the love and marriage of a young village belle, Puumaaya and her lover Tifomi, who is described as a prodigious farmer, a graceful dancer, and also as a skillful hunter and a brave warrior, whose *dablim* and *bidiblim* were renowned. Once, a lion lay siege to the village and, when no one dared step beyond the village boundary, Tifomi single-handedly went into the bush to hunt the lion. This is how the writer describes him as he set out;

*Sapashinbla ndaa nye Tifomi ka o **dablim** daa yayi.*¹² (emphasis mine). (Zakaria, 2007:23).

Tifomi was a young warrior and his *dablim* (bravery) was renowned.

The writer continues, after Tifomi had slain the beast;

*Ka be daa tim ti garigi nayili o ni tum **bidiblim** shem.* (emphasis mine) (Zakaria, 2007:25)

Then they sent and reported to the palace the *bidiblim* (gallant act) he had performed.

There is thus a recurrent pattern of representing the feminine and masculine sexes as possessing or symbolizing contrasting attributes.

v. *doyim* ‘x’ *lana* [births x(number)owner] - *payaba* ‘x’ *lana* [wives x(number) owner]

The final example of linguistic asymmetry in Dagbanli are the phrases *payaba* ‘x’ *lana* [wives x(number) owner] and *doyim* ‘x’ *lana* [births x(number) owner], meaning respectively ‘man who has x number of wives’ and ‘woman who has delivered x number of times’. These expressions are used to describe persons to

¹²*Sapashinbla* is a young member of the Sapashinima (warrior) estate.

others who do not know them, especially in contexts where the age of the individual, if known, would be given.

Traditional Dagomba society had no system of writing and no tradition of recording births. Indeed, it was a taboo to state that a person was x number of years old.¹³ The important thing was to know the order of birth of individuals in the family for the purpose of determining seniority. Where exact age in years would be given in other cultures to describe an individual, the Dagomba may use the various stages of physical growth or development of a person as descriptive phrases to give an idea of how old or mature the person is, or what stage he or she has reached.¹⁴

A child is first described as *biliɛyɔ* (infant), then as *bi'ziinigu* (a child who has reached the stage of sitting without support), then *bi'gbamdigu*, (a child who has started crawling) and then as *bi'chɛndigu* (a child who has started walking). When the mother begins to have other children, the earlier ones are described by the number of siblings that follow them; *nyeyɔ x lana* (a child who has x number of younger siblings).

For girls, the appearance of breasts becomes another stage in their growth which can be used to describe them. To describe a girl at this stage, speakers may say:

O yiri la biha

¹³ As a school boy I was able to keep in mind the date of birth of a younger sibling, and one day during play with my friends I proudly announced to my friends that my younger sibling was now six months old. My mother, who heard this, was alarmed and sharply rebuked me and taught me and my friends that it was a taboo 'to count a human being's days'.

¹⁴ Between naming and marriage ceremonies there are no other rites of passage in Dagbon culture, so the various stages of physical growth of the individual become the milestones used to describe persons.

[She come out-IMPF EMPH breasts
(She is bringing out breasts, i.e. Her breasts are developing),

and when the breasts are full they say;

O biha pali la o nyɔɔyɔ
[Her breasts full EMPH her chest]
(Her breasts are fully developed).

Since boys have no such visibly observable physical features, a number of duties that young boys could perform at various ages were used, like herding cattle or cutting grass as fodder for the horse, if the family head had one, and a boy was said to reach maturity if he was able to raise one hundred yam mounds before the sun had travelled a quarter of its daytime journey.

Significantly, girls begin to help their mothers in the home at a much earlier age than boys do in the farm. They wash dishes, sweep the yard, prepare condiments for the soup, carry water and gather firewood for their mothers. The diligent performance of these chores is considered to be some of the qualities of a good wife, and a girl who falls short in this is derogatorily labeled. One would therefore have assumed that, like boys, the ability to perform these duties would provide the descriptive phrase for a girl. Instead it is the development of the body; *o yiri la biha* (she is bringing out breasts) and *o biha pali la o nyɔɔyɔ* (her breasts have filled her chest) that becomes the signposts for describing girls. In this we find a discrepancy in the linguistic treatment of the two sexes in the manner Chaika has described it; ‘women are defined in terms of their sexuality, men by what they do or the kinds of persons they are’ Chaika (1982:210). These phrases may also be described as sexist as it tends to have the effect of what Fowler (1991) and

Richardson (2001) says is unnecessarily drawing attention to the body of a woman as a sex object.

Marriage is the next stage that may provide a description for males and females in situations where age would have been used. A married man may be referred to as *paya lana* [wife owner] and the married woman as *doo yili lana* [man house owner] or 'belonging in a man's house', but not **doo lana* [husband owner]. The phrase 'belonging in a man's house' seems to be a better interpretation of *doo yili lana*, for when a woman marries it is said of her '*obe la doo yili*' [she beEMP man house] (she is in a man's house). Furthermore, in the language of marriage in Dagbanli, the man 'takes' (*kpu yi*) a woman and a woman 'goes "home" (to a man)' (*kuli doo*).

In a monograph on marriage among the Dagomba, Andani (n.d.:13-14) discusses the conduct of a woman in marriage under the section '*dooyili behigu*' [man house bePROG] (being in a man's house). Thus the term 'marriage' is interpretable in different terms in Dagbanli for a man and for a woman. Marriage for a man is 'owning' a wife or wives, and for a woman it means 'belonging in a husband's home'. However with most marriages now contracted in the Islamic tradition, the Hausa-derived word *amiliya* is now more often used in expressing marriage for both sexes, thus; *o niŋ amiliya* [he/she do PERF amiliya] (he/she has done *amiliya*) i.e. he or she is married instead of 'he has taken a wife' and 'she has gone 'home' to a man'.

The Dagomba practice polygyny and in the past having many wives was an indicator of high social status or economic strength. It signified a man's capability and his level of responsibility, and assured him of a large farming force. So when a husband progressed from being just a married man with one wife to a husband with two or more wives, it was usual, when he was being described to unfamiliar people, for him to be referred to as *payaba 'x' lana* [wives x (number) owner]. For a woman, her pride was in the number of children she delivered, and so the number of deliveries a woman had had *dogim 'x' lana* ('woman who has delivered x number of times) was a term of reference used to describe her to someone who did not know her.

In the context described above neither of these terms *payaba 'x' lana* and *dogim 'x' lana* are derogatory, because they signify the achievement by the man or the woman of the society's goals in marriage. However, they produce different gendered effects, especially in the event that either of them needs to marry again. If the man is seeking to add to the number of wives he already has, his being described as already having x number of wives may be a plus for him. He is considered not only a capable person but a good husband; if he already has x wives then he has proven he can take care of more wives. For a woman the description may be a minus for her if she has to remarry, because as indicated above, with the absence of an indicator of real age, reference to number of births is used as a measure of how old a woman is. Moreover as we have seen in the case of *pakoli* above and as we shall see in the next section, unlike the male, once

a woman's marriage ends, whether by her own will or by the will of the man, she attracts several derogatory labels, which I examine in the next section.

4. 2. Labeling men and women

In this section I discuss vocabulary items that are used as labels or descriptive terms for men and women.

While compiling a preliminary list of paired-terms (i.e. structures that have male and female forms) for further field investigation, I observed that some terms did not have corresponding forms for males even though, as I stated above, the context that gives meaning to the female referent of that particular term could apply to a male too, and I discovered more of similar terms during the interactions in the field. I considered a term relevant for inclusion if it was mentioned or confirmed by at least one other person in another community or district.

In other words, in many situations or states that could apply to either a man or a woman, one finds that there may be a word or expression that labels a woman in that situation or state, but none for a man in a similar situation, or there may be a label for a man and none for a woman, though these are rare. This is unlike the previous phenomenon where there were paired terms for both sexes with one of each pair, usually the feminine forms used with derogatory intent or connotations. In this other form there is only one term used exclusively for one sex; hence I describe them as non-paired terms or labels.

Some of the labels have positive connotations or effects, but many are negative, and a significant observation is that there are more negative labels for females than for males. Richardson (2001) has observed that a rich vocabulary on a particular subject indicates societal interest in or obsessions with that subject, and she gives the example of the extensive vocabulary about cars in America. Fowler (1991) discusses this phenomenon in relation to the representation of women in the media and calls it ‘overlexicalization’. He observes that overlexicalization is the existence of an excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities and ideas that are of particular preoccupation or problem in the culture’s discourse, and notes that ‘when women are presented from an explicitly sexual angle, there is available an immense proliferation of (often pejorative) words and expressions for designating them and their attributes’ (Fowler 1991: 103). This is the phenomenon that seems to be present in the Dagomba labeling of men and women.

The expressions deal with those aspects of male- female relations that are of most interest to men; namely, marriage, and the duties of a wife in the home. These are discussed under sub-themes such as divorce, the state of being unmarried, virginity, performance of wifely duties and type of marriage, etc. In sections 4.2.1. to 4.4., I discuss terms used for labeling a divorced man, a non-married man, the weak man (without authority over his wife), a divorced woman, the chaste woman, the dutiful woman, the jealous woman, the sex-hungry woman, and labels for types of marriage, and other contrasting terms.

4.2.1. Labeling a divorced woman

As I noted above (section 4.1.i.) a *dakoli* is a man who has no wife because he has never married or is either divorced or widowed. The meaning of *pakoli*, unlike *dakoli*, is however restricted to only one kind of woman, a widow. The other types of unmarried women (one who has never married and the divorced woman) are described in a variety of ways, many of them derogatory. A divorced woman may be referred to as *Zayla pay'kuro* (so-and-so's former wife) just as a divorced man may be referred to as *Zayla yidan'kuro* (so-and-so's former husband) or *Zayla do'kuro* or (so-and-so's former man), but this is so when, in either of these cases, speaker and addressee both know who 'so-and-so' is; otherwise, they may be described in other ways that do not convey any negative attitude of the speaker. Yet still there are other terms which are used to refer to a divorced woman, and which terms are pejorative. These include *bazawara*, *su nkpai* and *payayihin* which are discussed below.

a) *bàzáwára*

Bàzáwára is used to refer to especially a divorced woman, who has had children from her previous marriage or marriages. It is not recorded in any of the two dictionaries but it is of common usage especially in the big towns of Tamale, Yendi and Savelugu. Some informants have suggested that it may be a borrowing from Hausa. In the Yendi area as one informant indicated some people may use it for a woman 'who may no longer have a child'. *Bàzáwára* is pejorative and will not be used to the hearing of the woman so called, but like all other linguistic

items discussed so far, women use it to refer to other women too, depending on their attitude to or relationship with the other woman.

b) *su nkpai* (secondhand sack)

The term *su nkpai* is a nominalized serial verb structure [fill + pour out]. This is a term originally coined by traders and farmers to describe used jute sacks. These are sacks which have been used to convey cocoa to the processing factories, where they are emptied of their contents and resold to farmers for use in storing grain. New sacks cost more; so, many poor farmers prefer the used sacks. Thus the concept of a used or a second-hand jute sack (*su nkpai*), is extended to a divorced woman. In its original reference to the used sack the meaning is neutral, but extended to women, the meaning has been degraded and is very offensive, and hence the avoidance of using it to the hearing of the individual who is referred to.

c) *pàyàihìṇ*

Payayihìṇ [woman + removedAdj] means ‘a sacked woman’. This is a less derogatory term than the two just discussed above. It means a woman who has been ‘removed’ or ‘sacked’ by her husband. Some men may nevertheless use the term even in a situation where it was the woman who walked out of the marriage and not the man who sacked her. In such a case it may usually be an attempt to protect the ‘face’ of the husband as the term suggests that the initiative of the break up came from him.

4.2.2. Labeling a non-married woman

The terms under this section also refer to women who are not married, but unlike the three just discussed above (*bazawara*, *su nkpai* and *payayihìṇ*) the non-

married state of the woman being referred to may or may not be the result of divorce; i.e. she may never have been married. In other words a divorced woman may be referred to by any of these terms too, but a woman who has never married cannot be referred to by any of the above but by one of the following.

a) *pàɣ' zilinli*

IM defines *payazilinli* as 'an unmarried woman' (page 192), while BL defines it as 'a woman without a husband; a spinster or a divorced woman' (141-2). This term, as one informant explained, is used mostly to describe an unmarried woman from a different community as a way of announcing her status to interested men. He used the example of funerals which usually attract large numbers of visitors, especially women. 'Not all those who go to funerals are mourners or helpers', he said. 'Many of the men and women go as spectators, and as for the young men, many go because of the *pay' zilima* (plural of *pay' zilinli*)', the unmarried women. Not many women would like to be called by the term to their hearing.

b) *pàɣ' waayiliŋ*

The word *pay' waayiliŋ* was unknown to me before this project. I discovered it in BL when I was compiling the preliminary word list. The dictionary lists it as *payawayini* (PL *payawayina*) and defines it as 'a woman without any responsibility for a husband or a child' (BL 2004:141). However, I gathered from my informants that the correct form of the word is *pay' waayiliŋ* and not *payawayini*. It is not a commonly used word, a fact that was shown in the division of opinion on its meaning. Some of my informants were of the opinion that it refers to a woman who, in the Dagbanli way of putting it 'has no child in her

hand' i.e. not nursing a child at the moment in reference. If the word is used in that sense then it may not be pejorative. Indeed it may be a positively valued word from the men's perspective as it will refer to a woman who is available once again for her husband's bed. In traditional Dagomba custom, when a woman has a child she must not have sex with her husband again until after the child is weaned and can walk properly. At this stage she could be described as *pay'waayiliŋ* (her child is no longer 'in her hands'), and that would be a very welcome state for her husband.

Some were less specific, saying it meant simply 'a woman without a child' while others indicated that it meant 'a woman without a husband or a child'. Yet one woman who had obviously reached menopause referred to herself and said 'for example someone like me can be called *pay' waayiliŋ*'. Whatever the meaning of the word may be, one thing that is clear is that it adds to the evidence of the over-lexicalization of women. There is no evidence that there are such fine categorizations of men in Dagbanli.

c) *pay' suntoli* and

d) *pay' sumana*

The two words *pay' suntoli* and *pay' sumana* both mean the same thing 'a woman living independently'. *Su* is a verb meaning 'own', 'possess'; *mana* is a reflexive or emphatic pronoun (Olawsky 1999, Purvis 2007), whilst *toli* is a suffix added to pronouns to make them reflexive or possessive. *Pay' suntoli* [woman possess self] and *pay' sumana* [woman own-IMPF self] both mean the same thing; an 'independent' woman. The idea of a woman 'living independently' perhaps refers

more to character or some other attributes rather than to the fact of a woman living on her own. Some informants explained that the words are used to refer to what they described as ‘the women of today’. This includes especially young divorced women who are reluctant to remarry, or young women who travel to the cities in the South to work as head porters (*kayayo*) and where they are under no parental control whatsoever. As an elderly woman in the village of Gbirimani in the Tolon-Kumbungu district observed ‘this kind of talk and behavior are only heard in the big towns. A Dagomba woman can never ‘own herself’; in other words one does not find a situation where a Dagomba woman lives independently, except at the isolated settlements called ‘witches camps’ where alleged witches are banished to.

The words, *pay’ suntoli* and *pay’ sumana*, like the word *bazawara*, therefore appear to be used more in the big towns. They appear to be new words that are being coined to describe new concepts and situations. Similar terms do not exist for describing men who may behave in the same way hence the equivalent terms **do suntoli*, **do’ sumana* and **do waayiliŋ* **doyihiŋ* are non-existent.

4.2.3. Labeling the chaste woman

Like many traditional societies Dagomba society values chastity. There were strong deterrents in the form of taboos and humiliating social sanctions against premarital sex and sex outside marriage. A mature individual who had never had sex was described as one who did not yet ‘know’ a man, or a woman; *o na zi doo* (she does not yet know a man), or *o na zi paya* (he does not yet know a woman).

However, the demand for chastity seemed to be heavier on females than on males. Remaining a virgin till marriage was more important for the female than the male, so the speakers of the language found words for the female virgin and none for a male virgin. These are:

- a) *pay'pieliga*- a virgin (female) *pay'pielim* virginity, and
- b) *pay'pali*-virgin¹⁵, literally 'a full woman'.

Being a virgin till marriage was considered an 'honor' not only for the woman but also for her family, especially for the person who raised her. The consummation of a marriage was signaled through a 'thank you' message sent to the woman's family head the morning following the consummation. If a woman had been found to be a virgin, the fact was made known through the symbolism of the message. In his monograph on marriage in Dagbon, Andani (n. d.) describes the practice as follows.

O yidan yi zaŋ o n paaigi, o payapieliga, bieyu yi nee, o bɔr la guli pifinaayi n pahi tuhu pinaayi zuyu, ntim ka be ti puhi dɔyrikpema ŋun daa ti pay'pini maa...Di yi nyemi o bi paai pay maa payapieliga, gu'feli din yen puhi maa ni, be bɔyri la gu'bɔy yindi n-niŋ. Di yi paai pay maa yiŋ-nima, din yen wuhi ni be bia maa bi pali m-bala. (Emphases added).Andani R. I.(n.d., page 11).

When her husband takes her and meets her *payapieliga* (virginity), when day breaks, he gets 22 cola nuts in addition to twelve thousand¹⁶, and sends to greet the family head who gave the wife-gift...If it is that he did not meet her *payapieliga* (virginity), among the cola that is to be sent (for

¹⁵BL defines *pay'pali* as 'virgin' and adds the comment: 'probably a Christian invention'. The rites cited from Andani (n.d.), show that the concept of virginity could not have been copied from Christianity.

¹⁶The figure 'twelve thousand' refers to cowries, which was the medium of exchange. In traditional ceremonies like funerals monies used in some rites are still quoted in the cowry equivalents. An informant has however indicated that the 'twelve thousand' mentioned in the text is a mistake and that a thousand and two hundred cowries (which would have been the equivalent of twelve shillings in the old British currency) was the most likely figure. Ibrahim Mahama (2004:116) also describes the message of announcement of the consummation of a marriage, but he puts the number of kola nuts at 12 and not 22 as in the text above.

greeting) they break one cola and place a piece among the rest. When it (the cola nuts with the broken piece) gets to the woman's people, that will show that their child was not 'full' (*pali*).

The fact of the woman's chastity was publicly announced and it was said of her '*o paliya*' (she was full). The husband of the 'full' woman then slaughtered a fowl for her to be feted with a special meal called *zumbuli*. After the introduction of Islam, the practice of announcing a woman's virginity persisted, but the traditional method of making the announcement was replaced by what was assumed to be an 'Islamic' form, but was an adaptation of Wangara and Hausa practice¹⁷. The newly wedded couple was expected to sleep on a white sheet, usually a piece of calico, and early the following morning an elderly woman would inspect the sheet. If there were blood stains on it then that was evidence of the woman's virginity and, accompanied by ululations, the sheet was sent with gifts to the woman's family. There are anecdotes of couples conspiring and cutting or pricking themselves with sharp objects in order to get blood on the sheet. This was done to avoid the shame and dishonor of the loss of virginity before the wedding night, especially if the husband was the one responsible for the premature loss.

Once again I found no such equivalent words as **dopielga*, ** dopielim* or **do'pali*, or any other for describing or referring to a male virgin. Probably this is so because it was not possible to show that a male was a virgin before the

¹⁷ This practice was, in fact, not 'Islamic', in the sense of being a prescription by accepted Islamic traditions. It was one of the many cultural practices which the Hausa and Dyula (Wangara) Muslims who introduced Islam to the Dagomba brought with them, and which were presented to the Dagomba, or were adopted by them as part of the religion.

consummation of his first marriage. The second reason could be that virginity was not considered as socially important for the honor of the male and his family as it was for females and their families. This clearly placed different values on the sexuality of males and females. The female's sexuality was considered an object to be preserved for her husband.

The only deterrent against premarital sex by boys was the belief that premature sex would rob them of the strength needed to quickly pass the 'hundred-yam-mounds-test' (see section 4.1.v.) Indeed a young boy who showed signs of lack of physical strength would be described as looking like *ɲun bɛ sayi ka niɲ* (someone who has not reached (i. e. maturity) but has done it (sex)).

Today, nobody seems to care whether a husband finds his newly married wife 'full' or not, and no messages of virginity or otherwise, whether in the traditional form or in the so-called 'Islamic' form, are made. However, the words *pay'pielga*, *pay'pielim*, *pay'pali*, remain available in the language, even if only in the vocabulary of the elderly, as they lament the problem of teenage pregnancy and talk wistfully about the 'good old days'.

4.2.4. Labels for conduct and performance of wifely duties

In discussing the concept of *dotali* (manhood) and *paytali* (womanhood) we saw that both concepts included the performance of the duties of a man or woman, i.e. the role of a husband or wife. Though the duties of husband and wife are different they are considered equally important as they compliment each other, and the

failure of one partner to perform his or her duties poses serious problems and attracts condemnation.

Dagomba society seems to have set a number of standards for measuring a wife's performance of her roles and few, if any, for a husband. This is seen in the categorization and labeling of wives in accordance to what seems to be men's evaluation of their performance. Wives are labeled when they perform their duties well, they are labeled when they do not, they are called names for nagging and for gossiping, they are called names if they are dirty, and they are named according to their attitudes towards their co-wives and the extended family and so on.

The following terms were all given by informants and confirmed by others. I have summarized their meanings as given in the explanations by informants across the four districts.

a) *pay'wahu* - [woman horse] (*horse woman*):

A hardworking woman; she takes good care of the children and the home and meticulously carries out the husband's instructions and is tireless in farm work. She does not complain about anything. 'Her mouth is too heavy, just like a horse's mouth', is the way someone put it figuratively, or as another put it, the words of complaint or disagreement with her husband feel 'heavy in her mouth', so she will rather work than complain.

b) *pay'jerigu*- [woman foolish] (*foolish woman*):

This term is synonymous with the above and is used to refer to a woman who is dedicated to her marital duties and does not complain. She will not rest until all

the housework is done, even if it means doing what others should do. In the large Dagomba household with several wives some may be lazy or negligent in their duties. In the words of a female informant such wives behave as if they are ‘wiser’ by leaving the bulk of the work to the other, whom they may insult as *jerigu* foolish’. But, it is a Dagomba belief that when a woman performs her role as a wife well and pleases her husband, her reward will be children blessed with success as a result of the father’s goodwill (see section 5.3.4.). The term is thus ironical; the foolish woman is rather the ‘wise’ one as it is her children who will be blessed. Some women were unsure about the term *pay’ wohu*, but quickly acknowledged *pay’ jerigu* and added their own interpretation and exemplifications. During ceremonial occasions when all the women have to join in the cooking, some think they are ‘too wise’ and remain aloof, leaving the work to those they think are foolish. The term thus appears to originate from women as a jibe at other women, but when men use it, they do so as a compliment because men prefer a dutiful wife.

c) *pay’baa* or *pay’bazuyu* -[woman dog or woman dog head] (*dog woman* or *dog-head woman*):

A ‘dog woman’ or ‘dog-head woman’ is an unsociable woman. She is petty, nagging and unfriendly to her husband’s relations and even to her own. She is suspicious and cannot tolerate the sight of her husband exchanging as much as even a greeting with another woman. Some women also gave me the term *do baa* [man dog] (see section 4.3.) and said it referred to a man who wants ‘every woman’ i.e. a promiscuous/lecherous man.

d) pay'kuruchu -[woman pig] (*pig woman*): A dirty woman; nothing of hers is tidy. She does not take care of her physical appearance and her children are always looking dirty.

e) pay'bua - [woman goat] (*goat woman*):

A 'goat woman' refers to a woman who gives attention to her children only. This is a serious indictment on any woman in a polygamous society where several wives live within the same compound with their husband and children, and the wives are supposed to eat together from the same bowl and the children in groups according to their age groups.

f) pay'pieyu - [woman sheep] (*sheep woman*):

This is a woman who loves companionship, and will have no objection if her husband marries an additional wife (or wives).

g) pay'pani - [woman vagina] (*vagina woman*):

This refers to a woman who is not good at any household work. She is a bad cook, and her only use and desire is sex¹⁸.

The following is a transcribed excerpt of the explanations of Mba Alasani of Kɔgni, near Tamale, as we discussed the names used for women. This puts some of these terms in some context. We were joined in the middle of the interview by Mba Zoo Naa whom he introduced as his 'brother', and who also made some contribution.

¹⁸ A Mamprusi colleague sent me by e-mail some Mamprusi proverbs including the Mamprusi version of *pay'pani* and its meaning:- “‘Pɔ’a pienni’ (*a woman with only a vagina*) –A woman who cannot perform any household chores”.

Excerpt 1. M ba Alasani's description of types of women.

In the first part he explains who a *pay' jerigu* (foolish woman) is, citing an instance of the dedicated service of his own senior wife as an example.

*[It is the **foolish woman** (pay' jerigu) who holds the house... The one who is too wise cannot hold the house. The one who ignores all (bad) things... she is the one who holds the house. Then her colleagues will be calling her foolish. You see this my wife in there?... one day some of my relations came on a visit... I was in the farm, and a message came that visitors were greeting me... she had informed me that she was travelling... and then I asked, "Mayam-billa, is she at home?... she said she was travelling... has she gone?" Then that person said she just came out as the visitors arrived... and that she went back in... then I said, in that case my heart can lie down... By the time I arrived here, she had cooked rice and done everything for them... so you see if she had behaved too wisely, would she have done that? Women of these days... she would just have greeted them and sneaked away... when I asked and they told me Mayam-billa was at home, then I said my heart can lie down... Since Mayam-billa is at home, the visitors will have something to eat... and when I came home that was how it was...*

In the second part M Alasani describes the other types of women mentioned above: the sheep woman, the goat woman, the dog head woman and the vagina woman.

*....If you have a good wife you can get more. I had five wives, God took away two. The third is not well, and is now living with her people. Ask Zoo Naa here, nobody hears anything (bad) from my house. It is their children who are around. The senior one's children are about ten. If you are going to get a first wife and God loves you and you get a **sheep woman** (pay' pieyu) your house just moves on... a sheep does not like being alone; she wants to have company... if you buy one sheep, you will suffer... so if you have a **sheep woman** and she is alone she will not stay in your house... She wants company and so you can have up to ten of them and nobody will hear of you... so if God loves you and you get such a woman then you will be content... it is only the **goat woman** (pay' bua) who likes to be alone... **dog woman** (pay' baa)... **dog head woman** (pay' bazuyu) ... **dog woman** has no kin... see here, if your dog has a litter and the people in the next house pick one of the puppies, tomorrow when the mother dog attempts to enter that house she will not be welcome by her own child... Note that two dogs have never come across each other without growling at each other... so a dog has no kin... if you marry such a woman you have to do battle or you lose all your kin. Everybody will hear about you... as you have this car if you stop to greet another woman then she goes 'yei, yei, yei... that you are chasing her... **goat woman**... she knows only her children... if you have several goats and put them in a pen the mother*

drives all the rest deep inside the pen and keeps her own kids close to her near the entrance... vagina woman (pay' pani) is one without much use apart from sleeping with her husband....if you are going somewhere and you say you have a wife back at home you just have an empty house...she will not do what you want...].(The Dagbanli transcription of these excerpts is provided as Appendix IIa.)

h) pay'gbuntulli- [woman buttock hot] (hot buttock woman)

She is the woman who has children frequently and close to each other. The Dagomba value large numbers of children, but as noted earlier a woman's child had to learn to walk steadily before she would be invited back into her husband's bed. Sometimes couples may not be able to follow this traditional practice, or the couple may be 'lucky' and have the children coming immediately. Ironically, in such cases the woman takes sole blame for having the children 'too close' to one another, just as it is a woman who is blamed when a couple is childless. According to Afa Tafirli at Warizehi, a suburb of Tamale a *pay'gbuntulli* is a type of selfish or jealous woman. 'She does not give the man any space at all; before her last child is fully grown she is all over him again so that he will not think of another woman.'

i) pay'tikuba- [woman gossip] (a gossip):

This is the name given to a woman who is said to hop from place to place carrying stories of other people to others.

j) pay'tia- [woman speed] (speed woman):

This refers to a woman who divorces and remarries frequently. At the village of Libga in the Savelugu-Nanton District I observed a family head formally give consent to the marriage of a girl from the family. During the conversation that

followed the formal ceremony he told this anecdote about women who cannot remain in a steady marriage. According to him when God creates a woman he raises her up and asks of the men, ‘Who wants this woman?’ and if only one man responds, then the woman will marry only that man in her life time. If two men answer, she will marry each of them in her life time, if four men answer then she will marry each of them in turn and so on. In other words women who divorce and remarry are fulfilling a preordained script, but this is a script that has only a women’s version.

Some informants gave a different interpretation to term *pay’tia*. In the past, when difficulties arose in marriages, like a quarrel with a co-wife or a difficulty with a husband sometimes leading to wife-beating, it was common to see wives, especially young ones ‘run’ to their parents home, until some mediation or reconciliation was done for her return. Some informants said *pay’tia* referred to a woman who frequently indulged in ‘running’ to her parents.

k) pay’nyulilana - [woman jealousy owner] A jealous woman (IM, page 191).

As noted above, in the Dagomba marriage and residential system, if a man has several wives all of them live in the same compound and eat from the same bowl; two may even share a room. Rivalry and competition is natural in such a situation, especially as husbands naturally cannot and may not be fair to all of them at all times. Yet if a husband’s favoritism of one or others leads to resentment or conflict, the society finds it more convenient to blame the wives. In the view of the patriarchal Dagomba society it is easier to call a woman *pay’nyulilana*, a

jealous or selfish woman, who does not want her husband to exercise his right to have another wife, than to look for real causes of a conflict between husband and wife or between the wives. It is a derogatory term because in a society which permits a man to marry more than one wife, jealousy (*nyuli*) on the part of a woman is considered aberrant behavior. The *pay'nyulilana* (jealous woman) is the subject of several stories of meanness. The following proverbs give an example of how mean such a woman can be considered to be.

Pay'nyulilana deei daaŋa, zieri ka laa ni.

[jealous woman take over cooking place, soup not be dish in]

The jealous rival is in charge of the fireplace, there is no soup left in the serving bowl (Lange: p.327; 2173).

The wives in a household cook in turns for the whole family, and the proverb expresses the generally held belief that the jealous woman is so mean that she will not leave enough soup for those who may want a second serving. The second proverb is from an informant and illustrates another view of what is believed to be the common concern, in fact to some men the only concern, of the jealous woman.

Pay'nyulilana tuya kabri la duyu ni.

[Jealous woman beans burn-IMPFFOC pot in]

A jealous woman's beans are left to burn in the cooking pot.

The implication is that when a co-wife is in the husband's room the jealous woman becomes so distracted that she loses concentration and the food she is cooking may turn bad. Thus men may label a woman as *pay'nyulilana* and whenever she raises a matter of genuine concern, it may simply be dismissed as 'sexual greed', another form of *nyuli*, as we saw in the description of *pay'gbuntulli*.

The accusation of jealousy and the tag *pay'nyulilana* (jealous woman) are therefore convenient means for husbands and the society to silence wives who may justifiably feel that they or their children are being unfairly treated in the household.

1) *pay'dede*

IM defines this word as 'a respectable woman; 2. smart woman' (p.190). My investigation revealed that this label means more than the meanings given above. The descriptions and usage examples I received show that *pay'dede* may refer to a woman whose conduct is considered to be at one or other of the extremities of good or bad, commendable or condemnable, popular or notorious. As Mma Shetu Katariga of Gbirimani, a popular artiste of traditional women's songs, explained, *pay' dede* may refer to one of two persons, a woman who is known for her diligence and industry or one who is notorious for bad conduct especially a hot tempered woman; a shrew. She explained in the following words using herself, at a point, as an example;

Excerpt 2. Mma Shetu Katariga's explanation of *pay' dede*

There are two things; someone may have a very bad conduct and everybody knows about her...and because of her bad conduct when she is passing by they will whisper, '*paya dede*'...and then there is someone who does very well...as I sit here, sometimes when we are going to some place, we meet people on the way and the women will shout praises at me '*paya dede*'...but it is not that I have a bad conduct...sometimes someone may say I cannot do something, then I do it...(see Appendix IIb)

From this account we see that the contrasting meanings of the term *pay' dede* arise from the manner in which it is said. On the one side where negativity is implied, it is 'whispered' so that the person so described may not hear it, but on

the other hand, where praise of the person so referred to is intended, it is ‘shouted’ out.

On *pay’pani* (vagina woman), this is what Mma Shetu also had to say,

Yes, vagina woman...we say it...as for so-and-so’s wife, vagina woman...she is called a wife, but she is not among wives...she is just a wife by name...

As Mba Alasani’s exposé (Excerpt 1; page 89-90) shows, in the formulation of most of these structures, predominantly animal terms are employed to modify the noun *paya*. Their significance however lies not in the keenness of the observation of animal behavior but in the selective application of these images to women. The terms describe or label only females, and they do so from a male perspective and seem to represent a male conception of what is desirable or undesirable in a woman. The use of animal metaphors trivializes and denigrates the female sex, and not even those metaphors that are meant to be complimentary like the horse and the goat lessen this negative effect.

Ssetuba has suggested that such images help to strengthen the ‘hold of patriarchy’ on gender relations Ssetuba (2005:37). Kramarae (1980) has also observed that women’s experiences ‘when recorded has usually been recorded by men and through the medium of language developed by men’; the words and meanings for general discussions are ‘men’s formations and more closely represent their and not women’s experiences and perceptions’ (Kramarae 1980:60). Though Kramarae’s observation seems to be about ‘recorded experiences’ in non-literate societies these experiences are carried by the medium of the spoken word.

4.2.5. Labels for marriage types

The next two expressions describe the type of marriage a man gets into rather than the type of person the woman is, but in both examples *paya* is named, which further demonstrates the trivialization of the woman or the wife.

a) pay'jia - [woman short]

This is used to describe a situation where a man courts or marries a woman who lives close by. The Dagomba recommend avoidance of regular contact or interaction between in-laws and so they do not look favorably on a marriage between next door neighbors or between a woman and a man who live close by, such that the proximity of the two families will bring the man into regular daily contact with his in-laws. Such a situation, it is believed, creates unease on both sides, so a woman who finds herself in such a marriage is obliquely referred to as *pay'jia*, (short woman). Once again it is the woman who is used to label a situation that involves a man and a woman. The male equivalent *dojia* (short man) means only a man with diminutive height and has nothing to do with the situation of the marriage.

b) pay'taa— The woman whom a man marries for the first time in his life (IM, page 192).

There is no similar single word for a woman to refer to the man whom she marries for the first time in her life. The nearest in form is *dataa*, but this refers to relationship between men who have had sexual relations with the same woman. It is a relationship of distance, suspicion and strict avoidance.

4.3. Non-paired male terms

A number of terms which refer to men and which also do not have corresponding forms for women also came up, but comparatively, the number of terms for men is smaller. I am not sure if this supports the argument that in a patriarchal society males are more obsessed with labeling women as a means of social control (Lakoff 1975, Spender 1980), or whether it is the case that my female informants were reluctant to let me, a male, into the ‘secrets’ of the names they may give to men if they have any. Nevertheless, I did not notice any hesitation or diffidence in any of the women I interacted with that would suggest reluctance to give me information. Moreover, as I noted above, one woman mentioned *do baa* and explained that it referred to a ‘man who wants to sleep with every woman’. This explanation was confirmed by two other women, but it was never mentioned by men. The male terms cited by both males and females are as follows:

a) *payaba leliga*[women cockroach] (women’s cockroach)

This refers to a male, especially a boy, who is ‘very much attached to women’ (IM: p. 190). As noted earlier, males and females are segregated in many activities and children are taught very early in life to be with members of their own sex. Boys are expected to be found outside the compound where men’s activities take place and girls in the inner yard which is the women’s domain. Even though very young children of both sexes may play outside the compound they do so in same-sex groups. A boy who spends too much time in the inner yard or likes to play with girls gets the label *payaba leliga*. If he persists in it other

children, especially boys, may discourage him by openly taunting him by chanting after him,

Payaba leliga; ʒɛduyɔ gbuni, payabaleliga

[women cockroach; soup pot under, women cockroach]

Women's cockroach; beneath the soup pot, women's cockroach.

An adult male who frequently keeps the company of women may also be called *payaba leliga*. He is likely to be suspected of sexual impotence and called a *yokpiɲlana*, [dead penis owner]. Such people, the Dagomba believe, want to present a picture of themselves as sexually potent by being in the company of women all the time and usually regaling them with lewd stories or tales of their own sexual exploits. The real point in the use of these labels seems to be to discourage men from keeping the company of women.

b) *do'nyan* [man + Feminine] (*a weak or cowardly man*).

The suffix *nyan* is added to nouns to refer to feminine entities, and *loyu* (and its allomorphs *-doyu*, *-laa* or *-daa*) are added for masculine referents. Thus *noo* is generic chicken; *no'nyan* is hen and *no'loyu* is cock. So when a man, *doo*, is labeled *do'nyan* he is being called a man-female (womanish man), not because he looks like a woman but because he is considered to be behaving, as an informant put it, 'like a woman'; not showing courage or resolve. IM gives a definition of *nyan* as follows:

'nyan, suffix denoting female sex...2. a suffix to the word "doo" (man) denoting weakness or cowardice: *do'nyan*: a weak or cowardly man' (my emphasis) (IM: page 176). (See section 4.5.3. for further discussion of the *-loyu* and *-nyan* suffixes).

c) *do'loo*.

This also refers to a man who is perceived to be weak, especially one who cannot exercise authority over his wife. *Loo* is a small bush mouse whose meat is of little value and is considered fit only for children. Opinion is divided about whether the *loo* in *do'loo* refers to this mouse or not, but what is not in doubt is that any man described as *do'loo* is held in contempt. As someone put it,

'Do'loo nyela doo ŋun paga nyan o...

[*Do'loo*be EMPH man who wife overcome him...

...oyubu ku zani yili maani, nayala paya yubu'

[his wish NEG stand house DEM in, except wife wish]

(*Do'loo* is a man whose wife dominates him. What he wants does not work in the house, only the wife's wish does).

There are many signals that might point to the failure of a man to impose his authority over his wife; however, the most obvious is the situation where the man is seen performing tasks in the home that are generally regarded as women's work. Some tasks are unequivocally reserved for women and others for men and a self-respecting man must scrupulously avoid women's work. A male must not perform any task related to cooking or processing of food for cooking, nor do any chores like sweeping (except the outer space in front of the compound), washing clothes or dishes; he must not bathe children nor baby sit. If a man does any of these, even out of his own volition, he is regarded as 'weak', a useless man, and will be called *do'loo*. He cannot have authority over his household. So to avoid this label a man must not, under any circumstance, touch women's work.

But, it is not only the husband who suffers ridicule and loss of respect for being 'controlled' by his wife; the wife takes severer censure, much of it, ironically

from other women. So, in traditional Dagomba society a wife will protest if a husband attempts to do ‘women’s work’, lest she be condemned not only by men but by her fellow women (see section 7.3.1.).

d) *doo* (man)

Lastly, the word *doo*, besides having the meaning ‘male’ and ‘man’, is a praise term for males who perform acts of bravery or strength, as we saw with *bidibga* (4.iv. above). Both *bidibga* (boy) and *doo* (man) are metaphors for bravery or strength. When it is said of a man; *doo n nyɛ o* [man beCOP he] (he is a man) it is not to his sex as a male that the reference is being made, but to his bravery or strength. *Doo*, as will be shown later (Chapter 5) is the subject, actor or agent in most proverbs that deal with courage.

4.4. Contrasting Terms

There is also a small set of paired terms used to refer to males and females and which are derived from activities that are the domain, or are believed to be characteristic of males and females. A characteristic of these terms is that their pairing is fixed; the use of one, calls for the use of a particular contrasting paired term, or implies it and not any of the others. Speakers seem always to contrast one term or task with the other.

Female		Male	
<i>kunkumda</i>	‘cry’ crier	<i>gban’ ziina</i>	skin sitter
<i>kunkumda</i>	‘cry’ crier	<i>val’gbira</i>	grave digger
<i>dakabra</i>	firewood gatherer	<i>tila’gbira</i>	medicinal roots digger
<i>kulsiyra</i>	water fetcher	<i>dokuyu ɲmara</i>	log cutter

a) *kunkumda* (Pl. *kunkumdiba*) vs. *ghan' ziina* (Pl. *ghan' ziiniba*)

The term *kunkumdiba* [cry criers] (criers) means 'those who cry' (cry-babies) and refers to women, whilst *ghan' ziiniba* [skin sitters] (sitters on skins) means those who sit on skins and refers to men. The pair was first mentioned to me by Alhaji Adam Yogu, a retired Director of Education. He also gave a brief account of what is claimed to be the origin or the first known use of these expressions, and his account was confirmed, with elaborations, by Luŋ Mahama of Tolon. Like the story about the extension of the meaning of *pakurugu* (section 4.1.ii), the account links the terms to another incident related to Naa Zanjina. The incident involved the King and one of his wives Napaya (King's wife) Laamihi, who was a daughter of a previous Ya Na. Being a princess and in addition a wife of the Ya Na, her situation in life was unique and of high prestige. As a daughter of a Ya Na she could be a chief herself one day. These qualifications however seemed not to have been satisfactory enough for Napaya Laamihi. She wanted, above all these, to be a mother of a King. She might therefore have been disappointed when her first two children were girls; and, when her third child was born, and she too was a girl, disappointment might have turned to despair. So when the child was grown and it was her turn to sleep with the King again (*kpe dooni* - i.e. 'to enter the man's place' - as the Dagomba put it), she refused and openly let out her frustration lamenting, according to the account, that her father, a King, had given her in marriage to a King so that she could give birth to a King, but instead of getting *ghan' ziiniba* [skin sitters] (sitters on skins) all she was getting were these *kunkumdiba* [cry criers] (criers). This was an expression of her own

disappointment and frustration, because it is usually the man who complains when a wife fails to give him sons and who will hasten to take another wife in the hope of getting a son.

The institution of chiefship among the Dagomba is called *nam* or *gbana* 'skins' (Sing. *gbay*) hence the reference to *gbana* 'ziiniba' (sitters on skins). Though daughters of a Ya Na may become chiefs (Mahama 2004), they can never ascend to the throne of Yendi or the 'skins of Yendi', so the King's wife was frustrated that she had not given birth to a boy who could become a Ya Na.¹⁹

The literature shows that the practice of viewing or representing females as persons who are prone to crying is a common tendency across cultures and has been noted by Bosmajian, (1977) as one of the means of 'infantalizing the woman, thus placing her in a dependent, subservient, and inferior position to men', (Bosmajian 1977: 91; see also Yusuf 1994, Pauwels 1998, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Grad 2006, Adetunji 2010). Bosmajian (1977) discusses how American society treated women as infants and notes some of the things which the society and the law allow an adult American man to do which an adult American woman, like a child could not do.

The child cannot participate in the male adult activity of swearing; the child cannot use vulgar language as a speaker and by law is to be protected from hearing obscene speech. Like the child the adult woman has been socially

¹⁹The narrative indicates that Napaya Laamihi relented after this initial petulance and not long after that she picked her next seed and gave birth to a boy who later became a Ya Na, Naa Bimbiɛyu.

prohibited from expressing herself in language which is allowed of men; like the child, the adult woman has been legally prohibited from hearing language which men are free to listen to. Like the child the woman may cry (Bosmajian, 1977:95).

Adetunji (2010) for instance observes that the Nigerian woman is constantly depicted as a baby and defined with babyish characteristics like crying. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) have also noted that there are in societies in general ‘gendered constraints on crying and other expressions of emotional vulnerability’ put on men (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:29).

Among the Dagomba when a male child is hurt and is crying he is told not to cry, because ‘*Doo be kuhira*’, (A man does not cry), Salifu (2007:63). If he persists the persuasion may turn into an impatient rebuke and name-calling as a ‘cry-crier’, as Kpanalana, an elder of the chief of Nyohini put it, ‘*Bo ka a ti niŋdi ka paya maa? Kunkumdi ŋo*. (Why are you behaving like a woman? You cry crier). Thus through a combination of exhortation and censure the male child is taught to suppress any inclination to cry openly whilst at the same time he forms the opinion that it is only girls who cry.

Napaya Laamihi’s description of her girls as those who only cry may be seen as a woman’s resignation to the society’s view that women (including herself) are not capable of doing what men can do. When speakers use this term they also do so with the same view.

b) *kùnkúmdá* ('cry' crier) vs. *vál'gbírá* (grave digger)

The second pair also contrasts *kunkumda*, but it is contrasted with a different term *val' gbira*; pl. *val' gbirba* (grave digger). The two relate to the roles of women and men on the occasion of a death. When a death occurs, the family and sympathizers gather quickly as burial must follow almost immediately. Burial of the dead is a communal affair and all adult male members of the community participate in it. Token sums of money (now usually not more than one Ghana cedi) are given to the head of the bereaved family or the elder presiding over the funeral saying *n nyɛ n sɔyibu* 'this is my burial'. It is acknowledged then that the giver has 'buried' the deceased. If a man does not give the burial token, it is said that he has 'not buried the deceased', even if he was physically present at the interment. In some circumstances fowls, goats or sheep may be part of the token. These monies are what the family head of the deceased uses to meet the costs of the burial rituals, some of which may require the slaughtering of the animals. As indicated above the burial money (*soyibu*), is given by men only, and it is also men's role to dig the grave and inter the corpse.

Women do not give burial money (*soyibu*). This is how Kpanalana, the elder of the chief of Nyohini explained it.

Paya kuli sɔyibu nyela o chan ti kuhi. O yi bi kuhi, o bi sɔyi...Doo bi kuhira. Bi yi yihi kuli palo, payba maa n yen kum, ka be yeli ni be yihi kuli palo.

A woman's burial of a deceased is to go and cry. If she does not cry she has not buried (the dead)...A man does not cry.²⁰ When a death is confirmed, it is the women who will cry, then, they say the death has been made public.

²⁰This is not to suggest that bereaved males are forbidden from weeping. Males can sob, but they do not wail and sing dirges; only women do that.

Any woman who arrives at the home of the deceased immediately bursts into a funeral dirge in which she wails and sings, combining praise of the deceased and his or her lineage with lamentation for the loss. Young women were deliberately taught how to cry at a funeral, and a woman would be accompanied by her friends to a relation's funeral to help her cry. In fact the expression used is not 'singing' but 'crying', '*n kum kuyila*' (crying the 'funeral song' or dirge). According to Kpanalana, females are sometimes called *kunkumdiba* (cry criers) and males *val' gbirba* (grave diggers) because of these differentiated roles at funerals. Both roles are considered as paying the necessary respects to the deceased according to one's sex, and none was regarded as more important than the other. In this context therefore *kunkumdiba* only contrasts the role of the two sexes and does not denigrate women as it does in the *kunkumdiba* - *ghan' ziiniba* pair, nor does it reflect a devaluation of their role.

c). *Dàkábírá* (firewood gatherer) vs. *tilá'gbírá* (medicinal roots digger)
Kúlsíyíáá (water fetcher) vs. *dòkúúú ñmárá* (log cutter).

The above pairs of terms also contrast roles of females and males. Females are gatherers of firewood and drawers of water while males are those who dig roots for use as medicine and cut logs for the elderly to keep themselves warm. A hint of the gendered division of the two roles is given in IM's definition of the terms:

kulisiyira: a carrier of water: a person, (usually a girl) who goes to fetch water for domestic use (p.127).

dakabira a firewood gatherer. 2. A boy given to an old woman to take care of her needs (especially firewood to keep her warm) (p. 52). (Emphases added).

Discussing the upbringing of children among the Dagomba, Tia (1969) observes that there are four different methods of training; there are specific regimens for boys and for girls on one hand and regimens for royals and for commoners on the other. He notes that a young girl may be sent to a foster parent, usually a female relation of the father or family head, for upbringing (see Oppong, 1975). In sending the girl to the foster parent, the family head may remind the recipient with words like;

‘...*ni be ti o la yuli, bee kuli siyira be bi ti o la dokuyu ηmara*
(Tia, 1969: 43).

...that they have given her a water pot or a *fetcher of water* and not a *log cutter*.

This is to underline the fact that the girl will be a helper of the foster parent, performing household chores for her, including fetching water for domestic use, all of which become part of the training for her future role as a wife.

The caveat that the girl is not being given as a ‘log cutter’ *dokuyu ηmara* (log cutter) does not refer to the girl directly, but to a prospective suitor. A prospective suitor or a new husband has a number of customary obligations to his in-laws. Some of these include occasional social services (Mahama 2004: 105), like sending a log of wood to his mother-in-law to keep her room warm, especially during the cold harmattan months. The caution means that the foster parent must not accept any overtures of future suitors of the girl when she reaches the age of marriage, but must refer them to the ‘giver’ of the child.²¹ According to Tia, if on the other hand, the foster parent is told *ni o zaη o bo dokuyu*, (Tia, 1969: 44) ‘that

²¹The family head always reserves the right to decide who a girl in the family marries. Moreover, in the past, a baby girl could be betrothed at birth or in infancy, so for a girl thus betrothed, a foster parent could not tolerate the advances of other men.

she should take her and look for a log’, then she is free to receive gifts from a prospective suitor of the girl. Note that, as indicated above, the use of ‘a fetcher of water’ has produced the explicit use of ‘a log cutter’ in contrast.

The label and role of the girl as *kuli siyira* (a carrier or fetcher of water) is carried over into the marriage situation. In the language of the marriage ceremony, the head of the prospective husband’s family ‘begs’ for the daughter of the other family so that she will be ‘fetching water for their son’ and when the family head of a woman formally gives his consent to the union of their daughter and the prospective husband he does so saying to the man’s family head:

‘*N zaŋdi n yaaŋ’ yaakaza n tiri nyin’ yaakaza ni a zaŋ n ti a bia yaakaza ka o toori kom tir o.....*’ (Andani (n.d.): 9).

I give my grandchild so-and-so to you so-and-so to give to your son so-and-so, so that **she will be fetching water for him....**

The reference to ‘fetching water’ for the husband is not a mere rhetorical device but represents one of the principal duties of a wife and a symbol of a wife’s services to her husband. It is the wife’s duty to provide water for all domestic use. She serves her husband water immediately he arrives home from the farm or from a journey, kneeling down to present it to him and remaining on her knees till he has finished drinking before she greets him and rises. She then provides warm water for his bath. When visitors arrive in the house, it is her duty to offer them water to drink before any greetings can be exchanged. Where a man has more

than one wife, these duties are performed by the youngest wife, called *komlana* (water owner), ‘the one who provides the water’²².

Though the use of these terms are not generally derogatory, except *kunkumda* as it is reported to have been used by the King’s wife, their effect is ‘sex-role stereotyping’ (Lei 2006:87), the creation of the sense that some roles are exclusive to one sex or the other. So fixed are husband-wife roles that when a wife is present, a man does not serve a visitor water nor even help himself with a drink of water, he does not provide water for his own bath, and he does not go gathering firewood from the bush²³, lest he be called a *do loo*(see section 4.3d).

4.5. Talking about the sex organs and the sexual act

It is obvious that any talk about relations between males and females, especially the roles of wives and husbands, or their obligations to each other, will at some point and in some manner, touch the topic of sexual intercourse. In my interactions and interviews, remarks about sex occasionally dropped in spontaneously especially from the males. I took note of these and in subsequent interviews when no reference was made to this topic I asked direct questions or directed the conversation in order to elicit remarks about sex. Being a male, talking about sex with men was much easier than with the women, some of whom

²² See IM (p. 110) *komlana*, n. pl. *komlannima*: the latest wife of a chief. 2. A person who sells water.

²³ It was indicated that it is only in the Tamale area, known as Gulkpegu, that the role of gathering firewood is performed by men. The explanation was given in a legend of a powerful chief of an unspecified time in the neighboring community of Savelugu who began abducting young beautiful women found in the bush as wives. Since the people were helpless against this chief the men in this area stopped their women from going to the bush alone, and would carry firewood home after each day’s work on the farm. Men in the Tamale area have done so since that time.

were total strangers. For such women if they did not mention it, I did not ask. Others too were very open in discussing these issues.

It is noted that generally in almost every culture, bald references to the sexual organs or the sexual act itself, especially in public discourse, is considered indecent, vulgar and offensive and is avoided out of consideration to the sensibilities of listeners. Sexually explicit words and expressions are usually replaced by others that are considered less offensive.²⁴ Dagbanli is no exception.

4.5.1. Avoiding sexually explicit terms (sexual euphemisms)

The Dagbanli words for the sex organs are *yoli* (penis) and *pani* (vulva/vagina), but in public discourse *tooni* (front) is used as a neutral non-explicit and polite term for both. The expression for sexual intercourse is *nyebi*, which is equivalent in vulgarity to the English word ‘fuck’, and so speakers avoid using it in public discourse, preferring instead less explicit terms (or euphemistic terms) such as the following;

*doni*²⁵: to lie down (with somebody),

bo: to seek

*layim*²⁶: to come together, mix together

baŋ taba: to know each other, and

*ngoli*²⁷: to hang on to.

²⁴ The exception is in proverbs where the use of sexually explicit words gives the proverb its special effect. As Lange observes the use of graphic words in ‘sexual proverbs’ is not considered vulgar or obscene as they are the vehicle for teachings about human values’ (Lange 2006: viii).

²⁵ BL (page 55): **doni** v. 1. to lie down...4. to lie with, to cohabit. **doni paya** / **doo** ‘have sex with woman/man’

²⁶ Ibid. (page 102): *layim*v. 1. to gather together ... 4. to have intercourse 5. two or more to have intercourse with one woman.

Both males and females cited these euphemisms (and *tooni* (front) for the male or female sex organs) as accepted alternatives to the explicit reference to sexual intercourse in normal everyday discourse, though the last *goli*, is the least preferred because to some it also sounds equally lewd.

4.5.2. Sexual Metaphors

Other terms used for the sex organs and sexual intercourse are:

<u>penis</u>	
i) <i>jiligu</i>	tendon
ii) <i>kpaa</i>	cudgel
iii) <i>karante</i>	cutlass
iv) <i>tiliga</i>	pestle
v) <i>pienkpaa</i>	large needle (usually about 4-5 inches long) used to sew sacks of grain.
vi) <i>sheriga</i>	needle
<u>vagina</u>	
<i>toli</i>	mortar

Another less offensive term for vagina is *nyiriga*, but as noted in IM it is also a “term of abuse or insult.” (IM, page 179; see also BL, page 134). The expression usually is *A nyiriga* (your *nyiriga*) and may be equated to the dismissive ‘fuck off’ or ‘to hell’ in English. It is used by both males and females to males and females alike. The female sex organ is thus degraded to the status of a general term of

²⁷Ibid. (page 67): *goliv*. 1. to hang upon by the hands. (intrans) 2. to embrace 3. to have sexual intercourse with.

abuse, which is suggestive of the derogation and devaluing of femininity in general.²⁸

The sexual act itself is expressed in pejorative metaphors:

- i) *feb o jiligu* - whip or lash her with a tendon.
- ii) *luh' o kpaa* - hit or strike her with a cudgel.
- iii) *kuh' o kpaa/sheriga* - prick her with a nail/needle.
- iv) *sa o kpaa* - plant a nail (in her with force).
- v) *luh' o tiliga* - pound her with a pestle.
- vi) *che o karante* - slash her with a cutlass.

Others are:

- vii) *gaagi o zuli* - ungirdle (lift up) her tail.
- viii) *feb' o lani* - whip or lash her with the testis.
- ix) *tse o kom* - splash/spray her with water
- x) *kabbi o* - break her

These terms and expressions seem to be used mainly by males, especially in contexts of all-male banter, and hardly by females. None of the women volunteered any of these, and those whom I felt comfortable enough to ask about these expressions simply laughed them off as 'men's talk'. There seems to be no doubt that women are aware of these terms, but they themselves hardly use them, and a close look at these items may give an indication why. The sexual act as

²⁸ The use of sex organs as terms of insult is however not limited to the female sex organ. Children sometimes trade insults referring to parents' sex organs: Invariably the first insult will usually be *A ma pani* (Your mother's vagina), to which the person insulted will reply *A ba lani* (Your father's testicle), or both may be strung together by the first person to pre-empt the obvious response.

expressed by these structures is not only represented from the male perspective but also suggests an act of violence against the woman. The male is the subject/actor or agent in each case and in the sexual act he is whipping, hitting, pricking, slashing, or pounding the female object or patient. The metaphors are drawn from the domains of weaponry and are expressed in an idiom of force or violence. When men use these expressions they do so with a sense of delight even in the mere saying of it, and it is difficult to see a woman taking pleasure in an expression that denotes violence either to herself or to another woman.

Observations on sexual euphemisms across languages show that there is a tendency, in formulating such structures, to draw on the vocabulary of food and weaponry, or eating and violence as metaphors for the sexual organs or the sexual act (Baker 1975, Haste 1994, Agyekum 1996, Hines 2000, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). For example, Agyekum notes that in Akan, food or eating are common metaphors in the language of sex, 'the vagina is metaphorically depicted as a delicious food to be eaten (*di*) by man' whilst the male organ is depicted as a weapon – a gun, club, stick or arrow' (Agyekum 1996: 164). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 222) note that in the language of Chagga from the Mount Kilimanjaro region in Tanzania, eating metaphors are the way of speaking about heterosexual sex, and from the male perspective.

Sexual control has also been identified as one of the primary targets of male dominance over women (Besly 1988). Belsy argues that patriarchy locates sex as a place of threat and that at the heart of patriarchy is a deep fear of woman's

sexuality. ‘Woman’s sensuality is what to be master man must subdue, and it is their ability to dominate such a force that legitimates patriarchal control’, (Belsey 1988:66). Haste (1994), cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:215) also argues that such “sexual metaphors” are central to maintaining sex-gender systems that support male dominance; they project a picture of a male actively defeating or otherwise harming a female (Eckert and Ginet 2003:220), and a parallel has been drawn with the common use of *screw*, *bang* and *hump* in English (Baker 1975) which tend to occur with male subjects and female objects and which suggest male force and violence against females.

Sexual euphemisms as the above therefore represent a typical androcentric conception of sexual intercourse as an act of ‘conquest’ by a man. As Salifu Abdulai (2008: 104) observes, the sexual idiom equates a sexually potent character to a strong character and personality, so men love to brag about their sexual potency.

I recorded only one metaphor *yayri yoli* (clay penis) which describes the sexual act expressed from the female perspective. A victim of rape may talk about her experience as having been ‘fucked with a *yayri yoli* (clay penis). Also, when a male and female negotiate for sex and the man, after the act, reneges on the promised compensation, the victim may use the same expression. The expression also occurs in the proverb in Lange’s collection:

Di zaŋ a yayri yoli n-nyeɓi ma.

[NEG-take your clay penis have sex me]

Don’t use your clay penis to have sex with me.

Don't have sex with me without giving me something, because I am not your wife Lange (p.147; 938).

As with all proverbs this may be used for any agreement that has nothing to do with the literal sense of the statement, i.e. where the speaker suspects that he or she may not get a fair deal. The expression 'clay penis' evokes the sense of both the physical pain and the psychological humiliation suffered from the violence of rape or the betrayal of trust.

4.5.3. Genders of inanimate objects

Dagbanli pronouns do not indicate grammatical function such as subject, object or gender (Purvis 2007:240), but they encode number, person, and animacy/inanimacy. The third person singular pronoun is *o* for both humans and non-human animates and *di* for inanimates (for more detailed discussions of Dagbanli nouns and pronouns, see Purvis 2007, Olawsky 1999, Wilson 1971a, Yahaya 1995, Bawa 1980)²⁹. Biological gender of non-human animates is indicated by the use of suffixes *lɔyɔ/dɔyɔ* (or *laa, daa*) for male and *nyan* for female. Examples are;

male: - with *lɔyɔ, laa*, or *daa* suffixes:

<i>noo</i> (chicken);	<i>no' lɔyɔ</i> (cock)
<i>bua</i> (goat);	<i>bu' laa</i> (billy goat)
<i>kpaŋ</i> (guinea fowl);	<i>kpaan daa</i> (male guinea fowl)

²⁹Two variants of personal pronouns are described in the literature: 'emphatic' or 'strong' and 'non-emphatic' or 'weak' pronouns. The examples given here are the 'non-emphatic' pronouns. The emphatic variants of the third person singular *oareɲuna* (+animate) and *dina* (-animate). Both variants have the same semantic content, but show different grammatical characteristics (see Purvis 2007).

female: - with *nyan* suffix:

no' nyan (hen)

bu' nyan (nanny goat)

kpaan nyan (female guinea fowl)

These suffixes make the purely biological distinction between male and female of the creatures referred to; they do not by themselves reflect or indicate any bias for one sex or the other. Preference for male or female animals, especially domestic animals, depends on the social uses to which these animals are put. Female domestic animals are valued for their ability to reproduce to increase the owner's stock, whilst male animals are valued for their market price and for their use for ritual purposes and for social purposes like presentation as gifts to important guests. However, as seen above, when the feminine marker suffix *nyan* is used with *doo* (*do' nyan*) the whole has the pejorative meaning; 'weak or cowardly man' (IB: page 176) (section 4.3b. above).

4.5.4. Attributing gender to inanimate objects

Gender categories may sometimes be ascribed to inanimate entities and objects like plants, the natural elements and various concepts, through the same process of attaching the *nyan* or *lyu* suffixes, or by adding *doo* or *paya* to the noun. For example, the pair of drums called *timpana* (known generally as 'talking drums') consists of a *timpan' laa* 'male' talking drum and a *timpan' nyan* 'female' talking drum. The drum head of the 'male' drum usually has a smaller diameter and a narrower opening at the end which gives it a high pitched note or tone. The

‘female’ drum has a larger diameter and a wider opening that gives it a low tone. Other paired musical instruments like the metal gong-gong or double bell (*dawule*) are also given the male/female identities based on the high/low tone difference. I also learnt that some persons believed to have powers connected with rain are able to distinguish between two types of rain (*saa*): *sa’ doo* (male rain) and *sa’ paya* (female rain).

Other examples of inanimate objects, natural phenomena or concepts classified as male or female may include trees and space. There are in the Dagbon area two species of the fig tree known as *galinziɛyu* and *gampilga*. The *galinziɛyu* grows in the wild and its leaves are loved as feed by domestic animals, while the *gampilga* is a ‘domestic’ species used as a shade tree at home. Each of these has two varieties named male and female; these are *galinziɛlaa* (male *galinziɛyu*) and *galinziɛnyan* (female *galinziɛyu*) and *gampillaa* / *gampirlɔyu* (male *gampilga*) and *gampilnyan* (female *gampilga*). BL makes the distinctions of the male and female varieties of the two trees as follows: *galinziɛlaa* **ficus kawuri**; *galinziɛnyan* **ficus platyphylla** (BL page 63) and *gampillaa* **ficus thonningii** and *gampilnyan* **ficus polita** (BL: pages 64-65).

Theshea tree (**butyrospermum parkii**) is generally called *taana*. There is no explicit reference to ‘female’ shea tree (**taan’nyan*), but speakers may refer to a shea tree as *taandɔyu*, ‘male’ shea tree based on its age and size. Very old shea trees may grow to enormous heights and sizes and because of the shade they

provide one or two may be left on a farm after the land has been cleared. Though they are referred to as ‘male’ they bear fruit.

The male (*laa*) female (*nyan*) classification is also applied to species of crops like yam and cereals such as guinea corn (sorghum) and millet. Dagomba farmers distinguish between two types of a species of yam called *labako* as *labako laa* (male *labako*) and the *labakonyan* (female *labako*), and for the cereals they distinguish between *ka laa* and *kanyan*, male and female guinea corn, and *za laa* and *zanyan*, male and female millet.

4.5.5. Bases for gender attribution to objects

The bases for naming inanimate objects as *loyu/laa* (male) or *nyan* (female) are arbitrary and sometimes conflicting. Characteristics that make one object ‘male’ may be used to describe another as ‘female’. For trees the reproductive potential appears to be the main basis for classification as female. The wild fig (*galinzienny*) and the ‘domestic’ fig (*gampilnyan*) are ‘female’ because they both bear fruits while *galinziella* (wild male fig) and *gampillaa* (‘domestic’ male fig) are named ‘male’ because they do not bear fruits. For the shea tree the basis of classification is not the reproductive potential, but the size and age of the tree. A *taandoyu*, ‘male’ shea tree bears fruits, but usually very few as a result of its age. The features that earn it the label ‘male’ are therefore its age and size. A farmer describes the biggest shea tree on his farm as *taandoyu*.

For rain, it was mentioned that besides their area or direction of origin, another distinguishing feature of *sa doo* (male rain) and *sa paya* (female rain) is the

manner in which they come. The general descriptions are that when rain is preceded or accompanied by storm, lightening and thunder it is male whilst the rain that falls gently is female.

For crops like cereals, the features which farmers use to name some varieties ‘male’ and others ‘female’ are the length of the growth and maturity cycle as well as the size and color of the grain. The varieties of cereals described as ‘male’ are fast yielding; the farmers say *di valim mi* (they are fast), but their grains may be finer, and for millet the colors are lighter. The ‘female’ varieties are slower, or as the farmers put it *di zilim mi* (they are ‘deeper’); however, their grains are usually larger and their colors darker. For yam, the ‘male’ *labako* plant has small narrow leaves and produces long slim tubers, whilst the ‘female’ has rich lush foliage and produces heavier tubers.

It would seem from the above examples of yams and cereals that plants and objects that are closely linked to the daily livelihoods and needs of the people are those that are more commonly classified as male or female, probably for the purpose of easy identification.

As noted above there is no objectively predictable or consistent set of criteria used by speakers to describe objects as male or female; nevertheless from this mix one may discern a subtle transpositioning of culturally informed conceptualizations of masculine and feminine attributes of humans onto inanimate objects. Explaining the difference between the female talking drum (*timpan’ nyaŋ*) and the male talking drum to me, the drummer (*akarima*) of Zɔɔyɔ noted that though the male

drum (*timpan' laa*) has smaller dimensions (slimmer body, smaller drum head diameter and smaller opening at the end), its 'voice is stronger' i.e. it has a higher note. 'It is the one you hear from afar'. As for the (female *timpana*) its 'voice is 'down', he said. (Compare with the description in section 6.2.1. of male response *naap* as strong and the female response *naa* as weak). This shows a reversal of the Akan system of identification of the talking drums. The Akans, from whom the Dagomba borrowed the talking drums, call the higher pitched drum 'female' and the lower pitched drum 'male' (Nketia 1963, Dakubu 1981).

The shea tree becomes 'male' (*taandɔyɔ*) as a result of its age and huge size, and the guinea corn and millet are 'male' when they are quick yielding. The attributes of strength of voice, maturity with age, big size and swiftness are all characteristics that are usually associated in the Dagomba view with human males and so objects that show these characteristics are regarded as 'male'. The cereals that are 'slow' or have longer growth and maturity cycles are labeled 'female', and this may also be seen as influenced by the cultural view of females as slow. A male who shows sluggishness often attracts a query like “‘A *mahi pam; paya n nyɛ a?*’ You are too slow; are you a woman?” (Salifu Alhassan, 2007: 64). Farmers at Jana-kpeng in the Savelugu-Nanton District were more explicit in their description of the 'female *labako*' yam (*labakonyan*) in human terms: 'It has more leaves, and the leaves are broad and always green and it looks beautiful. And the tuber is fat; the woman always looks plump.'

4.5.6. Gendered space and others

In the Dagomba world view the space around us is also gendered. The spatial orientations of front (*tooni*), back (*nyaana*), left *nu zaa* (literally, left hand) and right *nu dirgu* (right hand) have various symbolic values and significances in Dagomba world view, and find expression in both language and other semiotic representations. Left and right represent the two sides of a person's kin relations; individuals whose maternal and paternal relations belong to the same social estate (like royalty, or a professional group such as drummers or butchers) may pride themselves or receive adulations from praise singers as *gam gobgu ka loo dirigu* (one who struts on the left and changes to the right)³⁰ i.e. he or she enjoys the prestige of lineage of both sides.

Like the other concepts described above, there is divided opinion about which of the two sides represents male or female. For some, the left represents the maternal kin (*ma yili*), literally 'mother's home' and the right the paternal kin (*ba yili*), literally 'father's home'. Thus left is associated with woman and right with man. This view was contested by some others who said 'right' is female and 'left' male.

Yet still other arguments and other semiotic representations in Dagbanli culture seem to favor the previous view that the 'left' represents female. In one of these, reference is made to the Islamic teaching about the creation of the first woman which states that the first woman *Ti paya Awa*, (our grandmother Awa (Eve)) was

³⁰ With butchers in particular a dancer performing the traditional butchers' dance indicates which side of his or her family are butchers by raising the left or right arm. A dancer who raises both indicates that he or she belongs to the profession on both sides of the family.

created from a left rib bone of *Ti yaba Adam*, (our grandfather Adam). In the view of those who cite this account this makes the left a symbol for woman. An informant went further to cite a saying that is informed by this view of the creation of man and woman.

*Be ni daa zaŋ doo sapir kɔbli nam paya maa, di zuɣu ka Dagbam
kpamba yeli ni paya yelli kam goŋ mi maa; a kuli cheri o la lala. A yi
bɔri ni a teeg o, a ni kabigi o.*

Because they used a rib bone of man to create a woman, that is why the Dagomba elders say everything about a woman is crooked; you just have to leave her as she is. If you insist on straightening her you will break her.

Other views and indigenous practices also show the association of the left with woman. Two elderly informants from Kogni and Nyohini who talked about the ‘male’ and ‘female’ rains indicated that the male rain ‘lies to the right’ when one is facing east, i.e. rains originating from the South Easterly direction, whilst the female ‘lies to the left’, i.e. rains originating from the North-Easterly direction. Another example of the spatial symbolism of ‘right’ and ‘left’ is in traditional Dagomba architecture. The landlord’s quarters within the compound house is always located to the right of the main entrance with the women’s section to the left, (see Prussin, 1969: 32-33; fig. 1-13). Immediately to the right of the entrance is a raised mound where the husband and male visitors sit. The door to a woman’s room opens to the left and behind the door is her sleeping place. The door to the man’s room opens to the right and behind the door is his bed. Whether these practices are linked to Islam or not was not indicated; however, considering the influence of Islam on Dagomba culture one is inclined to opine that the view of right as representing male and left as representing female may be derived from

this influence. The traditional Dagomba representation may have been that the left represents male and the right represents female as suggested by Dr. Salifu Abdulai (a Dagomba linguist) in a personal communication.

In the foregoing gendered symbolisms of left and right there does not appear to be any suggestion of preference or value placed on either of the two. When a person who belongs to the butchers' clan is performing the butchers' dance he or she may raise the left arm or the right arm in the air to indicate which side of his or her kin relations are butchers, and whether a dancer raises the left arm or right arm, he or she does so with equal pride. Similarly, when a praise singer yells out that his patron struts on the right and changes to the left the one praised takes pride and delight in the fact of belonging to both sides.

However, other practices show that there is some negativity associated with the 'left', as it was explained by an old man at Jana-kpeng in the Savelugu-Nanton District. 'The left hand is used to clean the body after you ease yourself. When you are giving something to somebody you do not give it with your left hand and he will not receive it with his left hand. It is not good. Even when people greet they do not use the left. And the elders say *Nir bi zaṇdi o nu zaa tirti o yiṇa*'. (One does not use the left hand to point to his or her house), i. e. one does not say negative or bad things about the side he or she belongs to (i.e. the family, hometown or any group to which one belongs).

It is not very clear whether these sentiments about the left are extended into the gender associations discussed above, but the negative associations expressed by

the old man and the proverb just cited may make one wonder whether the view that the left is female is not one of the processes of degrading the female.

4.5.7. Summary

In this chapter I have looked at some lexical items, set phrases and commonly used expressions which are employed to name or describe males and females. Some of these items have paired and differentiated forms for males and female referents and it has been shown that in their meanings and use speakers show more than just sex differentiation. The items reveal semantic asymmetries or subtle semantic differences and associations which reveal certain biases and prejudices relating to the sex of the referents. There are other labeling or descriptive items that do not occur as pairs. Though examples have been found of such non-paired terms for males and females, there seem to be many more of such terms for females than for males, a phenomenon that has been described as overlexicalization (Fowler 1991). There are labels for the divorced woman, the non-married woman, and the chaste woman, labels for the conduct and performance of wifely duties and labels for the woman who finds herself in certain types of marriages. Many of these labels are not complimentary and some are outrightly derogatory. Males are also labeled, but there are few derogatory terms about males, and those terms describe certain relationships they have with women. There are also some terms and expressions that simply contrast roles of men and women.

When Dagbanli speakers avoid direct reference to the sex organs and the sexual act they resort to euphemisms, and the examination of the euphemistic terms and expressions shows that many of them include images and metaphors of weaponry and violence and present the sexual act as an act of conquest of the male over the female.

The Dagomba believe that all entities exist in two parallel worlds, the everyday and the metaphysical. All animals, even down to insects, are thought of as having inner lives, motivations and indeed humanlike attributes. Trees, rivers, and other natural elements may also be understood to have human as well as spiritual attributes (Blench, undated paper). Some of these non-human entities and inanimate objects may thus be labeled as male or female based on a number of arbitrary attributes or beliefs about their nature. The attribution of gender is however not a pervasive practice, but appears to be limited to only some of those objects and entities that play a regular role in the lives of the people. The gendering of these objects therefore seems to function more or less for the purpose of identification.

In the next chapter I examine the presentation of males and females in Dagomba proverbs.

CHAPTER 5

GENDER IN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS

Paya beɲmari way' zuyu.

A woman does not cut the head of a snake. (A Dagbanli proverb)

5.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter I identified vocabulary items and phrases with which the Dagomba label males and females and define their respective roles. In this chapter, I look at proverbs, an aspect of speech which also provides some insight into the gendered perceptions of male and females and definitions of their roles.

In the introduction to his collection of Dagbanli proverbs, Lange observes that ‘Dagbani proverbs contain core cultural values of the Dagomba’ (Lange 2006: x).

In the foreword to the same work Naa Tia Sulemana, the Zoosali Lana (Chief of Zoosali) also makes the following observation about proverbs and their use in Dagbanli:

‘Our proverbs, like the seeds of life itself have been nurtured and passed on from generation to generation by our ancestors. They are the richest and most refined part of the language and culture. They are the condensed nuggets of wisdom used by our chiefs and elders at court in giving judgments and settling disputes, as well as in daily interactions of all kinds’ (Naa Tia Sulemana: Foreword to Lange 2006: iv).

Lange and Naa Tia Sulemana are both emphasizing the importance of proverbs as a repository of the cultural values of the Dagomba and their role as an essential part of language use both in formal and informal interactions. In that respect any effort to examine the language of the Dagomba and to make a statement about the views and values they hold about subjects that are crucial to society must take a look at Dagbanli proverbs.

Any initial concerns I had about possible difficulties of getting proverbs relating to gender in context of use disappeared when I began my interactions in the field. The interaction and interview sessions and the subject of our discussions themselves became contexts for talking about males and females. I used these occasions to ask for interpretations and contexts of use of other proverbs that I heard elsewhere or noted from the collections of proverbs. As respondents and informants answered questions, explained concepts or talked about their own experiences some more proverbs emerged in their speech.

I also took note and included statements that are immediately recognizable by their familiarity as oft repeated statements or popular sayings about men and women, but are not truly proverbs. One of the features of proverbs is that they are usually of unknown origin and ownership and are generally attributed to the 'elders', but the statements I refer to as popular sayings are usually of recent origin and a known originator (Awedoba 2000, see also section 3.2.2. above). These are statements which leave one with a feeling of *déjà vu*, because they are so familiar that they have almost become clichés. Lange's collection contains many such popular sayings, but unlike Awedoba, he does not make the distinction between these and the proverbs from antiquity. They are important for this study because they capture and reflect contemporary feelings and opinions of the people, and talk about women and men is riddled with such utterances even from those to whom proverbs do not readily come.

The proverbs and sayings collected and analysed in this study present both males and females in positive and negative terms and, like the vocabulary, there is a preponderance of negativity in the presentation of the female than the male. Section 5.1., introduces a single proverb (cited at beginning of this chapter) that defines the limit of a woman's role in decision-making, and in 5.2.1. to 5.2.12., I discuss proverbs that represent the woman negatively (as a child, as incompetent in a variety of ways, not trustworthy and even treacherous, as a cause of conflict between men and as a witch). I also show how this negativity is accentuated by the use of animal imagery. Section 5.3.1. to 5.3.4. discusses proverbs that present positive images of the woman; she makes a man and the home complete, and her role as mother is unique.

In section 5.4.1. to 5.4.3. I discuss the positive and negative presentations of the male, which contrasts sharply with the presentations of the woman. For the male both positive and negative presentations seem to be concerned with the mundane problems and toils of the bachelor, with his sexual prowess and with bravery.

The discussion follows:

5.1. The limit of a woman's authority

In any talk about the roles and responsibilities of men and women, especially in any issue that concerns authority or decision making, the Dagomba make a very clear statement on the limit of a woman's authority. This declaration is the proverb quoted at the beginning of the chapter;

Paya bi ηmari way' zuyu.

[Woman NEG cut snake head]

(A woman does not cut the head of a snake)

The interpretation is that a woman does not take a decision on weighty matters. Before I discuss this proverb in detail I cite three situations from my interactions with informants and a written text in which this proverb was used. In each of the segments cited below the ‘referential focus’ (Saville-Troike 1989: 138) or topic of my talk with the informant was the concept of *kpema*[kpɛmá](elder), i.e. whether a woman can be a *kpema*, or a family head (*dɔɣri kpema*) like a man, and the making of decisions in the family. In each case I note some of the key elements of the context of each situation³¹.

Situation No. 1

Place: Gbirimani, a village in the Tolon-Kumbungu District

Setting: Home of key informant

Interaction: Unstructured interview with key informant

Participants: 4 persons; Mma Shetu Katariga an elderly female traditional music artiste, (key informant), researcher, contact person, one other woman with key informant.

Mma Shetu is a popular traditional singer and a widow. She is actively involved in many women’s activities in the communities around, and is concerned about the problem of young girls migrating to the south to work as head porters. She agreed to suggestions that because of poverty some women secretly push their daughters or girls in their charge to migrate. She condemned women who did that, and this then led to the role of women in the upbringing of children and decision taking concerning their welfare. Below is part of her comments about decision on marriage.

... As my husband is no longer living and I am left with the children...then I have grandchildren elsewhere...when they grow up and they bring one of them...and they say this is my grandchild they have brought for me to give to a man...As my husband is not alive he has kinsmen...I will say then this is a matter for my husband’s brothers...*a woman does not cut the head of a snake*,...I cannot

³¹ The Dagbanli transcription of the texts are attached as Appendix IIc(i-v)

...even though I am older than them it is not enough for me...*a woman does not cut the head of a snake*...If I am living in my own brother's home and they bring my grandchild, then it is left in the hands of my brothers; I cannot go ahead and beat my chest and do it...I have no say inside it... (see AppendixIIc(i) for Dagbanli transcription)

Situation 2

Place: Nyohini, a suburb of Tamale

Setting: Home of key informant

Interaction: Unstructured interview with key informant

Participants: 2 persons; Kpanalana, an elder of the chief and researcher

Kpanalana is an elder of a chief of one of the suburbs of Tamale. He participates regularly as a guest on radio discussions on issues relating to Dagomba culture. I arranged to meet him in his house when I ran into him at a funeral of another sub-chief in Tamale. A few days later I called at his home, and after our initial greetings the conversation began with a few comments about the funeral. I gathered from him that his own chief was related to the deceased chief and was one of the elders in that family. This was a good opening for me to introduce the subject of the responsibility of the family head for funerals of deceased members. Besides the role of the head in such matters a lot of information also came out of this discussion including the *kunkumdiba/val gbiriba* (cry criers/ grave diggers) terms already discussed in Chapter 4-section 4.4.2.). The next excerpt is part of what he said.

Kpanalana: ...*What is more a woman can never be a family head on any day...she cannot give a woman to a husband...It cannot happen that when the head of a family is dead, like when Vohindi Naa died, then a woman will come and sit for the funeral calabash³² to select her...that is why they say a woman does not cut the head of a snake...*

³²When an elder dies, the corpse is washed and covered with an undyed hand-woven cloth. Before burial the cloth is removed and placed in a calabash and the corpse is then dressed in a shroud. The spirit of the deceased is believed to be in the cloth and the calabash is called *ku myami* (funeral

- SNA:** *Then it stands for many things, is that so?...What if it is that within the family there is no one else who is senior to her...or greater than her in age...can you call her family head?*
- Kpanalana:** *As for a woman everybody is senior to her... she cannot be senior to anyone. This is how it is...when she is a child it is her mother who rears her, she grows up and her father looks after her, she marries and her husband controls her, and when her husband dies her children take care of her. So this shows that **a woman cannot cut the head of a snake**...there is no day that she can be the family elder...she can keep the family fetish...she becomes the one who takes care of the funeral calash room...but she cannot carry the responsibility of performing the funeral.(see AppendixIIc(ii)for Dagbanli transcription)*

Situation 3

Place: Tolon in the Tolon-Kumbungu District

Setting: Home of key informant

Interaction: Unstructured interview with key informant

Participants: 3 persons; Luŋ Mahamadu, a traditional drummer (key informant), researcher, contact person,

Luŋ Mahamadu is a traditional drummer [lùŋá]. Salifu Abdulai (2008) has described the traditional Dagomba drummer as ‘the educator, entertainer, historian and collective archivist of the society’ (Salifu Abdulai 2008:82). Whenever people disagree over a historical fact, a cultural procedure or on the use of language, it is usually to a *luŋa* that they may refer for guidance. At a point during our interaction, I asked Luŋ Mahamadu a direct question on the meaning of the proverb *Paya beymari way’ zuyu* (A woman does not cut the head of a snake) and this was part of his explanation:

A woman does not cut the head of a snake...a woman can be as old as anything, her order will not stand...unless a man’s hand is in it...a woman cannot make a sacrifice to the ancestors, if a woman is the oldest in the family and they come to ask for the marriage of a woman she is will go and look for a man...even if there is no male left in the family, she will go and look for (male) family friends...and tell them ...that it is child so-and-so they have come to seek and I want you to give her to them...they will seek for the girl’s hand from her, but it is a man who will stand and give her to them... (see AppendixIIc(iii) for Dagbanli transcription).

calabash). The *ku myani* of chiefs, titled persons and the very elderly, carried by a woman, ‘selects’ the person from among the male elders who will take responsibility for the funeral.

Situation 4.**Place:** Warizehi, A suburb of Tamale**Setting:** Under the shade of a tree in the open**Interaction:** Unstructured interview**Participants:** 2 persons; Afa Tafirli (the key informant), researcher.

Afa Tafirli is a young man (probably in his thirties) in Tamale and a member of a local group that does drama performances on radio. The group has added video film production to their performances. Afa Tafirli is popular for his language, which he seasons with generous amounts of proverbs and wit. Talking about seniority he made the following comments and also used the same proverb.

*A woman never becomes an elder...that is why the Dagomba say as for a woman she is not older than anybody...a woman can have thirty years and a man can have fifteen years and marry her. Yet in spite of all this she cannot call you by your name, but she must cover you with a leaf(i.e.treat you with respect when she addresses you)...my elder brother so-and-so....What is more if a woman has a hundred years and her brother has ten years...the person of hundred years cannot perform a ritual of sacrifice for the person of ten years...That is why they say **a woman does not cut the head of a snake**...as they are saying...even a woman does not kill a snake...when they say a woman does not cut the head of snake...a woman doesnot perform a ritual of sacrifice for a man...that is what they are saying...*

...The family fetish can be in her custody if she is the oldest person in the family...but her having custody of it is nothing...you cannot take a fowl to her to make an offering to it for you...when you go to her she knows the names of the old dead...she will mention their names to you and you will make the offering yourself...so a woman does not make an offering for a man...(see Appendix IIc(iv) for Dagbanli transcription).

The following is an excerpt from a monograph by Tia Sulemana (1969) *Dagbon Kaya ni Wahi* (pp. 43-44) in which the proverb is again used. The monograph describes some aspects of Dagomba culture and dances. In this excerpt the writer discusses the training of children, and like the others the mention of the roles of men and women in this regard calls forth the proverb:

The training of children in Dagbon falls into four types. That is, training of boys, training of girls, training of royals, and training of children of commoners....When

*they are giving the child to the person who is going to train her they say to the messenger that when he arrives he should say to the aunt that they are giving her a water pot or a fetcher of water; they are not giving her a cutter of logs...when they tell her this, then she also knows that she is only training the girl...but she has no authority to commit her to anything...she is only going to train her and when she matures into a woman she will return her to her fathers and they will give her to a man...But if they give her (the girl) to her (the aunt) and tell her to use her to look for a log, then it has become lawful. If any man pays her homage or presents her with logs she can point to the child's fathers and they give the child to the one who is paying her homage. In the way of Dagbon culture a woman does not give a child to a man. That is why Dagomba elders say that **a woman does not cut the head of a snake**. (see AppendixIIc(v) for Dagbanli transcription).*

Proverbs have two layers of interpretation, the literal and the metaphorical. In its literal sense a proverb makes a statement of 'fact' from the world view or daily experiences of the people and the world around them; or an allusion to 'a cultural truth, or eternal verity' which may be 'empirically valid or in the form of a valid traditional belief, norm or practice (Yankah 1989:40), or as Lange puts it, it makes reference to a 'concrete situation which gives one example of the general point' (Lange 2006: viii). The literal meaning of a proverb may itself be obscured through indirection as in this particular proverb, '*A woman does not cut the head of a snake*'. In a single statement in Situation 4 Afa Tafirli gives us all three forms of the manifestation of the proverb;

***a woman does not cut the head of a snake**...as they are saying...even a woman does not kill a snake...when they say a woman does not cut the head of snake...a woman does not perform a ritual of sacrifice for a man...that is what they are saying...*

He quotes the proverb, then states it in its literal sense that a woman does not kill a snake, and then he gives an example of its general application, 'a woman does not perform a ritual sacrifice'. The literal statement is an empirically verifiable custom. A Dagomba woman will not kill a snake. In Dagbon, both men and women earn their livelihoods from the farm and in the bushes around. Poisonous

snakes abound in these environments and snake bites are a common occurrence; yet, whenever a snake bites someone, witchcraft is never ruled out as a possible cause.³³ As Awalu (2009) notes, a witch can transform herself into ‘an invisible supernatural entity or can turn into an animal such as a cat, owl or an insect’ (Awalu 2009: 218). It is believed a witch can turn a strap of cloth into a snake which she can send to harm her enemies. With this belief system, a woman who is unafraid of snakes as to be able to kill one is suspected of being a witch. When a Dagomba woman sees a snake, she calls a male, even a boy, to kill it; she does not kill it herself. This constitutes the cultural truth in the proverb ‘a woman does not cut the head of a snake’³⁴.

When a woman avoids killing a snake she avoids the consequences too. This provides the template for other forms of roles and decision making in the society - being the head of a family, giving a woman to a husband, taking on the responsibility of funerals of deceased kin, offering sacrifices to the ancestors and so on. Performance of any of these acts involves financial commitments and the provision of other material resources like animals for rituals and women do not have access to such resources.

³³ When a person is bitten by a snake, the snake must be found and killed, and the victim is sent, together with the dead snake, to a medicine man. Before the medicine man begins the treatment, he dissects the snake and what he finds inside and within the viscera enables him to make a determination if the snake is a normal snake or one ‘sent by a witch’. Based on this determination he then proceeds to provide the appropriate treatment.

³⁴ The Mampurli (Mampursi) version of this proverb is more explicit: *Pɔ’a bu kuri waafu n ɲmaari o zugu* (A woman does not kill a snake and cut its head): A woman cannot take major decisions and act on them without the man’s consent. (Proverb provided from personal communication with Mr Baba Wuni).

These observations do not suggest that a woman can never take a decision on an issue or make an input into it. In the privacy of the home, a man may seek the views of his wife on an issue, especially the senior wife, or his mother, or an older female kin (Oppong 1975), or as in the example cited below from situation 3 the decision may entirely be the woman's, but when it is presented in public it has to be seen as coming from the man:

..even if there is no male left in the family, she will go and look for (male) family friends...and tell them ...that it is child so-and-so they have come to seek and I want you to give her to them...they will seek for the girl's hand from her, but it is a man who will stand and give her to them...

In this case the decision is the woman's, but if it is publicly pronounced by her, the act will be culturally deficient as it will lack the appropriateness of a performer, which Searle (1969) identified as necessary to make a speech act felicitous or 'successful'. She therefore calls on men, even if they are merely family friends or only neighbors, to perform the act of giving the woman to her husband. This clothes the act with the appropriate garment of male authority.

In other situations a woman who has her own position on an issue and has an option to make an input into a decision, may vacate that position in favor of the decision the men may take, because as another informant put it, when problems come up later between the man and his wife it is the men who must sit down and discuss it for a settlement, not the women.

In sum, the proverb clearly defines the role of the male and the female in decision making and in the performance of certain tasks. Important decisions and actions must be taken or carried out by males. The proverb does not only reflect the

beliefs and practices but it is cited to validate the actions of males, to reinforce these practices and to teach women the limits of their authority.

The excerpts above also emphasize a point made earlier in Chapter 4, that among the Dagomba it is sex, not chronological age that matters in respect of the assumption of some social roles. As we see in Afa Tafirli's statement in situation 3, age does not make a woman an elder. Even if a husband is half the age of his wife, the woman must address him as 'elder brother' and, as Afa Tafirli seeks to emphasize the point, even a hundred-year-old woman must defer to a ten-year old male in the performance of the rituals connected with sacrifices.

The Dagomba position then is in sharp contrast to observations from other African societies (Miescher 2007, Oyewumi 2002, Yankah 1995) where a woman who reaches old age also becomes an 'elder' (see section **2.1.4.**)

This is not to suggest that among the Dagomba seniority in age of a female is not acknowledged in other ways. As we shall see in the discussion of address forms (section **6.2.1.**), a younger person does not address an older person (male or female) by name alone but must show deference by qualifying the name with a superior kin term (whether the person is a kin relation or not). A younger male therefore addresses an older female with the appropriate kin term. However, in the assumption of social roles such as the position of 'elder' or in the performance of certain functions and rituals, it is the male who is given the responsibility even though he may be younger in age.

Churchill (1997) provides another example from Katariga, a village near Tamale where the priest, a woman, is the chief. Karim, the priest chief's son, performs all the rituals on behalf of his mother. She notes that it is Karim who acts as head of the family and does almost all of the duties of the chieftaincy which in name belongs to his mother. Karim's explanation of why men are the head of the family offers another revelation of the Dagomba view of men and women:

“Whoever the head of a family is feels pressure. Only the men have a strong heart, more than women.” (Churchill, 1997:37).

For the Dagomba all human emotions, reason and attributes come from the heart *suhu*, so the word *suhu* enters into numerous combinations to express different psychological and mental states, e.g.

suhudamli [heart turmoil] - grief
suhupielli [heart white] - joy, happiness
suhuyisili [heart rising] - anger annoyance
suhusayingu [heart ruined] - sorrow sadness
suhukuuni [heart dry] - wickedness
suhumahili [heart cool] - cool-temperament, kind
suhuzia [heart sitting] - composed
suhukpiɲ [heart dead] - forgetful, absent-minded
suhukpeeni [heart strong] - courage (see IM, 2003 and BL 2004, for more examples).

In Churchill's quotation above the speaker must have used *suhukpeeni* [heart strong] meaning 'courage'. As Karimu sees it then, the pressures of being the head of a family are so much that only the courageous can bear it, and women, in this view, are not courageous.

When a chief or a title holder dies his eldest son and eldest daughter are installed as *gbɔɲlana* (usually translated as *regent*) and *pakpɔɲ* (no English equivalent) respectively. On the day of installation, the two are jointly presented to the public

and sit side by side during ceremonies connected with the funeral; so there is an appearance of a ‘joint regency’, but it is the *gbɔɣlana*, even if he is much younger than the *pakpɔɣ*, who assumes the daily responsibilities of his father and officially sits in his place till the funeral is performed. Other reasons why a woman does not take decisions are stated in or may be inferred from the other proverbs that are discussed in the sections that follow.

5.2. Views and images of the woman in proverbs

Any attempt, during my interactions, to get some explanation why a woman cannot do this or that only led to a conversation in circles; the same proverb is repeated as if it is a self-evident truth, or fresh claims of a woman’s incapacity are proffered, as Mma Shetu did when I asked her why she cannot give her own grand-daughter to a man in marriage. Her response was;

Many people say that having a woman as an in-law is having no in-law...It is just for today...as things are still sweet...after a short while when things tilt a little she says she no longer wants it...she says I gave my consent, now I withdraw it. But when a man gives a gift ...a man’s face fears embarrassment a lot...As for a man when he gives a gift, to turn round and say he does not give again is rare...

So even to a female, a woman cannot be as consistent or resolute in her decision as a man is.

Besides other subjective evaluations of a woman’s abilities which are used as reasons why a woman cannot take important decisions (see 5.2.1. - 5.2.5 below) one may propose other reasons for the apparent reluctance of women themselves to take decisions. One is economic; taking a decision means assuming responsibility for executing it. Men monopolize the decision making process because men have greater access to economic resources and political power; they

also have greater authority and power and control the decision making processes (Biddle 1966). For example, one of the factors a family head takes into consideration when he decides on the time for the performance of the funeral of a titled or elderly family member is the availability of food for the funeral, and a cow or sheep that must be slaughtered for the departed relative. Although he need not be the sole provider of these items and often gets support from the family, he takes full responsibility for ensuring that they are available, hence it seems obvious that he must decide when a funeral will be performed. And that is how it is with many other activities like marriage, sacrifices and so on.

Another reason may simply be a pragmatic one; to avoid blame in the event that something goes wrong. When a man takes a decision and something goes wrong, men sit together and try to find the circumstances that led to the situation; when a woman takes decision and something goes wrong men sit down and find fault with the decision.

But there seem to be other reasons, besides the economics and politics of access to resources, why a woman cannot assume the same responsibilities that a man may take. Examining the proverbs and popular sayings collected during my interactions and from the collection of Lange (2006) and Ibrahim (2004), I present in the next sections a pattern of images and representations which depict women as less adequate in many other ways, whilst men are represented more favorably. I put these into sub-themes which reflect, express, and strengthen the different views about the two sexes.

5.2.1. Representing the woman as a child.

Dagomba proverbs and sayings often present the woman as a child. In talk about courtship and marriage a young woman, especially one who has never married, is referred to as *bia* ‘child’. Even a divorced woman or a widow with a child or two may be referred to as a child.

In the excerpt from Tia Sulemana (1969), the foster parent is said to train the child until she matures into a woman (*ka o ti bi paya*) and then she sends her back to her father’s house. It continues that at this stage the foster parent:

...can point to the child’s fathers and they give the child to the one who is paying her homage. In Dagbon culture a woman does not give a child to a husband....

Even though the writer indicates that the child who has matured into a woman is sent back to her parents he subsequently refers to her as ‘child’. The use of ‘child’ in some contexts may be explained by the fact that a man usually marries a woman who is younger than himself, sometimes one who may be younger than some of his own children. However, it is not only a young unmarried woman who may be referred to as a child; every woman is regarded as one. In the words of Kpanalana of Nyohini, cited above (p.160) ‘everybody is senior to a woman’.

Afa Tafirli says the same thing

*...Woman has no ‘old person’...they do not finish **training** her...when she is a girl they will be **training** her...if it is not her mother it is her aunt...then she moves from there...on the day of her marriage they will sit her down and **educate** her again...then when they send her ..because she is moving from one house to another...when she arrives in the new home ...then her husband’s people...they too will begin **training** her again...the way they want her to be...that is how they will handle her till she is advanced in age or her husband dies...then her children build a house...when they take her back....then she has changed house again...and they too will start **training** her again... (see APPENDIX IId for Dagbanli transcription)*

The speaker uses the word *wubsi* five times which I have translated as ‘train’ and ‘educate’. IM (page 263) defines *wubsi* as “to train a child, to bring up a child, to educate, to nurse a tree” and in BL (page 190) it is “to train up a child, to educate, to nurse a tree”. Thus, at all times in her life, a woman remains notionally a ‘child’ under somebody’s care and instruction.

5.2.2. Getting a woman - money, flattery, deceit or lies.

Having placed the woman at the level of a child, the society trivializes her further by belittling her intelligence or by denying her a sense of self dignity. The following sayings indicate what it takes a man to win a woman’s love: money, flattery, deceit or lies.

a) *Dagbambia ka liyri n-tiri paya ka...*
 [Dagomba youth not have money give-INF woman CONJ...]

...lee mali zilim balli n-tiri paya.
 [EMPH has tongue soft give-INF woman]

The Dagomba has no money to give to a woman, but he has flattering words for her. (Lange:127; 805).

Zilim balli translates literally as ‘soft tongue’, which may mean ‘kind words’, ‘soothing words’, or ‘pleasing words’. Lange’s interpretation of this saying is ‘If you don’t have money and wish to get something, you use convincing or flattering words’, and, as we have noted about proverbs, the literal sense of a proverb or saying expresses what to the people is a cultural truth (Yankah 1989, Lange 2006). The point then is that with money one can get any woman, but when one does not have it then flattery will do in its stead. The following saying is even more direct about using words to get a woman.

(b) *Nangbani nbori paya ntiri yoli.*
 [mouth find-INF woman give-INF penis]

It is the mouth that looks for a wife for the penis
 (Men flatter women to convince them to have sex with them.)
 (Lange: 250; 1646).

The idea of employing ‘flattery’ to get a woman may also be used in conjunction with the picture of the woman as a child. The Dagomba value truthfulness, but that value does not seem to be intended for the benefit of women and children, or to matter in dealing with them. It is alright to deceive or even lie to a child or a woman to get them to behave properly or do as an adult wishes. The Dagomba say;

Bε yohindi la bia ka nyiiri o nyuuli.
 [3P deceive-IMPF FOC child and bite-IMPF 3S/ANIM yam]
 They deceive a child in order to take a bite of his/her yam.

Perhaps it is thought that women and children are not intelligent enough to be able to recognize deceit and lies. The following statements are variants of the two proverbs (*a* and *b*) discussed above. The first was said during a phone-in session on a local radio station during which listeners were invited to make contributions to the discussion of a letter that had been sent by another listener detailing a problem in his relationship with his wife and his own mother. The contributor counseled the writer to be patient with his mother and concluded with the following advice;

(c) *Paya ɲun' mini bia nyε -la yim; bε bori la yohim.*
 [woman 3S/EMPH and child be FOC same; they like-IMPF FOC deceit]
 A woman and a child are the same; what they like is *deceit*.

Both BL (p.202) and IM (p.278) define *yohim/yohimɛ* as ‘deceit’, ‘pretence’, ‘trick’ ‘ruse’; however, in this context an alternative interpretation ‘indulgence’ appears more appropriate as in a situation where a parent or adult pampers or indulges a

child with endearments, little excuses or small presents to keep the child content to do the adults wish. In deed what is meant in this saying may be similar to what Eckert and McConnell-Ginet describe as ‘deceptive compliment’ (2003:155) where the complimenter seeks to enhance the complimentee’s good feelings of herself for his self- interest. The deception may also include making false claims about himself to enhance his status in the woman’s opinion.

The same comment came from one of my informants as,

- (d) ...*paya ɲuna, bia mbala, o bori la yohim.*
 [woman 3S/EMPH, child that is, she like-IMPF FOC deceit]
 ...as for a woman: she is a child; she likes deceit.

On two other occasions, two different informants, a male and a female used the proverb. The man had said:

- (e) *A yi bori paya ka yeli o yelimanli; a kulahi nye o*
 [You if want-IMPF woman and tell 3S truth; you NEG ADV get 3S]
 If you are courting a woman and you tell her the truth you will not get her.

He continued that a man ‘uses lies’ to get a woman and ‘uses truth’ to keep her.

When I pointed to the contradiction in this statement and the fact that the woman would soon find out that the man had been lying, his response was,

‘When she gets to the man’s home, by the time she finds out, then she would have had two or three children. Then she will say she cannot go and leave her children behind, and that is the truth.’

The ‘truth’ that will keep her tied to the man is the reality that she has children who she would not like to leave behind.

At the village of Jana-kpeng in the Savelugu-Nanton District where I spoke with two women after speaking with their husbands and their father, one of the women

agreed with the saying when I asked them about the claim by men that women love to be lied to. Her reply was,

‘Eẽh, ti payaba, ti borilaziri, (Yes, we women, we like lies).

Then, amidst laughter from both of them, she added, ‘but sometimes we know that you men are lying to us’.

Why would a woman accept a man’s proposal knowing that much of what he is claiming about himself or promising her may be false? In Dagbon marriage could be arranged between families or a man and a woman could marry after courtship. It was the right of the father (or family head) to decide whom his daughter married and the woman’s duty to accept the father’s choice of husband for her. A female child could be betrothed immediately after birth or at any stage in her childhood and married off the moment she passed puberty. Betrothal at childhood is hardly practised today and arranged marriages are fewer, but if a young woman remains unmarried for long it begins to be a matter of concern for her family. The continued presence of a grown unmarried woman in her father’s home is considered a blemish not only on the woman but a source of embarrassment to the family. Subtle pressure in the form of innuendos begins to be put on her and this may change to open threats for her to find a husband or be ‘given off’ to a man of the father’s choice.

A woman might therefore accept a man’s proposal as a matter of fulfilling a woman’s duty to accept marriage, not because she believes all the man is saying. In that situation the only ‘truth’ which the woman could expect from marriage is

the children she would get. Sometimes when difficulties arise in a marriage and the relationship between husband and wife has become so intolerable that the woman wants to leave, the strongest argument that usually makes them stay is statements like ‘I cannot go and leave my children’, coming from her, or ‘you should not go and leave your children’ from other people.

It would seem then that women accept the flattery, deceit and lies not because they are not intelligent enough to recognize them for what they are, but because they have resigned themselves to a system where marriage and child birth are the only options for a female.

5.2.3. The woman cannot make up her own mind.

As a corollary to the image of the woman as a child some of the proverbs present her as one who cannot make up her mind. Lange has the following saying,

O bori ka yeli ni o je; paya bilikonsi.
 [she like-INF CONJ say PART she not want woman hypocrisy]
 She likes it and says she doesn’t like; it is female hypocrisy³⁵.
 (Lange: 322; 2141).

This is said of someone who is known to want or favour something but pretends not to. In its literal sense the proverb states a Dagomba view about women’s attitude to love or sex; the view that a woman never readily consents to have sex at the first approach even if she would have it, nor does she openly admit that she likes it. Further, that a woman will reject a man’s proposal of love the very first time he makes it even when she loves him.

³⁵ *Bilikonsi*, which is translated by Lange here as ‘hypocrisy’ also means ‘pretence.’

Both men and women seem to agree that while it is normal and acceptable for a man to be the first to make a sexual move, indeed a sign of his virility, a woman's ready acquiescence to a man's advances for sexual intercourse is considered a sign of moral weakness. The society expects women to mask their desire for sexual so as not to appear as lascivious, and, as some women explained, a woman must not readily accept a proposal of courtship without initial demur. For some, it is a way of testing a man's real intentions, for if he comes again and again then it is an indication that he really loves you.

Though some of my male informants agreed to these views, they also had their own views. According to them women's refusal of men's sexual advances or proposals is either pretence *bilikonsi*, as the proverb above says, (they want it, but pretend not to), or a sign of their inability to make up their minds.

It appears that this is an attitude not peculiar to the Dagombamales. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) observe that the man 'who interprets a woman's "no" as implying "maybe" or even "yes but you need to keep coaxing me" does so because of certain assumptions he has about her constraining demureness' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:203). The Dagomba man may therefore not accept a woman 'no' to his advances as a negative answer but as 'I don't know'.

5.2.4. The woman's decision is flawed

Even when a woman is able to make up her mind about what she wants, that decision may be regarded as flawed. A young man, probably in his thirties, was adamant in his argument that his uncle was right in insisting that his cousin should

not marry a particular young man because that young man was considered reckless and incapable of maintaining his own farm. When my assistant suggested that the man was the girl's choice (*suhuyubu*: heart's wants or desire) his reply was;

Nira yi che paya suhuyubu ti o; o ni pii tigburigu.
 [Person if allow woman 'heart's wants' give 3s; 3s FUT choose tree stump]
 If a person allows a woman to do as she pleases; she will choose a (tree) stump.

Mahama (2004) has a slightly different version of this saying:

The desire of a woman is but nothing (Mahama: 194; 129)

This translates in Dagbanli as

Paya ηun kuli bori la yoli.
 [Woman 3S-EMPH only want-IMPF FOC nothing]

Salifu Alhassan (2007) has noted that in uttering this saying speakers usually play on the sound of the word *yoli* giving it a meaning that further denigrates women. When both syllables of the word are uttered in a high tone, 'high high' (*yólí*) it means *nothing*, giving the saying its intended meaning as Ibrahim has put it. However, when the first syllable in *yoli* is given a low tone and the second a high tone, 'low high' (*yòlí*) the word means 'penis', thus giving the utterance the meaning as 'the desire of a woman is penis', and sometimes speakers deliberately play on these sounds to further ridicule women.

5.2.5. The woman changes her mind quickly

An alternative view is that a woman is not resolute; even when she has made up her mind, it takes her only a short time to change it again. This view was alluded

to by Mma Shetu, above, in her remarks that a woman does not make a good in-law. At the village of Kogni, Mba Alasani's brother, Zoo Naa put it this way:

A mini paya yi tɔysi, miri ka a dii dihi o tabli; dahinsheli beni oni fɔhi a. Ka di bi lahi ɲmani ɲun di lan mi a yetɔya maa gba. Din zuɣu ka Dagbamba yeli ni a yi yɛn shi paya bua a shiri li la bu muni maa: o yi ti yeli ni o bori o bini ka a zaɲ ti o.

When you have an agreement with a woman do not trust her far; there is a day she will side-step you. Then it will look as if she has never known about your matter. That is why the Dagomba say when you are going to skin a woman's goat you remove the skin whole; when she says she wants her goat you give it back to her.

Lange cites this proverb as

Paya bua, shim' o koligu,...
[woman goat skin-IMPER it bag,...]

o yi ti yeli ni o bori la koligu ka a zaɲ ti o.
3s CON FUT say PART she want-INF FOC bag PART you take give 3s
A woman's goat should be skinned to make a bag. If she says that she wants a bag, then you take it and give it to her. (Lange 325; 2164).

Lange's interpretation is that one must 'wait for a woman to choose what she wants' (Lange 2006: 325); however, Zoo Naa's explanation seemed to corroborate Mma Shetu's comments which suggested that a woman easily changes her mind. The normal process of skinning a goat involves cutting the skin open, but after giving instructions that she wants her goat skinned a woman can later say she wanted the skin whole, which involves a different and specialized process of removing an animal's skin without cutting it open.

5.2.6. Women cannot be trusted

Schaefer (1991) notes that a Dagomba husband speaks briefly to his wife in the morning in order to give instructions for the day and spends more time conversing with his fellow men. One of the reasons for this, as noted earlier, is that a man who spends a lot of time with his wife runs the risk of being called a *do loo*. A second reason is that the Dagomba do not believe that a woman is worthy of trust;

if you take a woman into your confidence she will betray you. This view is stated in proverbs like;

Paya ka naani.

[woman not have trust]

A woman cannot be relied on (trusted).

Women are not trustworthy. (Lange326:2167).

A mini paya yi lo tobu, tobu gbarun nnyeli.

[you and woman COND plan war, war weak be-COP it]

If you and a woman plan a battle, it is a weak battle

(from an informant, Yendi)

A mini paga yi tɔgsi, mira ka a dii dihi o tabli;

[you and woman COND agree beware PART you really trust her well...]

...dahinsheli be o ni fohi a.

...someday exist she FUT fail you]

When you have an agreement with a woman do not trust her far; there is a day she will betray you. (Zoo Na, Kogni)

The informant from Yendi explained that this proverb may be used when a person, whether male or female, develops cold feet at the critical moment of taking action on an agreed upon decision. ‘Then you can even call him a woman’, he said, ‘and tell him ‘*a zɔri dabiem pam, paya n nyɛa?*’ (you are too cowardly, are you a woman?). That is why they say if you and a woman plan a battle, it is a weak battle’ (*tobugbarun* [battle weak]); i.e. if you plan an action with a woman it will be a plan bound to fail.

5.2.7. A woman will expose a man’s shortcomings.

As we have noted from Schaefer (1991) a Dagomba man traditionally did not have long conversations with his wife. There is a strong opinion among the Dagomba that it is not everything that a man must tell to his wife because women

cannot keep secrets or maintain confidentiality. One of the means of ensuring that one does not reveal secrets to a woman is to avoid having long personal conversations with her. Also when there is a problem at home, like the failure of a husband to provide a meal, they are quick to expose it to outsiders as this proverb suggests.

Paya b̄ri ka chi kani: ka o yina niŋ l̄ŋl̄ŋ.
 [woman like PART millet not be: CONJ she come out LOC do hop-hop]
 The woman likes it when there is no guinea corn available at home so that she can go out and hop around, (reveal it to others).
 A woman likes to expose bad news about the home. (Lange: 325; 2163).

As often happens to peasant farmers, a husband may run out of grain to provide the daily ration and remain helpless. In such a difficult situation the woman usually has to use her own resourcefulness, sometimes falling on neighbors to borrow grain to provide a meal for her children. This reflects the difficult situation for women, a no-win situation. In spite of the helplessness of such situations, men resent it when their wives go out to borrow grain or flour. It makes them feel that their inadequacies are being exposed.

Also, as indicated above, if you have a secret and it gets out, the leak must have come from your wife.

Yilisheli paya yi tu a ni a nyiri kpaysi,...
 [House another woman COND insult you that your buttocks lean

...a (yiŋ) paya n tua ka o wum.
 ...your (house woman) wife insult-INF you CONJ she hear]

If a woman from another house insults you about your lean buttocks, (your wife) a woman from your house has insulted you and she has heard it.

If someone knows your secret it is your close friend who told him/her. (Lange: 421; 2835).

As Lange's interpretation shows, the proverb does not refer only to a situation involving a man and his wife, but like most of the proverbs that have been discussed, undesirable behavior is presented as women's.

A good wife is the one who protects her husband's weakness;

Paya suŋ n lirti o yidana daashili.

[Wife good PART cover-INF her husband secret]

A good wife hides the secret of her husband.

(Lange: 329; 2186).

This prescription does not seem to be required of men because I did not find a proverb extolling the virtues of a man who protects his wife's secret or weakness.

5.2.8. Women are treacherous

Closely linked to the view that women are not trustworthy is the view that they are treacherous, so treacherous that a man has to be wary even of his own wife.

An informant in Yendi related the following tale, which I was familiar with because it is popular one regularly told to illustrate women's 'treachery':

A man returned home one day holding an egg. He called his wife and giving the egg to her told her to take very good care of it because his life was in it; 'The day it breaks, I'll die', he said. Together the two went into the wife's room, lifted up some pots that had been placed on top of each other till they got to the bottom pot. They put the egg in it and carefully replaced the other pots. Not long after this the man had a quarrel with his wife and beat her up. Seething with anger the woman rushed into her room and brought down the pots one after the other till she got to the egg. She took it out unwrapped it and holding it up before her husband she said, 'Look your life is in my hands, and today you're finished'. Before the man could say a word she crashed the egg on the floor. 'Now you are finished' she said. Nodding his head and smiling the man said, 'Truly, what the Dagomba elders say is indeed a fact; if a woman knows your secret you are finished. A woman cannot be trusted. That was just an ordinary egg and nothing else.'
(APPENDIX IIe)

The tale ends with two sayings:

- a) *If a woman knows your secret you are finished, and*
- b) *woman cannot be trusted.*

Both are interpreted as a warning that a woman will betray you when she knows your secret or weakness. The first of the two proverbs is sometimes given in another form as:

- c) *Paya yi ban a daashili, a zi a zayim.*
 [woman if know your secret, you sit your nakedness
 If a woman discovers your secret, you are sitting naked; (from an informant, Savelugu)

Here ‘you are sitting naked’ is a metaphor for ‘you are exposed to danger’ ‘you are unprotected’ or ‘you are sure to be disappointed’, and the interpretation of the proverb is that when a woman gets to know a secret or weakness about you, she will use it against you or expose you.

Other proverbs which express the same idea include:

- d) *Nir’ sim nnye o paya, o dim nnye o paya.*
 [Person friend be his wife; his enemy be his wife)
 A man’s friend is his wife; a man’s enemy is his wife.
 (Your life is in the hands of your wife, for good or for bad).
 Lange: 272;1802.
- e) *Binsheyu din ku naa, o paya mi.*
 [Something that kill chief, his wife know]
 The chief’s wife knows the cause of his death.
 (Whatever happens to you is known by those close to you)
 Lange: 102;6350.

5.2.9. A woman is not resilient.

We noted in our discussion of the attributes of males and females (section 5.1.iii) that the woman is seen as frail and lacking courage. The following proverbs also point to women’s lack of resilience. The first was given by Mburdiba, a male informant at Vittim near Tamale and refers to the physical condition of a woman;

her beauty fades the moment she begins to have children. The second, from Lange, refers generally to a woman's lack of resilience.

- a) *Payasarbil' ŋmani la aluura, o yi doyi yim o ni kpaai.*
 [Young girl be like FOC dye, she if give birth once she FUT fade]
 A young woman is like dye, when she gives birth once she fades.
 (Mburdiba, Vittim near Tamale)

- b) *Dagbam' paya ŋmanila machesi; saa yi bu o di naaya.*
 [Dagomba woman be like FOC matches; rain CONDbeat her it finish]

A Dagomba woman is like matches; if rain beats her, she goes out
 (it is finished). (Lange: 128; 809).

The interpretation of this proverb as given in Lange is that it is hard for a woman to be financially independent and that she needs help from others in order to succeed. A full interpretation however seems to suggest more than the inability to be financially independent. 'Rain' has multiple meanings, both good and bad, in Dagbanli symbolism, depending on the manner of its presentation. The symbol of rain falling is usually interpreted as a good sign, but being beaten by rain suggests the experience of the vicissitudes of life. In this proverb the suggestion is that a woman easily succumbs to life's difficulties. When difficulties come she easily succumbs to them and becomes helpless.

It is in the next proverb that the continued dependence of a woman on a man for support is stated, although not directly.

- c) *Paya nyaankurugu zaysi dooni, ka ku zagsi sayibu.*
 [woman weak-old refuse man place CONJ NEG refuse responding]

The very old woman refuses (to sleep with) a man; but she will
 not refuse to answer when he calls. (Lange 326;2171)

The old woman does not like to sleep with a man, but she will not tell him to stop looking after her. The Dagomba believed that sex after menopause was not good for a woman's health. The belief was that the monthly cycle cleanses the woman's womb and so when a woman reaches menopause continued sex could lead to the 'accumulation of dirt' in the womb which could cause serious illness. So at menopause the Dagomba woman would cease sleeping with her husband.³⁶ This does not however mean that a husband's duty of looking after his wife ceases when she is old and no longer sleeps with him. The proverb reminds the woman that in her old age she is no longer available to satisfy his sexual needs but she will continue to depend on him.

5.2.10. The woman portrayed in animal imagery

In section 4.2.4., we noted the abundance of animal terms used as labels for women. Some proverbs and sayings also present women in animal imagery. I noted the example given as 4.2.4(b) *pay'baa* (dog woman) in a saying by another informant;

- a) *Payabaa ka jilima*
 [woman dog not have dignity]
 A dog woman has no dignity.
 (Afa Fuseini, Yendi)

In this saying 'dog woman' may also mean 'promiscuous woman'. An elderly man used the following proverb when he was advising a newly wedded young man and his friends.

- b) *Paya ŋmani la ziŋa: o n'na mahi la ka a poriti o.*
 [woman be like FOC fish; it FOC wet FOC CONJ you make into a coil it]

³⁶Some men use this as justification for marrying again, and sometimes a woman will encourage her husband to look for another wife.

A woman is like a fish; the time to coil it, is when it is fresh.³⁷

It was the day following an Islamic wedding ceremony when the groom and his friends go round on ‘thank you’ visits to his in-laws and well wishers. On such visits congratulations and pieces of advice are given to the new husband and prayers are said for the bachelors among his friends to find wives too, and for those who want to add to the wives they already have. It was during one of such visits in Savelugu that this elderly man gave his advice to the groom and his friends. According to him a new marriage is beautiful and pleasurable because the love is strong and the man tends to overlook the problems the new wife may bring, hence the saying of the elders:

‘... *pay’palli sayri sɔŋdi la yoma.*³⁸
 ...woman new garbage place-INFEMPH nearby]
 (the new wife’s garbage; place it near).

He then went on to add that the elders however also say;

Paya ŋmanila ziŋa;o n’ na mahi la ka a porit’o.
 [Woman be likeEMPH; fish; it PARTstill wet PART that you coil-INF it]
 (A woman is like a fish; the time to coil it, is when it is fresh).

The interpretation of this proverb is that a man must mould the woman’s character into the ‘shape’ he desires when the marriage is still fresh. This seems to confirm the earlier statement by Afa Tafirli (section 4.2.1. above) that when a woman arrives in her husband’s home she receives fresh ‘training’ from the husband and his people. She must be taught to behave in ways that suit her new home.

³⁷ A method of preparing some types of fish, like the mud fish, before smoking is bringing the tail round to the head and hooking a fin into it or holding it in place with a piece of string or wood. This makes it easier to handle when it is dry.

³⁸ Lange quotes this proverb as *Pay’palli sayri, sɔŋmili nimaa ni (Pay’palli sayri bahiri la yirun)*: The dirt from the sweeping done by a new wife is put anywhere (328: 2181).

In another proverb the woman is likened to a horse (Salifu Alhassan 2007: 65);

- d) *Paya mini wahu yela yim; a yi bi bari o,*
 [woman and horse be EMPH same; you COND NEG ride-IMPF 3S
a mi ni vo o.
 you EMPH FUT pull 3S]
 A woman and horse are the same; if you are not riding her you will pull her on a leash.

In other words, a woman has to be put under one form of control or another. Though this proverb was not used or cited directly by any of my informants, it was confirmed by a number of them. The horse image is used for woman and appears again in another proverb in section **5.4.1h**, and also in my discussion of terms used to refer to women, (see **4.2.4a**). Though the horse is a status symbol among the Dagomba, a prized possession of the well-to-do and an essential element of the pomp of royalty, it is also known to have a latent character of wildness. The proverbs show a similar view is held about women.

5.2.11. Woman as the cause of conflict and source of trouble.

In section **6.1.**, we noted that people sometimes put the blame for conflicts between communities on what they call ‘women’s tongues’. In the same manner the sexuality of women may also be the cause of conflict between men.

- a) *Din deei yi dipa zinguli zuyu, doo naan je o kpee?*
 [It PARTCOND NEG clitoris sake man FUT-NEG not like his fellow]
 If it were not because of the clitoris (having sex), would a man hate his fellow? (Lange 140; 894).

In its literal sense the proverb presents a woman as a sex object over which men may quarrel and even fight and hate each other. In its wider application it objectifies woman as a commodity like money and chieftaincy over which men

squabble or fight. Lange's interpretation of this proverb is; 'we quarrel over something good between us – e.g. women, money, chieftaincy, etc.'

A woman can be the cause of the break up or destruction of the household if she shows certain qualities that are expected to belong only to men, such as 'power' and 'strength'. A man with such qualities may be described as *gandɔyɔ*. IM (page 78) defines the word as 'a powerful man, a strong man, a huge person' and in BL (page 64) it is 'a distinguished person'. These qualities however seem not to be appreciated in a woman.

- b)** *Paya gandɔyɔ nnye yili wurimya.*
[woman powerful be house collapse EMPH]

A powerful (or strong-willed) woman is the break up of the home (i.e. the cause of the break up of the home) (From an informant)

When a woman has too much influence over her husband or the household either because of money or witchcraft she is described as *paya gandɔyɔ*, (in a negative sense as we saw in the second meaning of *payadede* in section 4.2.4k). Such a woman can cause the break up of the household. Money or witchcraft makes a woman an object of suspicion, fear and envy especially among co-wives and their children.

It is not only the possession of 'strength' or 'power' by a woman which men see as a source of danger to the household. Other qualities which men consider to be a source of danger or threat to their own security and their control over the male-female relationship are wealth and beauty. Men appear to be generally uncomfortable with women who possess any of these.

The point made in the proverb (a) above about the men fighting because of ‘the clitoris’ is usually extended to a belief that a beautiful woman is a source of trouble for the husband because she may be an object of desire of lecherous men, and even though Dagomba women can now openly display their wealth and property, Dagomba men’s attitude towards women’s wealth and ownership of property remains chauvinistic. In the past and even today, a wealthy woman could easily be accused of witchcraft, as Stephen Zoure reported in a news story about the ‘witches’ camp at Daani in the *Daily Guide* newspaper of May 24, 2010.

‘(M)ost of the inmates noted that their accusers were jealous, insisting that they are not witches...others claimed that persons who borrowed monies from them and failed to pay, rather accused them of being witches, which forced them to come to the isolated camp. (*Daily Guide* May 24, 2010: page 10).

Today it is more common to hear men express the view that when a woman becomes wealthy, she no longer submits to a man’s control; she tends to be disrespectful and even defiant. During a radio discussion on a local radio station (Diamond Fm) in Tamale in July 2008 on apparent increasing tensions and conflicts in marriages, a panelist argued that marriages are no longer stable because men no longer have control over their wives and that this is because women are now making a lot of money and no longer respect their husbands. His advice to men then was:

‘A paya yi nya ligri, nyin dim n-ku li’
 [your wife COND get money, you eat INF-kill it
 If your wife makes money, spend and finish it all off.

A Dagomba man has no right to his wife’s self-earned money if she does not allow him access to it. This advice is therefore nothing more than a statement of a

strategy a man should employ to prevent his wife from making money. As a strategy to make the woman economically dependent on him, a man must ensure that his wife does not accumulate wealth. Writing about the changing roles of women and men in Africa in the 21st century in the *BBC Focus on Africa* magazine (July 2009), Farai Sevenzo attributes this type of attitude to a sense of masculine insecurity. The writer quotes the owner of a traditional food bar in a Harare slum who seems to be finding it difficult to get a marriage partner and laments that all the men she meets are terrified of her because of her wealth:

‘All the men I meet are terrified of me...A woman with her own money...is frightening to men’ (Sevenzo 2009: 29).

Sevenzo argues that with the gradual changing status of the woman in Africa, the commanding dominance of masculinity has been undermined, and this is not because men have changed but because women are no longer what men saw them as. The loss of economic control over family and destiny has made men uncertain and hesitant. ‘What is a man if his wife is the one clothing him, feeding him?’ the patriarchal society seems to ask (Sevenzo 2009).

5.2.12. Old women and witchcraft

I have discussed in previous sections the Dagomba belief in witchcraft and the link of witchcraft principally with old women, and I noted how the term *pakurugu* (old woman) came to mean ‘witch’. One finds a number of proverbs that also express a link between old women and witchcraft.

(a) *A yi ka ma paykpema, a baya ka nayili boligu ni.*
[You COND not have mother old woman, you interest not be chief house call]

If your mother is not an old woman (witch), you are not concerned about being summoned to the chief’s palace. (Lange: 38; 233).

Cases involving witchcraft are heard at the chief's court. Strange deaths or sicknesses in a community may raise suspicion of witchcraft and the chief may consult soothsayers to find the cause. They may find among other things that the affliction is the work of witches; then the chief may summon all the old women in the village to his palace where they may be warned to stop their activities. Sometimes various methods like divination, threats, or trial by ordeal may be used to 'catch' the alleged culprit(s). Sometimes too an individual may accuse a woman or group of women of trying to 'eat' (*ɲubi*) him, the term used for the manner in which witches are supposed to eliminate their victims. The woman or women against whom the allegation is made will be summoned and put through the same mode of 'trial'.

A woman who is thus summoned to the chief's palace is accompanied by a male relation, usually her husband or adult sons. Usually no reasons are given for a summons to the chief's until one appears before the chief. For a commoner, for whom an invitation to the chief's palace is not a usual occurrence, such a summons will be unnerving especially if it includes one's wife or mother.

The proverb's general sense is that 'if you don't have anything to do with a wrong doing, you don't fear what people will say about you' (Lange 2006:233), but in the literal statement it reflects the mind of the society that has made a permanent association of old women with witchcraft and draws a 'logical' link between a summons to the chief's palace and an allegation of the witchcraft. The same association is made in the next proverb;

- (b) *Ka ma baya ni pakurugu molo.*
 [Not have mother interest not in oldwomen/witches announcement]

The person whose mother is not alive does not worry about the calling together of old women. (Lange: 186; 1197).

(If you do not have an elderly mother you will not be unduly worried if there is an announcement summoning old women to the chief's palace.)

One of the punitive actions against women who are 'found guilty' of practicing witchcraft is banishment from their communities, or death. Some were sent by relatives to a witches' home or camp, one of which is at the village called Daani, near Yendi, where they are safe (Cf. the legend of Na Zanjina; Section 4.1.ii). The next proverb alludes to this practice of banishment.

- (c) *Paya nun daalizanda nyela Daani fon.*
 [Woman REL-EMPH paradise be-FOC Daani suburb]

A woman's heaven is the town of Daani. (Lange 327; 2178).

The use of *paya* (woman) as subject instead of *sonya* or *pakurugu* (witch) indicates the association of witchcraft not only with elderly women, but to women generally. The reference to the village of Daani as 'heaven' for the woman is ironical. In the first place the reference appears apt as the village offers the victim a safe haven, but on the other hand it robs her of her freedom and dignity.

5.3. Balancing the picture? - some positive images of the woman

The discussion from 5.2.1.–5.2.12 creates what Yusuf has described, in a comparative study of images of women in Yoruba and English proverbs, as a sense of intense 'cumulative misogyny' (Yusuf 1998:63). It also seems to corroborate Hussein's observation that many African proverbs portray women in

general as foolish, weak, jealous, evil, unfaithful, dependent, frivolous and seductive (Hussein 2005:60). This however is not entirely accurate.

One finds in Dagomba proverbs and sayings, as in other African proverbs, another image of the woman, her uniqueness as “a symbol of warmth and all-nourishing goodness” (Hussein 2005). As we shall see in the proverbs in the following sections, the home and the man are represented as not complete without a woman, and her role as a mother makes her, in Dagomba thought, greater than the man in some sense.

5.3.1. A woman makes a man complete.

It is the woman’s presence that makes the man’s presence worthwhile as the next proverb from Lange shows;

- (a) *Paya mbe ka doo be.*
[Woman exist CONJ man exist]

Woman is there and man is there. (Lange: 326; 2169).

The true sense of the proverb is that it is woman’s existence that makes man’s existence possible; a man’s life is empty without a woman. In the next saying it is noted that all a man’s possessions are worthless if he has no woman;

- (b) *Buni din gari kɔbga paya ngari.*³⁹
[Riches RELbe more than hundred woman be better]
A woman is better than hundreds of possessions,.

No matter what possessions a man may have, or position he holds, he has little esteem in the eyes of society if he has no wife. There are some titles and chiefship

³⁹While confirming this proverb another informant gave a variant form that put the emphasis on children, *Buni din gari kɔbga bia n gari* (Hundreds of possessions, a child is better) i.e the highest good.

positions which a man cannot take if he is not married, and so a person who seeks any such position endeavors to get a wife first, and he is helped by relatives and well-wisher to find one quickly. The regular jibes at the bachelor in proverbs and sayings are suggestive of the undesirability of not having a wife, and even today in a place like Tamale, some landlords will not rent out their rooms to an unmarried man, though this discrimination also affects unmarried women.

5.3.2. A woman makes a home

In traditional Dagomba society if a man was not married he did not build his own house. If a house owner has only one wife and she dies or leaves him, efforts will be made for a female relation to come and live with him, because the Dagomba say,

- a) *Paya n nɔɛ yili.*
 [woman INFbe house]
 Woman makes the home.

Yet, some say,

- (c) *Pay' suŋ nɔɛ yili suŋ*
 [Wife good COP home good]

A good wife is a good home. (Lange, 329:2187)

The last saying introduces an element of male subjectivity about what type of wife is good for a man. We get a hint of the society's conception of a 'good wife' from Lange's interpretation of the saying. A good wife is one who is 'not troublesome and welcomes strangers' (Lange, 2006:329) and co-wives. A male informant added that if you have a good wife, and you have the wherewithal to add another wife, it is easy for you because a good wife does not oppose her husband's efforts to marry another woman.

A woman is so important for the home that rather than have an empty house a man must only look for a wife and forget about her looks or age.

- (d) *Pay'bieyu so yili zanli.*
[Woman ugly better than home bare]

(Having) an ugly wife is better than (having) an empty house. (Lange: 325; 2161)

and

- (b) *Pakur' gbɔyu so la ŋun ka.*
[Old woman feeble better than FOC REL has not]
It is better to have a weak old lady (as a wife) than to have none.
(Lange: 330; 2198).

It is such considerations as the above which make bachelorhood an unattractive state and the bachelor the butt of jokes and subject of proverbs such as.

- (e) *Paybegu lana so la dakoli.*
[Woman ugly owner better than FOC bachelor]

It is better for a man to have an ugly woman than to be a bachelor.
(Lange, 325: 2158).

5.3.3. When a woman is greater than a man

In spite of the overarching patriarchal values which make the man head of the family, there is the recognition that the woman's role is critical, if not greater, than the man's in the survival, growth and spread of the family. In the past it was considered a propitious omen when a man's first child was a girl. The Dagomba say;

- (a) *Paya nteeri tuŋ.*
[woman INF/EMPH spreads gourd vine]
A woman spreads the gourd vine.

There are many interpretations of this saying. The 'gourd vine', (*tuy*), a creeping plant, is the Dagomba symbol for family or lineage (In IM one of the meanings of *tuy* is given as "clan; family" - page 250). In spite of the biases in favor of males and the potential of boys as additional hands on a man's farm, the Dagomba considered it a good omen for a man if his first born is a girl. Girls get married at an earlier age than boys, so a man whose first child is a girl is assured of an increase in his social links with another family. Getting a girlchild may also have other advantages. As an informer put it;

Ayi doyi bipuyinga, bihi ayi ka doyi maa...paya ŋo maa ni ku toi tum sheli ti a , o yi ti kuli doo, o yidani maa ni tum ti a.

If you give birth to a girl, you have given birth to two children...what this girl cannot do for you when she marries, her husband will do for you.

Therefore a man's first girl child could be named *Tuy-teeya* (the gourd vine has spread). According to Mba Alasani of Kogni, when asking to know the sex of a new born baby it is usual for most people to ask, *paya bee doo* (female or male), naming female first. According to him this is significant, because 'if the vine is going to spread it is the female who spreads it.' The woman does not only make the 'vine spread' but also keeps it alive; they ensure that the ties between relations are kept alive and continually renewed. They will walk long distances to attend funerals or visit relations. A man would prefer to ride a bicycle, and when he cannot find one he is reluctant to walk.

Another way in which women keep kin relations alive is that the child learns his or her relations with those around him or her through the mother. According to

Afa Tafirli ‘it is the mother who introduces the child to his or her kinsfolk more than the father’. Taking care of children is a communal responsibility in the traditional society. The immediate family, relatives and community members regularly take a hand in caring for young children. There is always an aunt, a sister, a grand mother or a neighbor to babysit for the mother when she is busy, and whenever a mother is passing a child to someone she does so saying:

‘abeli ni a kana yaa,...a bapir ni a kana yaa...a pirba ni a kana yaa...ba ŋun dii ka saha...n yen wuhi bia maa daŋ maa...

‘your elder brother says you should come,...your uncle is calling you, go to your aunt...a father has no time to show the child the relations....,

Thus through such informal means the mother is teaching the child his or her relationship with members of the immediate household and members of the community as well as the appropriate kin terms that are important in addressing others.

It is for this reason that the Dagomba say *wubsir gari dɔyira* (or *Wumsir gari dɔyira* (Lange p. 409:2749). The one who looks after is greater than the one who gives birth. This is usually said as a sequel to another statement which acknowledges the complimentary roles of a man and woman in giving life.

(b) *Doo dɔyri mi ka paya dɔyirà,...*
[man give birth-IMPF EMPH and woman give birth-IMPF]

...amaa wubsir ’gari dɔyirá
[but rearer more than giver of birth]

Man gives birth and woman gives birth, but the one who rears is greater than one who gives birth.

The word *dɔyi* (to give birth) is used of both men and women as if the man also goes through the physical process of giving birth:

Doo dɔyri mi ka paya dɔyira. (Man gives birth and woman gives birth).

This acknowledges the fact that procreation is a joint project of a man and woman, yet Dagomba custom recognizes the father as the ‘owner’ of the child ‘*doo nsu bia*’ (the man owns the child). Nevertheless, as the one who rears the child, the woman is greater than the man.

5.3.4. The supremacy of the mother

While the proverbs above make a general point about the importance of the role of the women, it also underlines the importance of the mother. Just as all a man’s possessions are worthless without a woman, the individual, whether male or female, is advised as in this proverb that anything he or she may get or have is not worth the value of a mother.

(a) Never sell your mother to buy a grasshopper (Mahama, p.193:111).
(*Di kɔhi a ma da sakɔyɔ*).⁴⁰

The Dagomba is taught to respect and revere his or her mother. It is everyone’s duty to take good care of the mother till her death. The elders impress this duty on the young by telling them;

(b) A ma nlihi a ka a nyina bili...

[Your mother INF take care of you and your teeth grow

... a gba lihiri o mi ka o nyina vuyi
[...you also take care of her EMPH and her teeth come off]

Your mother looked after you to grow your teeth, you also have to look after her to lose her teeth. (From an informant in Savelugu)

⁴⁰Lange has it as *Di kɔhi a ma n-zaj da sakɔyɔ* (*A kɔhi a ma da sakɔyɔ*) Don’t sell your mother to buy a grasshopper (You sell your mother to buy a grasshopper) *You should not exchange a useful thing for a useless thing.* (Lange p.137:874)

This is the advice usually given to people who appear negligent in their responsibilities to their aged mothers. Some people insist the saying mentions both father and mother (*ba ni ma*) –

- (c) *A ba ni a ma nlihi a ka a nyina bili,..*
 [Your father and your mother look after you CONJ your teeth grow...
 (Your father and mother looked after you to grow your teeth....).

Yet others insisted the saying is about whoever played the role of one's guardian;

- (d) *Nir' yi lihi a ka a nyina bili,..*
 [Person COND look after you CONJ your teeth grow,...
...a gba lihiri o mi ka o nyinavuyi
 ...you too look after her EMPHCONJher teeth uproot]
 (If a person looks after you to grow your teeth, you also have to look after her/him to lose her/his teeth).

The strong ties of the extended family system of the Dagomba and the tradition of fostering meant that many children grew up not in the care of their biological parents but sometimes with distant relatives (Oppong, 1975) to whom the individual owed the same duties as the biological parents.

No matter who this proverb talks about, it does not diminish the mother's role and one's duty to her. Moreover taking care of the mother has its own rewards;

- (e) *Bia anfaani yiri la o ma sani.*
 [Child blessing come out FOC 3S mother PREP]
 The blessings of a child come from his /her mother (Lange, p.86: 528).⁴¹

⁴¹ This saying has some ambiguity in it; it may mean that the child receives blessings from taking good care of the mother, or that a mother's respect to the father becomes blessings for the child. The intended meaning of a speaker usually becomes clearer in the context in which it is used. The second sense is unambiguously made in a different way by Andani (n.d.:13) as *Pay' ŋun luri nirib' suzuda doyirila albarika bihi*. (A woman who respects people gives birth to blessed children).

A child will become blessed and will prosper if he or she becomes a dutiful child to her mother, because pleasing the mother is a way of pleasing God and receiving his rewards. This belief is also expressed in the saying:

- (f) *Bia daalizanda bela o ma napɔŋ ni.*
 [Child heaven be EMPH 3S mother foot inside]
 A child's (reward of) heaven is under his/her mother's foot.

A person shows contrition by kneeling and taking hold of the leg of the offended party. The act symbolizes humility and the above saying probably borrows from that act to teach the individual to be humble before the mother. However, some informants pointed out to me that this last saying is an adaptation of a *Hadith* or teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. The word '*alizanda*', (Arabic *jannat*, heaven) seems to support this view but, whether that is the case or not, the saying fits well into the Dagomba view of the importance of the mother, whose influence over the individual, they believe, transcends both the temporal and the spiritual worlds. Salifu (2008) observes that though the Dagomba society is patrilineal, and a child "belongs" to the father, the individual draws spiritual strength from the maternal relations through the mother. The spiritual bond between mother and child is so strong that the individual is taught not to incur the mother's displeasure and never to swear by a deceased mother. They caution about the potency of a mother's curse saying;

- (g) *Ma noli bizaani soli*
 [Mother curse NEGstop way]
 A mother's curse does not stop mid-way.

If a person incurs the displeasure of the mother to the extent that she pronounces a curse on him or her, the person will come to ruin. Secondly, if a person swears by the deceased mother and subsequently breaks the oath, that person will die; the

mother will 'catch' or 'take' him/her. A Dagomba may swear by his deceased father saying *M po mba* (I swear my father). Later, if he wishes, he can slaughter a fowl to the father to revoke the oath or, as expiation, if he has broken it. There is no such act of expiation for a person who has sworn by the deceased mother, so swearing by the mother, though not a taboo, is rare, because the consequences are grave.

The explanation I got from an elder is that the spiritual bond between mother and child begins from conception and persists through life and death. That bond requires the child to be truthful to the mother at all times, especially when the mother is dead. He explained the basis of this bond as follows, seeming to be addressing me directly.

'Your mother carries you in her stomach for nine months and her blood runs through you, she goes through pain and loses blood to deliver you and carries you on her back till you learn to walk. On her back you piss and soil her clothes, and she collects your faeces, sometimes with her bare hands. If you do not eat she cannot eat; if you do not sleep, she cannot sleep. Because of all this suffering to give you life, if you offend her and she complains it will not leave you alone.'

So even though Dagomba proverbs and sayings appear to be consistently prejudicial in the presentation of the woman, the role of the mother is held as unique.

5.4. Views and images of the man in Dagbanli proverbs

We have seen that the dominant concern in Dagomba proverbs and sayings about the woman seems to be the definition of her role and the expression of the society's perceptions and core cultural values about her. The man is also the subject of many proverbs, but he is the focus of a different set of concerns in these proverbs. These concerns centre on the man's sexual desires, especially the foibles and pains of the bachelor or the foolishness of the lover/womanizer. But the most enduring representation of the male in Dagbanli proverbs is the image of acts of bravery.

5.4.1. The hapless bachelor

We saw in sections 5.3.1. and 5.3.2., that one of the expressions of the value of the woman is the view that a man or the home is incomplete without a woman. The state of bachelorhood is an undesirable one hence it is given some prominence in Dagbanli proverbs. However, in contrast with the sometimes harsh language used about the woman, the bachelor is presented in an easygoing satirical manner. Also, unlike the woman to whom both the literal and general sense of the proverb may be aimed, a bachelor himself may not be the target of the proverb, but the image of himself in a proverb reminds him of his situation. In the following proverb for instance there is a general admonition against pretence or self deception, but the addressee may well be a married person.

- (a) *Dakoli yi ŋma ziri ni o mali paya; o yohindi la o yoli.*
 [Bachelor if tell lie that he have wife; he deceive IMPF EMPH his penis]
 If a bachelor lies that he has a wife, he is deceiving his penis.

Pretending to be what one is not or to have something when one has not got it does not change one's situation; it rather makes one suffer more. The following proverb from Lange uses the bachelor to make the point that it is only by making genuine efforts can one get what one wants, not merely wishing for it.

(b) *Dakoli difieli mali viela ku lei paya.*

[Bachelor pillow make good NEG turn into woman]

The bachelor's pillow is beautifully made, but it will not turn into a wife.

(You need to make your own effort to get what you want.)

(Lange: p.128; 814).

The need for one to have a good reason before undertaking an action is also given in another proverb

(c) *Dakoli ka paya ka o yoli yiysiri ni di niŋ bo?*

[Dakoli not have wife CONJ his penis stand up CONJ 3S do what]

A bachelor has no wife, so what is his penis becoming erect to do?

(Lange, p. 129:815)

The same idea is put in another rhetorical question;

(c) *A bi nye paya ka yargir sɔŋ?*

[You NEG get woman CONJ spreadIMPF mat?]

You have not got a woman and you are spreading a sleeping mat?

These proverbs often draw laughter if there are others present and listening, particularly if among them there is an unmarried man.

On a more serious note the bachelor is presented in the next two proverbs as someone who toils but has little benefit from his labour or sees others enjoying the fruits of his labor.

(f) *Dakoli ku soonga ku dooi bim.*

[Dakoli kill rabbit NEG pour broth]

The bachelor killed a rabbit, but he won't get its broth.

(Lange, p.129:816)

When a bachelor goes hunting and returns home with a catch, someone's wife will have to cook it and get the best portion for themselves. This is a way of cautioning a person against depending on others and expecting to be treated well. Another popular saying using the situation of the bachelor to make a general point is;

- (f) *Dakoli nyu ηmaa; bilim sabgi, (dimi ku bahi moni).*
 [Bachelor yam piece; roll black, (it CONJ NEG give out ration)]
 A bachelor's broken piece of yam lies around and turns black; (but it won't be given as ration for the day).

This saying portrays a different side of a bachelor; stingy and selfish. When he brings yam from the farm he hides it in his room till his lover comes, and when she does not come it may lie there till it rots because there is no wife or child to find it. The saying is used when a person has something of value which he or she may not have any use for, but which he will not give to those who need it.

Thus in spite of the high value attached to marriage and the importance of having a woman in the home, the bachelor is represented in a tone that carries more empathy than censure. The unmarried woman is not so lightly treated whether in the manner of labels or in proverbs. A young unmarried woman, as we saw in section 5.2.9., is reminded that her beauty is only transient and will fade after only one birth.

- (g) *Payasarbil ηmani la aluura, o yi doyi yim o ni kpaai.*
 [Young girl be like FOC dye, she if give birth once she FUT fade]
 A young woman is like dye, when she gives birth once she fades.
 Mburdiba, Vittim near Tamale

In another proverb which is a version of one cited earlier (section 5.2.10.) a *payzilinli* (unmarried/divorced woman) is compared to a fish from the river. In yet

another a person who is planning to marry a divorced woman may be cautioned thus.

(h) *A yi nyɛ wahu ka o pagali zeya,...*
[you if see horse and it put on saddle standing

...o luhi la ŋun gari a
it throw FOC 3S greater than you.

When you see a fully saddled horse standing by itself, (beware that) it has thrown someone mightier than you.

This is a caution to a man planning to marry a divorced woman to tread cautiously, because a divorced woman may have proved too difficult to control by her previous husband. As noted earlier in section **5.2.10c**, the horse imagery is used again for woman and the implied reference to the latent character of wildness in a woman as it is in a horse is made by the warning that the woman may be divorced because she was beyond the control of her previous husband.

5.4.2. The lover, the womanizer, the libidinous man (Dagɔrli)

Another favored image of the man in Dagbanli proverbs is that of the lover or the libidinous man. This group of proverbs focuses on the sexual desires, suffering and failures of the lover or lecherous man. Because of his strong desire for sex the libidinous man does not discriminate in his choice of women, as the following saying shows.

(a) *Dagɔrli zi pay' biɛyɛ.*
[promiscuous man not know woman ugly]

The womanizer doesn't know an ugly woman (does not discriminate).

Like the bachelor who is desperate to have a woman, his only wish is to satisfy his desire. This saying is sometimes used of a person who has no choice but has to take whatever is available. But even though the womanizer or the libidinous man

will want to have any woman, he might still be expected to act rationally as the following proverb shows.

- (b) *Dagər' biəyɔ ku nyebi nɔŋa.*
 [womanizer bad NEG have sex scorpion]
 Even the worst womanizer will not have sex with a scorpion. (Lange, p. 125:793)

Another informant in Yendi gave a variant form which appears to be a conflation of the two sayings;

- (c) *Dagərli jerigu zi pay' biəyuku nyebi nɔŋa.*
 [promiscuous man stupid not know woman ugly NEG fuck scorpion]
 The stupid womanizer does not know an ugly woman but will not have sex with a scorpion.

No matter how desperately a person needs something, he will be expected to act rationally and not purposely do something that will harm him. It is recognized that sometimes the lover has to suffer indignities or pain in his bid to satisfy his lust,

- (d) *Dagərli chaŋ o mam yiŋa, n ti lu nkabi o yoli.*
 [bachelor go his lover home, CONJ FUT fall break his penis]
 The lover has gone to his girl friend's house and falls and breaks his penis (Lange, p.125:179)

The lover's suffering becomes a lesson that a wicked person is punished in the manner in which he has sinned. Dagomba sayings and proverbs about the lover or the womanizer generally show the same partiality, and even in the last example which appears to censure him, there is a sense of humor in the image of a broken penis. This contrasts with the brutal lack of sympathy for the sex worker in the following proverb;

- (e) *Dzaymelo yi kpi tabli nŋahigi.*
 [prostitute COND die tobacco fall]

If a prostitute dies, a leaf of tobacco has fallen to the ground (has been torn off). (Lange, 170:1089).

The local tobacco plant is grown at home around the compounds of houses. Only a few elderly persons use it for chewing or smoking. It is so toxic that even those who chew it do not swallow their saliva as they chew. Because of its toxicity the tobacco leaf is of no use to most people; not even goats or sheep care about a leaf of tobacco when one falls off. The death of a sex worker⁴² is like the falling off of a tobacco leaf; it is not considered anything of importance. There is no pain when a thing of no value is lost.

5.4.3. **Doo (man), a synonym for bravery and strength**

I observed in section 4.3. that besides meaning ‘male’ or ‘man’, the word *doo*, is a praise term for males who perform acts of bravery or strength. The word is not just a praise term; it is a synonym for a ‘brave man’ Mahama (2003:63). Dagomba proverbs and sayings are consistent in the presentation of *doo* (man) as the subject in statements of acts of bravery and strength.

5.4.3.1. **Man’s strength**

A man is expected to be strong both on the outside and inside. These qualities are inculcated into the male even as he is still a child. When a little boy is hurting and cries he is told even by mothers and female adults to stop crying with the injunction;

(a) **Doo be kuhira** (A **man** does not cry) (Salifu Alhassan 2007: 63),

or as another informant put it

(b) **Doo bi kuhira, doo ŋuhurimi** (A **man** does not cry; a man grunts)
(A. I. Sulemana, Yendi).

⁴² In the proverb the term *dzaymelo* is used, and I have glossed it as ‘prostitutue’, to retain the sense of derogation.

The saying has a more elaborate version, probably for adults, which more forcefully emphasizes the quality of stoic indifference that makes a man.

(c) *Doo larila yeli biɛri, o bi kuhiri yeli biɛri.*

[Man laugh FOC matters bad, he NEG cry-IMPF matters bad]

A **man** laughs at calamities; he does not cry over calamities.

Sayings such as these confirm the comments and observations already made above in my discussion of terms that label women as ‘cry-criers’ (*kumkumdiba*) in section 4.4.1.

Another way in which men talk about their strength is to use sexual idiom. We noted in 4.5.2. that euphemistic metaphor for the male sex organ is commonly drawn from the vocabulary of weaponry and the sexual act is represented as an act of conquest. Masculine strength may therefore be expressed as sexual prowess. The strong person is the virile sexually strong man. The sexual idiom equates a sexually potent character to a strong character and personality (Salifu Abdulai 2008:104).

The Dagomba have a tradition of choosing ‘praise names’ that are used as appellations and drummed or sung for them in public. It is a tradition for chiefs, but it is also practised among other members of the society (Salifu Abdulai 2008). Such praise names are profoundly witty and didactic and many have passed into common usage as proverbs (Lange 2006). Salifu has observed that praise names that encode sexual images are very characteristic of the warrior clan, drummers, and persons who are deemed to be brazen and do not shy away from sexually suggestive language. The warriors in particular need to show their

bravery both to assure their patron the chief and to brag to others, so the praise names they craft for themselves are full of sexual images, confirming our earlier assertion that sexual prowess is used as a symbol for power and strength.

Examples of such names from Salifu Abdulai are;

Pani kpabili nyebi ku sa.

Vulva shut make-love will not run diarrhea.

A tight vagina does not induce diarrhea.

I am capable of performing arduous tasks. (Salifu Abdulai, 2008:174)

The contrast between man and woman is expressed in the next praise name where young men (brave men) are shown to be concerned about exhibiting bravery (doing the warriors' dance) whilst young women (timid men) are only concerned with their looks (trivial matters).

Payasaribihi wuhirila gbuna, ka nachimba be kambon waa ni.

[Girls young show off buttocks, CONJ young men be warriors dance inside]

While the young ladies are exhibiting beauty the brave men are ready for battle. (Salifu Abdulai 2008:177).

5.4.3.2. A man is remembered for bravery

In section 4.1. I noted that the qualities that constituted *dotali* (manhood) included bravery. Putting this idea in statement form the Dagomba say

(a) *A yi wum doo, o tuma* If you hear a **man**, it is his work.
(from an informant in Nakohigu section of Yendi)

The word *tuma* (work) in this statement does not refer to the ordinary sense of occupation, but the outstanding achievement of acts of bravery, as suggested by this proverb from Ibrahim.

(b) A **man's** deeds, not his years, are counted (Ibrahim, p. 190:35).
(*Be kaani la doo tuma, ka o yuma*).

When a man dies people do not remember him by the number of years he has lived but by the deeds he has performed in his life time. We find in the next proverb;

(c) *Doo kuliya ka o yuli ku kuli (borigi).*

[Man go home-PERFCONJ his name NEGgo home(get lost)]

A **man** goes home (dies), but his name remains behind (is not lost).

(Lange, p.151; 963).

Or

(d) *Adiboo dali la ka be yeri doo yela, doo yela ka yelibu.*

[Adiboo day FOC CONJthey tell man matter, man matter NEG telling]

They talk about a **man's** deeds on the day of Adiboo, a **man's** deeds are not talked about. (also in Lange p.5; 25)

This is a saying of praise and encouragement to Dagomba warriors in remembrance of the battle of Adiboo in 1896 when the Ya-Na sent his warriors to fight against a German force (Staniland, 1975). Even though the Dagomba warriors were defeated, they were said to have fought gallantly but their story is told only on the solemn occasion of the remembrance of the day of Adiboo by drummers.

5.4.3.3. A true man is indestructible

When the stakes are high, or when a man gets intoxicated with success, the sense of resilience in the face of adversity or the feeling of elusiveness is given in more graphic images of invincibility.

(a) *Doo niŋla kɔbli; ka ŋmabu zaŋ gbuyi tandi.*

[Man become bone NEG breaking take bury sand]

A **man** has become a bone; cannot be broken and left lying there partially covered with sand. (Lange, p.151: 965)

(b) *Doo nyela dabol' loŋ soona; 'guliya, guliya ka o garita.*

[Man COPhill under rabbit; watch out, watch out CONJ 3S passing]

A **man** is (like) a rabbit by the hillside; ‘get him, get him’, and he is passing. (Lange p.151: 966)

These are typical praises that may be said of someone by another or by himself. Both proverbs make the same point; a true man is not easily subdued. In the first his adversaries will find him a tough nut to crack; in the second he proves too elusive for them. The two proverbs may be contrasted with the description of the Dagomba woman in the saying cited in section 5.2.9, who becomes helpless in the face of the mildest challenge;

(c) *Dagbam’ paya ŋmanila machesi; saa yi bu o di naaya.*
[Dagomba woman be like matches; rain COND beat her it finish]

A Dagomba woman is like matches; if rain beats it, it goes out (it is finished) (Lange: p.128; 809).

5.4.3.4. A man is unafraid of danger

Other proverbs point out that a man does not run away from danger, but confronts it head on and personally deals with it.

(a) *Doo bɔri ka o nini n nya; dini ngari ‘bɛ yeliya’.*
[Man want PART his eye see; it better than they say]

A man wants his eye to see; that is better than ‘they say’.
(Lange, p.150: 959)

Lange gives an interpretation of this proverb as ‘It is important to examine things for oneself rather than to believe what others say’ but another opinion is that a man should confront difficulties himself rather than depend on others. A man must not be afraid of any fight or trouble, not even the fear of death must stop a man.

(b) *Doo bori kum ka kum nya o nzo nsɔyi.*
[Man look for-IMPF death CONJ death see 3S ran hide]

A **man** looks for death and death sees him and runs away (Lange,

p.150: 960)

Lastly a true man is adaptable to all conditions; he has the ability to enjoy what is good and endure what is bad.

(c) *Doo ηmani la zoo;...*

[Man be like EMPH fly;

...o diri la bin' suma ni bin' galima.

...he eat-IMPFEAPH things wholesome and things unwholesome]

A man is like a fly; he consumes wholesome things and unwholesome things (A. I. Sulemana, Yendi)

In spite of the numerous exhortations to acts of courage and strength, the elders also warn the man against foolhardiness and advise caution.

(d) *Bε payi dooni lɔyɔ ka o zaŋ toli nyayi.*

[They praise man with quiver CONJhe take mortar hang]

They praise the way a man carries his quiver and so he hangs a mortar on his shoulders. *Praise can sometimes make one act above his or her ability.* (Lange, 79.486).

The same elders therefore in their wisdom recommend caution, telling the man;

(e) *Siya n-nyε doo.*

[Caution COPman]

A man is a person who takes precautions (Lange, 358:2391) i.e. being precautionous is the mark of a man.

Finally, probably as a warning against possible recklessness that the proverb (b) above may induce, the elders also remind the man with another proverb;

(f) *Bε zaani la dabiem lana gulinyaanga ka...*

[They stand-IMPFEAPH coward owner back of house and

.. tiriti wuhiri doo gballi.

point show-IMPFE man grave.

They stand at the back of the house of a coward to point to the grave of the man – i.e. the 'brave' man. (anonymous informant, Yendi).

If a man says he is not afraid of death, he may end up in a grave whilst the coward will live to build his own house. This is almost the equivalent of the English saying ‘he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day’.

In all these proverbs there is no doubt about the meaning of *doo*; it refers unambiguously to the male human being. The Dagomba word for ‘human being’ is *ninsala* (Pl *ninsalinima*), which makes no indication of the sex of the referent. Other sex neutral terms are *nira* (person) and *ninvuyu*—used in compounds with modifiers in the structure *ninvuyu* + modifier (person + modifier) e.g. *ninvuyubieyu* (person bad: bad person), *ninvuyusun* (person good: good person). The third person pronoun *o* (he or she) or the indefinite emphatic pronoun *ɲun* (Purvis, 2007) which may be translated variously as, ‘whoever’, ‘the person/one who’, ‘who’, or their equivalents are also sex neutral. These words appear in several proverbs in Lange.

There are 31 proverbs which use *ninsala*(person), 18 use *ninvugu* + modifier(person + modifier), 80 use *nira*(person) and 114 use *ɲun*(whoever, person who, etc.) as in the following examples.

- i) *Ninsala zilinli n-nyɛ dariga ka be doli siyra...*
 [Human being tongue be-EMPH ladder CONJ they follow descend-IMPF...
...ti banɖi din be o puuni.

...PARTknowRELbe-IMPF 3S inside

The tongue of a person is the way through which one enters to get to know what is in the heart of the person. (Lange, p.264: 1746)

- ii) *Ninvuyu bieyu ka banbu.*

[Person bad NEG knowing]

A bad person cannot be recognized. (Lange p. 265: 1752)

- iii) *Nira ku kɔhira tana ka ye binɕera*

[Person NEG sell-IMPF cloth CONJ wear rags]

A person will not sell cloths and then wear rags (Lange 267 p. 1769)

iv) *Dunbiri pɔhim ni che zɛyɛ*

[Who sow-IMPF wind FUT reap whirlwind]

The person who sows wind will reap a whirlwind. (Lange p.305: 2022)

All these proverbs make statements which may be applicable to the generality of persons and not to males or females in specifically. The proverbs that use *doo* are referring to the male person as the image of these qualities.

5.5. Summary

In this chapter I have examined the presentation of males and females in Dagbanli proverbs and popular sayings. I have noted that proverbs express and transmit the world view and core cultural values of its users, and we have in the proverbs cited the views of the Dagomba about males and females, their defining qualities and their roles.

Severally and cumulatively the proverbs build a picture of the woman as deficient, incompetent, frail, unreliable, not trustworthy and treacherous. She is depicted in animal imagery to underscore the need for her to be put under the control of man. The picture is not however a one of monolithic dehumanization of the woman. Through some other proverbs the Dagomba recognize that both the home and man are not complete without the woman as a wife and especially as a mother.

Unlike the woman, the man is presented in more sympathetic or positive terms. Proverbs about men focus on bachelors and lovers thus showing a concern only in the sexual needs of men and bravery.

In the next chapter I examine male female differences in the use of some linguistic items and the gender implications of these differences.

CHAPTER 6

DIFFERENCES IN SUMMONS/RESPONSE AND ADDRESS FORMS

6.0. Introduction

The last chapters have been devoted to the language as it is used about males and females, linguistic structures that label, categorize, describe and assign attributes to males and females and the social meanings these create and maintain. In the next two chapters I look at the language used by males and females and how such language presents them as gendered males and females.

This chapter specifically identifies some linguistic forms, namely summons and response forms and forms of address, and shows how they are used differently by the two sexes and examine the socio-cultural and pragmatic parameters by which these differences may be viewed as linguistic enactments of Dagomba gender ideology and practice.

Like many other peoples, the Dagomba hold strong beliefs about the essential differences between males and females (Olajubu 2002, Kiteku 2006). They see these differences as transcending the anatomy of the body into differences in their mental abilities and psychological state. These differences, they believe, find expression in various forms of behavior including linguistic behavior. Dagombas generally hold the view that women talk too much (see section 7.1.1. below), mostly about trivial things or about themselves and other people.

In addition, it is a widely held view that women have sharp or abrasive tongues. This view is expressed in the saying *payaba mali zilima* (women have tongues). *Zinli* (pl. *zilima*) means ‘tongue’, but it also means ‘abuse’, ‘ridicule’, ‘mockery’ or ‘insinuation’⁴³. It is not uncommon to hear people pick out *payaba zilima* ‘women’s tongues’ for blame in cases of family disputes or when a conflict breaks out between communities, and in the narratives of the history of Dagbon by the drummer historians (*lunsi*) some inter-ethnic wars of the past are attributed to *payaba zilima* (women’s tongues). A popular legend that is often told in these narratives is an episode in the Dagbon drum chronicles or drum history in which Na Luro, a 16th century Dagomba King, was stung by a taunting remark from one of his wives to go to war against the Gonja to avenge the death of his predecessor. The episode as it is narrated by the drum historians, and as told to me by Lun Mahamadu of Tolon, is that Na Luro succeeded Na Dariɛɛyu (c. 1554) after the latter had been killed in a war against the Gonja. One day, Na Luro instructed one of his wives (described as his favorite) to prepare a meal for a special guest. When the meal was taking too long, Luro summoned the wife and rebuked her for delaying the meal. Turning to go back she began grumbling in a way that the King would hear every word, saying words to the effect that the redemption of his honor did not lie in rebuking her; the redemption of his honor lay in going ‘to see the grave’ of his predecessor. The legend has it that Luro was so stung by this remark that he launched an attack against the Gonja that very day.

⁴³IM (page 288) defines *zinli/zilima* as follows: “**zinli**, n. pl. **zilima**, tongue, 2. accent; intonation. 3. insult; abuse. 4. opinion. *labi zinli*: to insult; to talk impudently to. BL (p.209) also defines *zinli/zilima* as follows: “tongue, **yeli zilima**, to abuse; to speak angrily to; abusive words (literally ‘tongues’)’ **zilima yelibu** ‘insulting’.

For men, the general belief they hold about themselves is that they only engage in *yɛtoy' maɲa* [talk-PL real] 'real talk' 'good talk' or 'purposeful talk' i.e. talk that deals with 'substantive' issues like farming or issues relating to the well-being of the family.

Claims about differences in the language of Dagomba men and women, about how women talk more than men, or what they talk about are not supported by any empirical evidence, and are not the interest of this present study. In fact similar claims in many other languages have been found to be mere opinionated generalizations, or have been largely contradicted by empirical studies⁴⁴. Nevertheless there are in Dagbanli some linguistic forms which can empirically be shown to be used differently by males and females.

6.1. The summons

In this chapter I examine the structure and function of the summons and response in Dagbanli and show how gender is embedded in the practice of these simple conversational acts.

Sacks *et al.* (1974) have observed that conversation is structured on a principle of speakers taking turns, and that the basic structural unit in conversation is a string of at least two turns (see Levinson 1983, Coulthard, 1985). Some turns are more closely related than others and occur as sequenced pairs, or what Sacks *et al.* call 'adjacency pairs' (Coulthard 1985:69). The production of a particular type of utterance 'a first pair part' by one speaker requires the production of a related type

⁴⁴see James and Drakich 1993; Deborah Tannen (ed.) 1993, for studies that contradict some of the well known stereotypes of male female speech differences)

of utterance ‘a second pair part’ by a second speaker; thus, a question requires an answer, a complaint an apology or justification, and a summons a response or answer (Levinson 1983, Coulthard 1985, Hudson 2001).

Chaika (1982) considers summons as one of the ritualistic aspects of language, like greetings, and forms of address. It occurs regularly in conversation, and because it also serves as a starter, like greetings and address forms, summons can function as tone setters and controllers of interaction. According to Chaika:

Every interaction has to have a formal beginning. This is an indication that the hearer is supposed to start decoding a linguistic message. ...The summons grabs one's attention. ...A summons is the verbal equivalent of catching someone's eye. No conversation can proceed without one or the other. ...A summons may take many forms: *Uh, Excuse me, Waiter, Joe, Dr. Dreidel*. (Chaika, 1982:51-52).

The last two, as Chaika notes, are address forms and it is such forms when used as summons and the differences in response forms of males and females that I discuss in this section. In the second section, I discuss differences in address forms used between husbands and wives.

6.1.1. Answering summons

In Dagbanli the basic response to a summons or a call is *ẽẽ*, (uttered in a longish nasalized rising tone). It is the response form used between equals, or by an older person to a younger person. When a Dagomba child begins to utter the word *mma* (mother) the response she or he receives is *ẽẽ*, and this is the response young children of both sexes first learn to use when they hear their names called. Though, as I noted earlier, *ẽẽ* is used between equals or by an older person in

response to a younger person, for a child learning to talk, responding *ẽẽ* to the mother or to any other adult is tolerated at this early age. However, from about age six, boys and girls are taught the sex differentiated response forms; *nááp* (or *nááb*)⁴⁵ for boys and *náá* for girls. Mahama (2004) makes a note of the care taken to teach young children these different speech forms;

The rudimentary training programme of a guardian includes how to respond to calls, how to receive things, eat, and how to sit down. A boy is taught to answer *naab* when he is called. A girl is taught to answer *naa*. Both responses mean “yes” (Mahama 2004:147).

Any further infractions are either ridiculed or aremet with a strong statement of disapproval. The internalization of these different forms is facilitated through the process of socialization as both sexes begin to associate more and more with their own sex groups.

Other observations about these different forms are noted in the two Dagbani-English dictionaries, Mahama (2003) henceforth IM, and Blench et al. (2004) henceforth BL.

IM (p.154) defines the words as follows;

***naa*.n.** a response to a call or greeting...e.g. Awa: *naa*: Awa, yes.

***naam*.n.** a response to a call, the equivalent is ‘yes’.

BL (p.118-119) has the following definitions;

***naa*.excl.** response to a call or to most greetings...(Note: the response to a call is usually on a higher tone than to an ordinary greeting)⁴⁶.

naam*.excl.** an answer to a call (also, ‘naap***’).

⁴⁵The male response is spelt *naab* or *naap* by different writers. There is a variant response form, *na’am*, which is an adaptation from Hausa/Arabic, and is used mostly by males with Arabic or Quranic education.

⁴⁶ Unlike the response to a call, the response to a greeting is undifferentiated; it is *naa* for both male and female. There is however a view held by some, as expressed by one of my informants, that women tend to drag their responses, prolonging or doubling the /n/ *tonnaa*. Perhaps this difference is what Blench et al are commenting on when they add the following note in their definition of *naa* “Note: the response to a call is usually on a higher tone than to an ordinary greeting. Women speak more musically than men. (Blench et al. 2004:118).

naap.excl. an answer to a call (also, ‘*naam*’).⁴⁷

Another response form is *oo*, but this appears to be out of current use. IM (p.189) notes that this is ‘a response to a call (by children), but there is a view that *oo* may have been the earlier response form used by the indigenous Dagomba peoples which has been replaced by *nááp*. An informant recollected an old song which used to be sung by women at work that ran thus:

<i>N yuri boo na</i>	My sweetheart calls,
<i>N yuri n booni ma</i>	My sweetheart is calling me;
<i>N lee sayli la oo bee naa?</i>	Do I respond <i>oor naa</i> ?

Chorus: <i>Oo beenaa?</i>	Oo or naa?
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As noted above, every Dagomba child from age six onwards is taught to respond to his or her name using the sex-differentiated response form. As a native speaker I had taken these differences for granted but my interviews with informants of both sexes gave me newer insights.

All my informants, as expected, acknowledged the different male-female responses, but the answers I got from most of them did not go beyond the simple fact that it only reflected the difference between males and females. As one female informant from Savelugu put it, ‘Male is male and female is female, and their response should be different’. In other words, since the two are different people it seems natural that they should have different responses. A teacher in Sagnarigu, near Tamale gave a more evaluative response that reflected some male

⁴⁷ Apart from BL who make a note about the difference in the pitch level of women’s voices, no indication is given in either dictionary that *naap/naa* are sex differentiated responses. In IM’s example *Awa: naa: Awa, yes*, the non-native speaker who is unfamiliar with Dagomba names cannot tell if Awa is a female or male name, and there is no hint that *naa* is the female response form and the other the male form. Both dictionaries however give the variant of *naap* i.e. *naam* or *na’am*.

bias. In his view ‘*nááp* is strong and *náá* is weak’, but he could not tell me exactly what he meant by ‘strong’ or ‘weak’; neither could he determine what made one response form strong and the other weak.

At Tolon in the Tolon-Kumbungu District, I got what appears to be a more insightful contribution from *Luy* (Drummer) Mahamadu, one of my informants⁴⁸. His explanation went beyond a narrow consideration of the verbalization of the response to its fuller realization as comprising both verbal and non-verbal components. As Abercombie (1968, cited in Hudson 2001) notes ‘we speak with our vocal organs but we converse with our entire bodies’; in verbal interaction, non-verbal behavior is as much involved in marking relations between speaker and addressee as verbal behavior (Hudson 2001:137).

During my interaction with *Luy* Mahamadu he reminded me of these facts about conversation when he mentioned the different postures which males and females assume when they respond to summons. ‘When an elder calls’ he explained, ‘you do not just respond and remain sitting where you are; you move quickly to him and squat before him if you are a boy, or kneel if you are a girl’. As he made this point he assumed the different male and female postures, both of which I was familiar with but had failed to take account of. A boy squats with the right knee touching the floor and the left arm resting on the left thigh, whilst a girl goes down on both knees on the floor with the palms on the floor or on her thighs. Note also that in the quote from Mahama (2004 above) he writes that the training given

⁴⁸Dagomba drummers are not only the principal repositories of the oral tradition and practitioners of performative arts but also instructors in etiquette (Salifu 2008).

to a child includes ‘how to respond to calls, how to receive things, eat, and how to sit down.’ The response and posture together index the responder’s inferior age or social status and show deference to the caller. Dagomba etiquette requires younger or socially inferior persons to squat (male) or kneel (female) when they approach or talk to superiors, or in the process of giving something to or receiving something from a superior.

The summons belongs to the class of utterances which Austin (1967) described as speech acts. A speech act, according to Austin, is a ‘statement’ which when issued does not record or describe any fact but constitutes the doing or performance of an act (Austin 1967). Speech acts are mostly recognizable by the presence of a class of explicit performative verbs (I warn, I promise, I declare, I apologize etc), some may contain no verb at all, but as Austin explains,

Any utterance which is in fact performative should be reducible or expandable or analyzable into a form with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active...Thus ‘out’ is equivalent to ‘I declare, pronounce or call you out’, ‘guilty’ is equivalent to I find you, pronounce, deem you to be guilty’. (Austin 1967: 62)

In Dagbanli, *M po Naawuni* (I swear God), *N tiya* (I give - said by the family head during Islamic wedding ceremonies in answer to the officiating cleric’s question ‘A tiya?’ Do you give? i.e. the woman in marriage) contain the explicit performatives ‘*po*’ (swear) and ‘*ti*’ (give), both of which, in their utterance accomplish the acts specified by ‘swearing’ and ‘giving’. However, a summons or call usually constitutes no more than a vocative ‘Nasara’, ‘Alasani’, but may, as indicated by Austin be analyzable as the performative ‘I request, order, demand that you Nasara present yourself before me’.

Austin further distinguishes three components of a speech act – locution, illocution and perlocution. Locution is the act of uttering the sound, word, phrase or sentence which constitutes the speech act, illocution is the intention of the speaker in making the utterance and perlocution is the effect of the utterance on the addressee and hearer. There are two illocutionary forces involved in a summons by an elderly person in Dagbanli. By the summons, the addressee is required or ordered to not merely make a verbal response, but to produce himself or herself before the speaker. Thus a summons requires two things; respond and present your self. Non-presentation of self after a response attracts an impatient angry query like;

‘Nasara maa lee be yani?’

[Nasara DET EMP be where] (Where is this Nasara?).

Presenting oneself before caller without first responding is interpreted as sulking behavior. Luŋ Mahamadu recalled how, when he was a child, his father drilled into them the inseparable routine of responding and presenting oneself,

‘If you just walked up to my father without first answering, he would make you walk back and respond before you come. He will not repeat the call, but you just go back, utter a response and walk back to him. He would then reiterate sternly, ‘Be yi lan bol’ a, nyin sayima.’ (Next time you are called, you must respond).

Thus in Dagbanli a summons from an elderly person being a first pair part of a speech act requires a response, which consists of two actions: a verbal component (uttering a response) and a non-verbal component, presenting oneself before the caller and assuming a specified posture, and both (response + posture) are differentiated by sex. The summons - response + posture may be illustrated thus:

Tampuli is male and Nienpaya is female.

male response to a call**Speaker** (calls): Tampuli**Tampuli** (responds): nááp [*squats on presenting self*]female response to a call**Speaker**: (calls): Nienpaya**Nienpaya**: (responds): náá [*kneels on presenting self*]

Gender enters into the use of the summons in Dagbanli when we consider it in the light of further explications of the speech act theory by Searle (1975). The summons belongs to one of the categories of speech acts described by Searle (1975) as directives. These are statements by which the speaker seeks to get the addressee to act in some specified way and include commands, orders, instructions, requests etc. (Searle 1975, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:188). By the norms of culturally acceptable behavior, a wife cannot give instructions to, order or command her husband (see section 7.2.2.). A man summons his wife and expects her to present herself before him, but a wife cannot summon her husband. This is the way an elderly female informant in Yendi put it:

‘Dagban’ paya ku tooi zini ka boli o yidana’.

[Dagomba womanNEG able sit and call her husband

(A Dagomba woman does not summon her husband)

A wife must avoid explicit directives and employ strategies of indirection (Brown and Levinson, 1978). If she wants to talk to him, she explained further, she walks up to him, kneels down and politely tells him what she has to say⁴⁹. When, for instance, the daily ration of foodstuffs (*moni*) runs out, the wife does not say ‘Give us our ration’ or ‘Give me money to go to the market’; she may say, ‘Mbe X

⁴⁹Where the husband is out of sight, a wife may call out his name and he will respond, but neither of them will expect the husband to proceed to the wife, unless there are peculiar circumstances that make it necessary for him to do so.

ti moni naai ya’ (My elder brother X our ration is finished) or ‘*Mbe X n chani la daa maa*’ (My elder brother X, I am going to the market).

This type of deferential indirection seems to be used by Akan women also during dispute settlements at the chief’s court, as observed by Obeng and Stoeltje (2002). However in the Akan example it is a strategy employed to achieve a particular purpose, but in the above examples from Dagbanli it appears the indirection is a cultural norm imposed on the female sex.

Gender differentiation further affects the ‘response + posture’ moves as the individual progresses from youth into adulthood. As a man advances in age the number of people he will answer *nááp* to becomes smaller and smaller. He also abandons the kneeling posture. An adult man does not squat even before a chief, but sits on the floor. For the female however there is no age limit to her use of *náá*; she responds *náá* when her husband calls, but receives *ẽẽ* from him. To her husband’s relations including those of her own ageshe must also respond with *náá*.

Whilst an adult male may sit before a chief or an elder, a woman, no matter her age, must kneel when she presents herself before men⁵⁰. The most revealing performance of the differentiated gender postures at any speech event is the moment when a group consisting of men and women arrive before a chief or an elder. The men assume sitting positions whilst all the women huddle to one side

⁵⁰Handshaking (adopted from the Islamic religion), distinguishes the greeting practices of men and women (see Wilson (1972), Naden 1986). Men frequently shake hands with each other when they greet, but not with women. Women do not shake hands at all, not even with each other. For men, refusing an offer of a handshake during greetings is a show of hostility or disrespect.

and go down on their knees bending forward with their hands on the floor, and remaining so throughout the greetings and any subsequent proceedings. The fact that the response and posture of women remain unaffected by age seems to reflect the Dagomba gender ideology about the status of a woman. To the Dagomba, a woman remains a ‘child’ throughout her life. This belief underlies many Dagomba practices and is constantly reiterated in many various ways in the language (see Chapter 5).

Dagbanli response forms may be represented as follows.

1. reciprocal responses: $\frac{\text{same age group or equal status}}{\tilde{\tilde{e}}\tilde{\tilde{e}}} \Leftrightarrow \tilde{\tilde{e}}\tilde{\tilde{e}}$
2. non-reciprocal responses:
 - i) $\frac{\text{older person}}{\tilde{\tilde{e}}\tilde{\tilde{e}}} \neq \frac{\text{younger person/ social inferior}}{\text{nááp/náá}}$
 - ii) $\frac{\text{husband}}{\tilde{\tilde{e}}\tilde{\tilde{e}}} \neq \frac{\text{wife}}{\text{náá}}$

Reciprocal response forms are used between persons within the same age group or persons who consider themselves to be social equals. The reciprocity of response forms is represented by the symbol: \Leftrightarrow . Between an older person and younger person the response forms are non-reciprocal, represented by the symbol: \neq . Note that whilst a husband uses the same form as an older person a wife must use the form of a younger person or a social inferior.

I now turn to a closely related speech form that looks much like the summons in form and which in Dagbanli is also marked in some instances by differentiated performances by males and females, more precisely by husbands and wives. This is address forms.

6.2. Forms of Address

A primary function of language, especially talk in conversation is the ‘management of social relations’ (Rühlemann 2007:181), that is, establishing and promoting of relations between self and others (Halliday 1973, Goffman 1981, Brown and Yule 1983). Speakers have choices of different linguistic structures for achieving these goals in interaction, and forms of address have been identified as one of the typical linguistic phenomena in which social categories like status and gender, social relations like power and solidarity as well as attitudes such as politeness and deference are most manifest. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), probably all languages encode deference in generalized forms of address. These forms are of interest to sociolinguists because they can conspicuously manifest the relationship between language and social relations (Brown and Levinson 1978; Hudson 2001; Wardhaugh 1992). Chaika (1982) notes that the tone or style of a conversation is heavily marked at the outset by introductory acts like summons, greetings, and form of address. These forms have a social deictic function or are what Chaika calls ‘social selectors’ and powerful controllers of interaction (Chaika 1982:46). They also signal politeness and relationships of power or solidarity.

Social deixis concerns linguistic features by which speakers encode aspects of social distinctions and relationships that hold between them and the addressee (Levinson 1983, Ruhlemann 2007). These may include linguistic items that reflect social characteristics of the speaker, of the addressee or of the relation between them such as honorifics, titles, personal pronouns and terms of endearment (Hudson 2001: 120).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness is a linguistic strategy that involves paying attention to the ‘face wants’ (Goffman 1955) of the addressee or the ‘public self image’ that all rational adult members have or claim for themselves when engaged in spoken interaction (Goffman 1955:213). ‘Face’ consists of two related aspects, positive face, the want that one’s self image be appreciated and approved; and negative face, the claim of every ‘competent adult member’ to personal preserves, non-distraction and freedom from imposition. Face can be lost, maintained or enhanced by various acts or omissions of other participants in interaction, so as we communicate with others we consciously or unconsciously attend to their face needs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). We endeavour to soften utterances or acts that will threaten the face needs of the other by using a variety of politeness strategies that support their self image (Goffman 1955, 1967; Holmes 1995).

Another type of social relations encoded in forms of address is relations of ‘power’ and ‘solidarity’ (Brown and Gilman 1960). ‘Power’ reflects relative superior status, social distance, unfamiliarity, and deference, and ‘solidarity’

reflect closeness, familiarity, common experiences and shared intimacies. Shared relationship of solidarity or differences in power relationships are reflected in reciprocal or non-reciprocal use in some languages of personal pronouns in address (Brown and Levinson 1960, Chaika 1982, Trudgill 1983).

6.2.1. Address forms within the kin group

The linguistic choices available for a speaker of Dagbanli to address another are determined by three social variables: kin relationship, age and sex. These variables set up hierarchies between interactants. Older persons have a higher status than younger persons, males generally are accorded a higher social status than females, and persons in certain kin positions enjoy some rights and privileges over persons in some other kin positions. These hierarchical social positions are expressed and reinforced through different socio-cultural institutions, practices and linguistic behavior, the most obvious of which is the terms used in addressing others.

Dagombas generally address or refer to one another by their given or personal names⁵¹. Age differences and kinship relations between speakers however circumscribe the modes of address a speaker may use. Persons of the same age or age group address each other by name alone. An older person also addresses a younger person by name alone, but a younger person must not address or refer to an older person by name 'without qualification' (Dakubu 2000). For persons who are kin relations, the younger person uses an appropriate kin term either alone or

⁵¹ See Dakubu (2000) for a linguistic description of Dagomba personal names. Nicknames are a common feature of Dagomba naming practices, and sometimes individuals are better known by their nicknames than by their proper names.

with the name of addressee or referent. Modes of address, as Dakubu observes, are ‘keyed to the social hierarchy, which is viewed as an extension of the kinship hierarchy’ (Dakubu 2000:63), hence in Dagbanli even older persons who are not kin relations must be addressed with a kin term.

Titles are also an obligatory element in Dagomba address practices. The possession of a title confers on the holder some prestige. They are therefore valued social status markers and identity labels and are used either alone or together with a kin term to address those who possess them. Besides traditional titles, titles from the Islamic religion, like *Afa*, *Mallam*, *Alhaji/Hajia* and English titles like *Misa* (Mr.) are used. ‘Titles’ may also include professional and occupational descriptions like ‘teacher’, ‘lawyer’, as well as positions like ‘Chairman’, ‘Assemblyman’ etc.⁵²

6.2.2. Address between husband and wife

The general norms of addressing are the same for males and females. Both must address older persons (whether relations or non-relations, male or female) using the appropriate kin terms or titles. As in the use of summons and responses, differences occur also in address in the context of husband-wife relations. A wife does not address her husband by name alone; she must qualify the name with a kin term or a title if he has one, e.g. *Mbe Amadu* (my elder brother Amadu)⁵³. It is

⁵² For a discussion of the key elements (titles, names and kin terms) in Dagbanli address forms see Salifu Alhassan. (2010) ‘Signaling Politeness, Power and Solidarity through Terms of Address in Dagbanli’. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 19 (4): 274-292.

⁵³ In Dagbanli the possessive pronoun is used with kin terms in both address and reference forms e.g. (i) *mbe Adam* as reference: *A nyem be’ Adam?* (Have you seen my elder brother Adam?) (ii) *mbe Adam* as address: *M be’ Adam ya ka a chena?* (My elder brother Adam, where are you

extremely rare for a Dagomba wife to address her husband by name alone, but the choice of kin term is variable. The commonest term is ‘elder brother’, as in the above example, but where the age difference is large and a wife may be as young as some of her husband’s senior children, the wife may use ‘father’ as his own children do.

I asked informants who were married to indicate how they addressed their husbands or wives. The purpose was not to find out what was already obvious, but to get an idea of the variety of terms used by wives or if there are other strategies used by women to show deference when addressing their husbands.

From the 96 persons interviewed for this study (i.e. excluding the key informants), 85 made up of 36 husbands and their wives (49) indicated how they addressed their partners. Eleven of the men had two wives each, one man had three wives and the rest had one wife each, so the break down of the numbers was 36 husbands and 49 wives. Eleven of the respondents were unmarried, and so for them the question was not applicable.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they address their husbands/wives when they talk to them, or how they refer to them when they talk with another person. The responses given by all 85 interviewees conformed to the norms of address between husband and wife.

going?) The two are usually distinguished by tone levels. The address form will have a high tone *m bá* and the form for reference a low tone *m bà*

husbands	wives
24 (with 1 wife each)	24
11 (with 2 wives each)	22
1 (with 3 wives)	3
36	49

On the other hand, none of the 49 wives addresses or refers to her husband by name only. They use a number of options to avoid the name alone address; these include.

- i) Kin term + Name (Kt + N) - *Mba* + *Amadu*: Mba Amadu (my father Amadu)
- *Mbe* + *Sule*: Mbe Sule (my elder brother Sule)
- ii) Title + Name (T + N) - *Afa* + *Issa*: Afa Issa

-*Mr + Yahaya*: Mr. Yahaya

iii) Title without Name (T + Ø) - Alhaji

- Chief

The frequency of use of a particular term of address may vary depending on variables like location and level of education of respondents. In a typically rural community where the level of education is low, one may hardly hear such terms as Mr, Chief, Master⁵⁴. These will be used more by wives in the towns to their educated husbands, while wives in the rural areas will more frequently use kin terms and traditional titles to address their husbands.

Table 2. Address forms used
by wives to their husbands

Address form	Number of wives
Kt + N	15
T + N:	
i. <i>Mr + N</i>	9
ii. <i>Afa + N</i>	7
T + Ø:	
i. <i>Alhaji</i>	4
ii. <i>Chief</i>	1
iii. <i>Master</i>	2
iv. <i>Teacher</i>	2
v. <i>Assemblyman</i>	1
vi. <i>Chairman</i>	1
vii. <i>other titles*</i>	7
	49

*These were traditional titles like: Wulana, Saha naa, etc.

The husbands indicated that they use the same form (name only) whether in face-to-face interaction with their wives or in conversation with others, but the wives indicated that in conversation with other women they sometimes refer to their

⁵⁴‘Master’ here refers to school master. When teachers rise to the position of Head teacher or headmaster, they become simply ‘Master’ to everyone including their wives.

husbands in slightly non-formalized ways. A woman may refer to her husband as ‘father of X’, using the name of one of her children, usually the first born or the last born, e.g. *Balchisu ba* [Balchisu father] ‘Balchisu’s father’. Some may use euphemistic terms, like this woman from Yendi who had this to say while laughing;

N yi yen boli n yidana, n yeri mi mbe Issa, amaa m mini n paya taba yi zia ni to bolo n duulana,”

‘When I am going to call my husband, I say “*mbe Issa*”, but when I am with my women friends I can call him “*n duu lana*”.

Mbe Issa means ‘my elder brother Issa’, and ‘*N duu lana*’ is ‘my room owner’, the owner of my room.

The non-reciprocal address forms between husband and wife are also informed by the view of the husband-wife relation as an unequal relationship: a superior-inferior, super ordinate-subordinate relationship. There are several dimensions and conceptions of this relationship; the foremost being that the husband is the senior and the social superior. Another female informant from Yendi put it thus,

Paya ŋun kuli mi la o yidan’ n nye kpema ni ŋuna, di zuɣu o booni o la o beli. Dagbamba yerimi ni paya bi kpem doo.

A woman truly knows that her husband is senior to her, so she calls him her senior brother. The Dagomba say that a woman is not older than a man.

That a woman is ‘not older’ than (or senior to) a man is a principle that governs most male-female relations among the Dagomba and a fundamental law in Dagomba marriage. It is an ideology that is reflected and reinforced in many practices, including the address forms used by husband and wife. It is a principle

that recurs in different linguistic forms (see Chapters 4 and 5). R.M. Yahaya, an educationist and social worker, had this to say on the husband-wife address forms:

‘Men call their wives by their name. Women call their husbands by adding “mbeli” e.g. Mbeli Adam – my senior brother Adam. Even when a woman is older than the man she still considers him as a senior brother. This is a degree of politeness. Sometimes they can say Afa Adam. When the man has the same name as the woman’s father some women call the husband father...my wife calls me Mr.Yahaya, sometimes Daddy’.

He explained that his own children address him as ‘Daddy’, and that during family conversations at home, his wife also uses it. At those private moments especially in conversation with the children he may in turn address or refer to his wife as ‘Mama’, the term used by the children. The use of ‘Daddy’, or ‘Dada’ and ‘Mama’ is common among Dagombas with Western education.

Mbaya (2002) and Akinbiyi (2010) describe similar husband-wife relationships and address forms used by wives among the Oromo of Ethiopia and Yoruba of Nigeria respectively. Among the Oromo a woman avoids mentioning the name of a husband and may refer to him as ‘father of x’ using the name of a male child (Mbaya 2002:228), and according to Akinbiyi, Yoruba women are expected, by socialization to defer to their husbands who are considered their social superiors. Yoruba wives, he notes, are linguistically subordinate in their relationships with Yoruba husbands. ‘It is considered unethical for a Yoruba woman to address her husband by his first name, especially in the presence of visitors, strangers, or in-laws. Therefore, she selects between a teknonym (a compound of “baba” (father) and a name of the man’s child, e.g. “Baba Wale”)’ and a pet-name (e.g.

‘Olowoorimi’ (one who has paid for my head or one who owns me) Akinbiyi (2010:12).

Duranti and Goodwin (1992) have observed that certain linguistic features index or point to more than one dimension of the socio-cultural context; ‘indexing of certain dimensions is linked in a constitutive sense to the indexing of other dimensions’ (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992:335). Kin relationships set up different types of rights, obligations and privileges for kinsfolk. Each relationship term evokes certain feelings, expectations, rights and duties, hopes and fears associated with the particular relationship; the reiteration of kin relations through Kt address forms reminds speaker and addressee of the ties and obligations that hold between them as kin, and strengthens those relations (Lydall 1999). Kt’s index solidarity between kinsfolk and cement expectations of mutual obligations, duties and rights (Schusky 1974); at the same time they signify the power of the superior kin and establishes a degree of social distance. As Oppong (1973) observes, not even sibling relations make a younger sibling equal to an older sibling and the former must use the kin term *mbeli* when addressing an older sibling and concede precedence to him or her. Therefore through the obligatory use of a superior kin term *beli* (elder brother), *ba* (father) a wife acknowledges the social distance that exists between her and her husband and concedes precedence to him.

As R.M.Yahaya, and some other respondents put it, a wife uses a Kt to address her husband to show respect *jilima* (respect/honor Blench et al.2004), while others explained it using the metaphor *kabgi voyu pa* [cut leaf on], i.e. to place a

leaf on someone, meaning to show deference to someone. The pragmatics of the use of a Kt by the wife is to attend to his positive face (Goffman 1967, Levinson 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987). Hudson (2001:114) also calls this the ‘power face’. Thus in using a kin term a wife acknowledges the husband’s superior social status, his power and his right to the privileges of a social superior. Conversely, when a husband uses name only to address his wife he is asserting his superior status and making a claim to power over her.

The concept of ‘face’ appears to be a major factor in interaction between males and females and comes into play in many of the practices that characterize male-female interaction in Dagbanli. The use of kin terms and indirection in addressing husbands and the avoidance of confrontational speech or directives to husbands (Section 7.2.2: Discussion 4) all seem to be purposely suited to preserving the face of husbands. A woman must not be seen even in speech to be imposing her will on the husband.

6.2.3. Addressing others outside the kin group

I have noted earlier that the use of Kt’s in address extends beyond and outside the kin group. A speaker is expected to address every person older than him or herself with a Kt even if the person addressed is no relation and is a total stranger, but the choice of Kt depends on the speaker’s assessment of addressee’s age and status. Whether a speaker will address a total stranger or someone not related to him or her as *m beli*, (my elder brother/sister), *m ba* (my father), *m ma* (my mother), *n*

yaba (my grandfather), *m paya* (my grandmother)⁵⁵, etc. depends on whether the speaker assesses the addressee to be the same or about the same age as his or her own brother/sister, father, mother etc.

For adult speakers a second factor that influences the choice of a Kt to address an unfamiliar person is the sex of the speaker. The observed practices of adult speakers seem to be that adult males tend to address adult male strangers as father's kin and adult females address adult female strangers as mother's kin. Thus an adult male will most likely address another adult male as *m bapira* (my **father's** younger brother) and an adult female as *m pirba* (my **father's** sister), whilst an adult female will tend to address an adult male stranger as *n yahiba* (my **mother's** older or younger brother) and a female as *m mapira* (my **mother's** younger sister) or simply *m ma* (my mother) if the addressee is very much older. In sum the practice is as follows:

Male speakers: - paternal Kt's: *bapira* (father's younger brother)
pirba (father's sister)

Female speakers: - maternal Kt's : *yahiba* (mother's brother) *mapira* or *ma*
 (mother's younger sister or mother)

These choices are not normative practices, but preferences or observed tendencies which appear to be influenced by the sex of speaker. None of my informants could offer any explanation for this practice beyond the usual refrain 'that is how it is.' However, it appears the practice may have been borrowed from the formal address practices of the royals of Dagbon.

⁵⁵ The full terms for 'grandfather' and 'grandmother' are *yab' doo* and *yab' paya* respectively, but in common usage *yaba* is used for grandfather and *paya* for grandmother.

The Ya Na and all other chiefs are addressed as *Naa* (Chief) by the princes and princesses, and the Ya-Na, by custom, addresses all chiefs and princes of the royal gates as *m bapira*⁵⁶ (father's younger brother) and the princesses as *m pirba*, (father's sister) irrespective of their age. Other chiefs and princes of the royal families also use 'father's brother' (*bapira*) to address each other and 'father's sister' (*piriba*) for the princesses. The princesses in turn also use 'father's sister' and 'father's brother' respectively to address each other and the princes. The princesses' use of (*bapira*) to address adult male royals is thus in contrast with the generally preferred use of *nahiba* by other women to address men in general.

We notice that only Kt's relating to 'father' are used in these address terms of the royals for one another. This obviously may be due to the fact that Dagbon is a patrilineal society and claims to chiefship by royals are usually based on male descent (see Staniland 1975:14). One's claim to royalty is thus through the father, so when a royal (like the Ya Na himself) addresses another royal as father's kin, the act does not only acknowledge their common descent but recognizes the other's claim too to royalty.

This practice by royals seems to have been borrowed into popular use and transformed into its present common form. As this practice is non-normative, failure to observe it does not attract any sanctions or disapproval. What is not acceptable is to address an older person without an appropriate Kt.

⁵⁶There are a few exceptions. There is a small number of chiefs whom, for some historical reasons, the Ya-Na addresses as *nyaba* (my grandfather), one as *ba kpema* (senior father) and one as *beli* (elder brother).

6.2.4. Other sex-based preferred address forms

We have shown that Kt's are used to address adult persons whether they are kinsfolk or not and whether they are familiar or unfamiliar. Younger persons are addressed by name only, but where the addressee is unfamiliar to a speaker several options, as shown in Table 3 below are available. These are the commonly used address terms identified by informants across the four districts; however, individuals may have their own peculiar ways of addressing one another. Adult speakers (male and female) may use the pronoun *nyini* (you) as a vocative to address a child or a very young person, e.g. *Nyini, kamna* (You, come). The use of *nyini*, as in this example even to a child sounds domineering, so the other alternatives may be used. The term *paysarbila* (young woman) is used by both adult male and female speakers.

Table 3. Address forms used by adults to unfamiliar younger persons

female preferred forms	male preferred forms
<i>nyini</i> (you)	<i>nyini</i> (you)
<i>paysarbila</i> (young woman)	<i>paysarbila</i> (young woman)
<i>nachimbila</i> (young man)	-
<i>n nyintaa</i> (my rival i.e. co-wife)	-
<i>n zo</i> (my friend)	<i>zɔri</i> (friend)
<i>m bia</i> (my child – son/daughter)	<i>n dapala</i> (my child – son/daughter)

The next two address forms *nachimbila* (young man) and *n nyintaa* (my rival i.e. co-wife) are favored by females. My male informants did not mention *nachimbila* (young man) as a form they would use to address a boy, and all those I suggested it to, rejected it indicating instead that *zɔri* (friend) is what they would rather say.

I could not get satisfactory answers as to why *paysarbila* (young woman) may be used by both male and female speakers to address a girl, but *nachimbila* (young man) is used by only women and hardly by men to address boys. One may however speculate on the basis of some observations made by Holmes (1993, 1998) and Tannen (1994) on women's and men's attitudes towards the act of complimenting.

Both terms *paysarbila* (young woman) and *nachimbila* (young man) have a positive semantic content [+youthfulness, +attractiveness], and their various derivations may be used to compliment or flatter adult males and females. Holmes (1993) suggests that just as one can find several cross-cultural stereotypes and myths about women's talk, so also can one formulate a number of verifiable sociolinguistic universals about men's and women's talk. She suggests that one of these universals is that women tend to focus on the affective function of an interaction more often than men do, and she goes on to propose that women compliment and receive compliments more than men (see also Holmes 1998, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003).

One may thus speculate that the differentiated uses of *paysarbila* and *nachimbila* may be a reflection of the suggestion that women readily compliment others and in turn receive compliments regularly. When a woman uses *paysarbila* or *nachimbila* she compliments the young woman or young man and also achieves the affective effect. The male use of *paysarbila* to address a young girl also seems to follow the tendency for males to readily compliment females especially on their

physical appearance. As a male may hardly compliment another male on his appearance, males hardly use *nachimbila* to address young boys.

Another term which may be used by older women to address younger girls is the phrase *n nyintaa* (my rival, my co-wife).⁵⁷ Co-wives do not address each other with the term *nyintaa* (*nyintahi* PL), but in conversation with others they may use it to refer to the other wife. A junior wife addresses a senior co-wife as *m be zayla* (my elder sister so-and-so), or even *m mazayla* (my mother so-and-so) because a junior wife may be younger than some children of her senior co-wife⁵⁸, so when older women use *nyintaa* to address young girls they do so in a jovial mood as an elderly woman at Gbirimani in the Tolon District explained;

‘You can call a young girl *nyintaa* because any unmarried young woman who is not your relation or your husband’s relation is a potential co-wife, because a Dagomba man can marry many wives.’

The last set of address terms which are used differently by males and females are the two pairs: *n zo/zɔri* and *m bia/n dapala*. I shall discuss first *n zo/zɔri*. The word *zo* (or *zɔ* in IM) means ‘friend’ and *zɔri* (or *zori* in BL) is ‘friendship’ as cited below. Different spellings are used in the two dictionaries, but I use *zo* and *zɔri*, as I pronounce them.

IM: *zɔ*: n. friend. *zɔri*: n. friendship. 2. a polite way of addressing a person; esquire. 3. a polite address by an older **boy or man** (*Emphasis*) (2003:289)

BL: *zo*: n. friend.

⁵⁷ *Thehunyi* (drummers) also use the term *nyintaa* (co-wife) to address the wife of a royal, because the drummers are regarded symbolically as ‘wives’ of royals, who they shout praises at and from whom they receive tips and other favors.

⁵⁸ In the traditional Dagomba household co-wives live together with their husband in the same compound, and a junior wife usually lives together with a senior wife in the latter’s room until after the junior wife’s second or third birth when she is provided her own room.

zori: n. 1. friendship 2. my friend (a polite form of address) 3. *layi zori*, to make friends with. Jovial form of address to someone who *isn't* your friend. (2004:210-211)

Both IM and BL identify the use of *zori* as a polite term of address, but whereas IM makes the point that *zori* is 'a polite address by an older boy or man', BL only indicates that it is a jovial form used to address 'someone who *isn't* your friend'.

My own observation has been that there is a difference in the use of the two words by men and women. Men tend to use *zori* (friend) to address a younger male; women do not use it as a term of address, but they do use it in its ordinary sense 'friendship' or 'to make friends' *layi zori*. Women prefer using the noun *zo* in the form *n zo* (my friend) to address a young girl who is not familiar. The practice then is that men use *zori* to address young males; women use *n zo* to address young females. This difference was confirmed both in my interaction with informants and in a dialogue between two young women in a locally produced Dagbanli film.⁵⁹ In the short dialogue between the two friends one of them uses *n zo* three times in three successive utterances while pulling a fast one on her friend. An old man, probably in his sixties, who decides to abandon his wife and go courting a younger woman, meets this woman and her friend in a street. He struts in front of them for a while, hands out a wad of cedi notes to her and turns to walk away. While the two friends are still enjoying the spectacle of the old lover as he swaggers off, the second lady grabs the money from her friend saying '*N zo che ka n kali ti a*' (my friend let me count for you). She quickly tucks a note under her blouse and begins to count, but noticing her friend was turning to look she points

⁵⁹*Yolliem*: A Dagbani film Directed by A. Labzoro, Dahinsheli Productions (2011)

to the man again and says, '*N zo kuli nyem' o n' mi chendi shem*' (my friend, just see how he knows how to walk). Her friend looks up again and she tucks another note under her blouse. After a moment she hands over the money to her friend saying '*N zo dee' bahi kali, man' ni kuli*' (my friend take it and finish the counting, I will go home).

Although BL has added that *zori* may be used jovially to address 'someone who isn't your friend', there is always a risk in its use because it may index either genuine camaraderie or social distance and hostility between speaker and addressee depending on the context and the participants' perception of each other. In fact, friends or people who know each other very well do not address each other as *zori* in normal interaction except in very light moments. There is a proverb that says: *zi nira zaŋ boli zori* 'If you don't know a person you call him 'friend' (Lange 2004:449 (3015). It is only when you do not know a person's name that you address him 'friend'. The deeper meaning is that when you do not know a person very well you keep some social distance between him and you. When a speaker wishes to assume a hostile stance towards the addressee he uses *zori*, e.g. *Zori, fomi a noli* (Friend, silence your mouth: i.e. keep quiet).

It has been argued that women's speech, especially in same-sex interaction, shows more use of positive politeness and affiliative features than men's speech (see Fishman (1980), Goodwin (1980), Maltz and Borker (1982) Tannen (1994) Holmes, (1995), Coates (1996).

The inherent ambivalence in *zori* therefore appears to make women avoid it, preferring instead the variant *n zo* which evokes a feeling of closeness and intimacy, or ‘solidarity’ (Brown and Levinson 1987; Hudson 2001). The structure of *n zo* is also similar to other kin terms used for address, e. g. *n yaba*, (my grand father) *m ma* (my mother) and suggests more intimacy similar to those evoked by the use of kin terms in address.

Women may sometimes use the term *n daabuya*, (my friend) for a female friend. The term is a calque of the Hausa *abuyanaa* [friend my], *abuya* being the word a Hausa woman would use for another woman who is a friend. Dagomba men, on the other hand, do not use the Hausa male form *abokyi* (friend).

6.2.4.1. Referring to one’s child

The last pair of terms is *bia/ dapala*. Both mean ‘child’, (son or daughter)⁶⁰ and both may be used by older persons to address unfamiliar younger persons, but like other terms in this list there is a sex-based difference in their use, both as address terms or as terms to refer to one’s offspring. Both men and women may use *bia* to refer to a child of their own (whether young or grown) but *dapala* seems to be used to refer exclusively to a man’s son or daughter. We see this in the example given by IM of the use of *dapala*;

dapala: son or daughter of a man. *Do ηuni dapala, paya ηuni bia*: the son (or daughter) to which man and woman.” IM (2003:56)

The use of *do + dapala* and *paya + bia* in IM’s example *do ηuni dapala, paya ηuni bia* (which man’s child/son/daughter, which woman’s child/son/daughter)

⁶⁰*Bia* may also mean junior in age or rank, or someone who is not an adult.

points to the distinction in the use of *dapala* and *bia*. A similar coupling of *doo* and *dapala* is in Sugre's (1969) book of short stories for children;

*Doo n daa mali o **dapala**, m mali azitsi pam, ka daadam nim mi o daazitsi maa yela. Doo maa mi **dapala** maa zuyu ka o daa nya azitsi maa.* (Sugre 1969:27)

Once there was a man who had a son (*dapala*), and he had a lot of wealth, and everyone knew about his wealth. It was because of the man's son (*dapala*) that he got the wealth.

An informant in Tamale was blunt in his explanation of the difference between the two; *Doo ko n ni tooi boli o bia o dapala; paya nun booni o bia la o bia*. (It is only the man who can call his child his *dapala*; a woman calls her child her *bia*).

The male/female difference in the reference to child/son/daughter is as follows:

Man: *m bia, n dapala* (my child/son/daughter)

Woman: *m bia* Ø (my child/son/daughter)

Thus the word *dapala* means child, son or daughter, but is it used only by men or of men's relation to their offspring. A woman in Yendi suggested that *dapala* does not connote real delivery (birth), but *bia* does and so that is why it is used by women. This suggestion appears insightful especially when one considers that *bia* (never *dapala*) is what is used for the offspring of all female creatures, examples *noo ni o bia*, (a hen and her child), *peyu ni o bia*, (an ewe and her child), *nahu ni o bia* (a cow and her child) etc., but never **noo ni o dapala*, **peyu ni o dapala*, **nahu ni o dapala*, etc. In this sense *bia* regularly collocates with 'mother'.

While this appears as a possible explanation for the use of *biaby* women, I could find no suggestion for the use of *dapala* by men. It appears as a word that has its

own independent meaning because my suggestion to some informants that *da-* in *dapala* might be the nominal stem from *doo* ‘male’ was rejected.

6. 3. Summary

I have identified summons-response moves and terms of address as linguistic forms that are used differently by males and females. Differences in summons-response reflect the Dagomba view of males and females as different. Sex, age, and status are the social determiners that impose the differences in the use of these linguistic forms as the appropriate conduct in verbal and non-verbal interaction. Younger people respond differently when summoned by older people, and their responses are in turn differentiated by sex. The different verbal responses of young males and females are marked by different accompanying postures which change for boys as they grow into adulthood but remain the same for girls even into their adulthood. That men may progress out of the inferior response forms whilst women continue to use it into adulthood also reflects a Dagomba view of woman as a ‘child’ at all ages - a notion that we shall see in various forms in subsequent practices in this study. Summons-response forms and address forms between husband and wife are non-reciprocal. The rules governing these forms are also defined by the Dagomba view of the social superiority of the husband⁶¹.

Differences also occur in the address forms used by males and females when they address younger and unfamiliar persons. These differences are however largely preferred differences as, unlike the differences identified earlier these do not

⁶¹Personal communication with Mr Baba Wuni shows that the summons-response and address forms between husband and wife as described here is the same among the Mamprusi.

attract any social sanction in their infringement. Where their use does not conform to the known preferred practices they may be viewed as curious or ironic.

In the next chapter I examine the manifestation of gender as men and women engage in normal conversation on a number of issues.

CHAPTER 7

CONSTRUCTING AND REPRODUCING GENDER IN CONVERSATION

7. 0. Introduction

In this chapter I analyze different samples of casual conversation recorded as the participants went about their normal everyday activities. In these interactions participants engage in talk that reveals various aspects of some of the gender issues that we have discussed in the preceding chapters.

In proposing that gender is performed and not a fixed category, Judith Butler (1990) argues that gender is ‘a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a natural sort of being’ (Butler 1990: 33). In this view gender is seen as constantly enacted by the repeated performance of particular acts of both a linguistic and non-linguistic kind in accordance with the prevailing cultural norms which define ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Though policed by tight social norms, the performance of gender also allows a role for human agency and the individual can and does engage in ‘acts of transgression, subversion and resistance of the norms that govern gender’ (O’Loughlin 2001:37).

Cameron (1996; 1997) has also observed that the performance model allows the language and gender researcher to move away from merely cataloging male and female differences to a more subtle enquiry into how people use their linguistic resources to produce gender differentiation. It gives new prominence to the role of the individual in the construction of gender. That is, the construction of gender is

no longer seen from a purely deterministic perspective; instead it is interpreted as something which can be resisted or contested.

In the conversations presented here we see individuals in active casual non-interview situations ‘performing’ gender by either constructing themselves or others in some of the stereotypical images discussed in the preceding chapters, or trying to resist the gender roles assigned to them by society. In some of these interactions, like the casual encounter in the taxi cab, I was an active participant in the exchanges, but in the others, even though I was present I did not actively contribute to the conversation, whilst in others like the radio interview, I was only an ‘observer’ or more precisely a listener. Unlike the interview sessions, none of the speakers in these situations were aware that I had other interests in the conversation besides sharing talk. These conversations were thus unplanned and unrehearsed.

7.1. Affirming stereotypes in conversation.

In the first two situations two men and a woman engage in conversations in which they reproduce some of the gender stereotypes of the two sexes.

7.1.1. Woman as ‘talkative’

Situation 5.

Setting: In a taxi

Participants: Three female passengers, self as fourth passenger, taxi driver.

Event: Casual conversation in taxi cab.

Earlier in the day of this encounter, I had left my car at a mechanic’s workshop in one of the suburbs of Tamale for a problem to be fixed, and in the late afternoon I

had to take a taxi from the central business district to pick it up. When I arrived at the taxi rank the cab at the head of the queue had just filled up and there were already three passengers, all women, in the next one. I was directed to join them and as I entered the car the driver also came in ready to move. It was at that moment that we noticed that the first cab was still stationary and blocking our way. Holding on to the open door with one foot in the car, the driver was talking agitatedly at someone and taking a bit of time getting into his car. Obviously irritated by the delay caused by his colleague our driver shot back at him.

Driver: *Nyema, chem ha ka man' yina. A ŋmani paya pam.*

(Look, move on and let me come out. You are like a woman too much).

This got the other driver into his car and soon we were all moving out of the station. At that moment it did not appear as if any of the other passengers in the car had heard the driver's remark to his colleague, but I was curious; so after a few seconds of silence I asked the driver why he said his colleague was like a woman. The following is my (SNA) question and his (Driver) answer.

SNA: *Wula ka o ŋmani paya?*

How is he like a woman?

Driver: *A be nye o n' yeri shem?*

Can't you see how he is talking?

Still there was not a word from the other passengers. By this time we had moved out of the station and after about a fifty meters' drive we pulled up at a red traffic light, coming to a stop right beside the first taxi on the other lane. Looking out of the window one of the women noticed that the driver was still talking in the same

manner as before. This time she made a comment which led to another short interaction between her (Woman) and me (SNA).

Woman: *Ooi, be shiri ni yeli ni o ŋmani paya. O na kuli yeri mi.*
 Ooi, they will indeed say he is like a woman. He is still talking.

SNA: *Ka, o ni yeli shem maa yelimaŋli nnyeli?*
 But, what he has said, is it true?

Woman: *Ei, ka ma ti payaba...yi kuli zaŋ sheli ti tí, tí deerimi.*
 Ei, as for us women...whatever you give us (say about us) we accept it.

I did not comment further and none of the other persons in the car, not even the other two women, said anything after this.

Discussion 1.

The driver's initial comment did not say exactly what made his colleague look like a woman. But among the Dagomba whatever a man does that makes other men liken him to a woman, must be conduct seen as not fit for a man and hence conduct that is disapproved of. As we have seen, particularly in the last two chapters, Dagomba culture emphasizes differences between males and females and assigns many negative attributes to the female. A man must not show any sign of the attributes or behaviors assigned to women. If he does he is likened to or called a woman, which is a strong expression of disapproval of his conduct and a threat to his face. By likening his colleague to a woman the taxi driver was therefore expressing disapproval of whatever behavior the first driver was putting up. The first driver did not protest at this comparison but immediately got into his car and got out of the way. He must have been aware that to protest would have

been used as more evidence against him as ‘talking too much, like a woman’. To avoid this further threat to his face he drove away, and as it turned out minutes later he was still talking even as he drove out of the taxi rank.

For a casual observer like me who had just walked into the station and had not seen what had gone on earlier among the many drivers and their helpers and passengers at the station, the only conduct of the first driver that I observed was that instead of moving out to make way for the next cab, he was talking and blocking the way. I suspected that it was this that our driver was disapproving of but I still asked him what made his colleague look like a woman, and his answer was ‘Can’t you see how he is talking?’. The delay caused by the other driver’s talking was then the problem.

One could have noted his comment as one of the many stereotypic remarks one hears daily from men, but the episode became more interesting and significant for me when one of the women, seeing the driver still talking remarked, ‘Ooi, they will indeed say he is like a woman. He is still talking’.

In the second sentence;

O na kuli yerimi
[he still EMPH talkPROG]
‘He is still talking’,

the woman uses a combination of grammatical devices which cumulatively indicate not just the continuousness of the action but suggests that it lasted too long. The adverbial *na* means ‘still’ with time reference to the present, whilst *kuli* is a particle which emphasizes the non-conclusiveness or persistence beyond an expected duration of the action *yerimi* [talk+IMPF]. The woman leaves no doubt

that she considers the man's talk as excessively long. The most striking thing however is her conclusion that the excessiveness of the driver's talk makes him look like a woman. She says:

‘...*bɛ shiri nɪyeli ní o ŋmani paya*’
 [...they ADV AUX say PART he be like woman]
 They will indeed say that he is like a woman.

Thus in her own way she seems to confirm the belief that talking too much is characteristic of women. Even though the two were not addressing each other directly they seemed to have achieved what (Brown and Yule 1983) have noted about small talk between conversationalists, that is ‘sharing a common point of view’ (Brown and Yule 1983:4), not only about the other driver's conduct but also a common view that women talk too much, a stereotype that cuts across many cultures (Coates, 1986; Mizokami, 2001).

This talk in the taxi did not only reproduce the stereotype of the talkative woman, but also touched on the issue of the role of a woman. Following the woman's remarks I asked her whether she was then confirming what the driver had said about women. Her response was.

Woman: *Ei*, as for us women...whatever you give us (say about us) we accept it.

Two gender issues emerge from this statement: women's role in decision making and the evaluation of that role by an individual woman. The driver alluded to only one aspect of what he considered to be characteristic of women, (they talk too much); however, the woman's response sums up the relationship between men and women in Dagbon society; a relationship of difference, and of power and

powerlessness. She begins by saying ‘as for us women’ (*ka ma ti payaba*), thus setting up women in opposition or contrast to ‘you men’ reproducing the society’s view of the male and female as different from each other. Between the two opposing groups she presents women as the passive recipients of whatever the men ‘give’ or say about them;

yi kuli zaŋ sheli tì tí, tí deerimi
 [2Pl Adv take whatever give us, we accept-IMPF].
 Whatever you say of us we accept it.

The emphasizing adverbial on the serial verb construction *kuli zaŋ...tì tí* [take give us], underlines the authoritativeness of what men assign to women. The interpretation of her statement is; ‘men have the authority to decide what we women are, and if they say we talk too much then we accept it’. Thus the Dagomba woman in her conversation may present herself as subordinate to men and accept the situation as it is. In the next sample we see another popular stereotype of the woman as a child reproduced in a pair of sentences.

7.1.2. Woman as a child

Situation 6.

Setting: Studio of an Fm radio station⁶²

Participants: Host and two guests (as announced by the host)

This sample consists of only two utterances by a speaker in an interview on radio. The interview was in Dagbanli and the speaker was one of two gentlemen from a local pressure group in Tamale called the Tamale Concerned Citizens Association who were being interviewed. In his introductory remarks the host had referred to

⁶²Radio Justice, Tamale: Special interview program aired 22nd April, 2011 (9:00am). Host: Sulemana Abdul-Nashiru.

allegations that the association had become dormant because they were sympathetic to the new local political authorities and did not want to embarrass them. He said critics of the association cited their failure to come out, as they always did in the past, to make any statement on a recent long disruption in water supply in Tamale to support the allegation.

In responding to these criticisms, one of the interviewees conceded the point that they had been inactive lately, but rejected the accusation of partiality saying their inactivity was deliberate but only temporary. According to him, some people did not seem to appreciate their work and so they had deliberately held back so that people will feel the effect of their inactivity. Assuring the host and listeners that they would not abandon the people but would come back, he went on to say:

Dagbamba yeliya ni baa be dimdi o bia paari kɔbli. A n' yi kpiyi fiebgi nfebi a bia la a je o mi ka fiebri o maa? Ka a paya ni yi tum taali ka a bu o la, di pala a je o mi.

The Dagomba say a dog does not bite its young to the bone. When you pick up a cane and lash your child, is it that you do not love him (or her)? And when your wife offends you and you beat her, it does not mean that you do not love her.

Discussion 2.

In the last two sentences of his response the speaker draws a parallel between a wife and a child in the same way that Dagbanli proverbs and sayings liken the woman to the child (see also section 5.2.1.). A man loves his wife, just as he loves his child; he can also beat his wife as punishment like he beats his child.

Thus wife beating is presented in a matter-of-fact manner and none of the others present in the studio objected to these examples; at least I did not hear any protest,

suggesting that they also accepted his examples as normal practices that could be used to illustrate the point the speaker was making. There would have been about four or five people in the studio (i. e. the three speakers plus a technician or two), but this was a discussion that was being broadcast to a wider audience outside the studio. Wife beating is one way in which a man shows his power over his wife and the act is talked about as a prescription for ensuring good behavior from a woman. As Ssetuba (2005) observes, the imposition of a male order is achieved both through the production and internalization of images of women as weak and subordinate as well as through the prescription of modes of actions for men in their relation with their women, including beating of their wives, in the same way as women are likened, in a Ganda proverb, to ‘the extremes of hide’ that need ‘rubbing to soften’ (Ssetuba 2005: 40).

7.2. Questioning stereotypes and gender roles

In the next two situations, different women engage in talk in which they seem to challenge or question the status quo, in sharp contrast to the woman in Situation 1.

Situation 7

Setting: Under the shade of a tree by a street in Tamale.

Participants: Wanzam (traditional barber), woman (probably in her late thirties), woman selling nylon net sponges (a non-Dagomba from southern Ghana), self.

Event: Casual conversation.

The *wanzam* was haggling over the price of a net sponge. He was offering two Ghana cedis instead of the three the seller, an Akan speaking woman, was asking for. The seller would not accept his offer, so he had to settle at her price. Handing the sponge to the *wanzam* the woman explained that that was the only sale she

had made the whole day and her profit on the three cedis was only fifty pesewas, which she would use to buy dinner for the night. This remark prompted the *wanzam* to ask in Twi:

Wanzam: (*Speaking in Twi*) Why, won't you cook for you and your husband to eat?

Sponge seller: No, I'm tired. I will just go and sleep. When he comes home he too should look for something to eat and sleep.

(Wanzam pays for the sponge while the Dagomba woman and I look on. After the sponge seller has walked away she (the Dagomba woman) speaks:

Woman: As for these people...their situation is better. A Dagomba man will only manage to get you raw dry maize...that is all...and he expects to come and find his food ready.

Wanzam: Abaaa (*an expression of mild disagreement...chuckles*). We help you...

Woman: Where? Hmm...and when he is going to talk to you...it does not look as if it was he who brought you ...as if there was nothing between the two of you...just like that...

Wanzam: That is not how it is...

Woman: Where is it not like that...? (*changes topic*)
(See Appendix IIIa for Dagbanli transcription)

Discussion 3.

After listening to the sponge seller declaring that she was tired and could not cook for the night and that her husband should himself find something to eat, the Dagomba woman is obviously envious of her. Here is a woman just like herself: but yet, unlike her this other woman has the freedom to choose to cook for her husband or not to, a freedom which she as a Dagomba woman does not have, hence her remark 'as for these people...their situation is better'. Even if a Dagomba woman, out of exhaustion, can hardly stand on her feet, she cannot

choose not to cook. Refusal to cook for the household can be a cause for divorce as Andani notes;

Pay' yi zɔri daaŋa, di zuɣu gba yihiri o doo yili. Bahi-yoli mi m-bala. Pay' yi ku duyɪ ka o mini o yidan di, o daalifaani nyɛ dini?
(Andani n.d.:p.19)

If a woman fears the fireplace, that reason can also send her away from the husband's house. And that is self-destruction. If a woman will not cook for her and her husband to eat, what is her use?

Mahama (2004) adds,

‘The Dagomba woman has an indispensable role as the keeper of the hearth and house. Only women are permitted by custom to cook’
(Mahama, 2004: v).

Cooking the main meal for the household is the sole responsibility of the housewife. In Dagomba custom, after sex, the second most important and ‘non-negotiable’ conjugal right of a man is to be cooked for by his wife, and it is the woman's right to be provided the *moni*, the daily ration of guinea corn, maize or yam for cooking. In the past a married woman was formally initiated into this role through a ceremony called *monibu* (cooking). This was a simple ceremony involving the preparation by the woman of a large quantity of food which was distributed to the members of the family and neighbors to announce that she had formally assumed the role of cooking for the household. For royals, the *monibu* ceremony also gave legitimacy to the woman's children. If a male child was the eldest son of a chief, he could not, on his father's death, be made the regent if his mother had not performed the *monibu* ceremony (Mahama 2004:118). Cooking is therefore a duty which a wife cannot refuse or choose not to perform.

On the part of the man, once he has provided the daily ration of cereal his role is finished. It is the woman's task to mill the grain, provide the accompanying ingredients and process all of these into a meal for the family. In the traditional economy, wives played their part without much difficulty because a woman could simply walk into the bush and gather most of the inputs needed to make a meal. That is no longer the case even in the rural areas. It is into the market, not the bush, that a woman must go to get her ingredients, and most women have very little income. Therefore the woman's statement,

‘A Dagomba man will only manage to get you raw dry maize...that is all...and he expects to come and find his food ready’,

is a critical assessment a woman's share of the responsibility of feeding the family. She feels the demands of the roles are unequal for the man and the woman and she seems to be questioning or protesting against a system which she sees as demanding more from the woman than from the man. The woman also appears to envy the sponge seller's freedom to choose not to cook for her husband. The *wanzam*'s protest is weak and, even though, he claims that men help women to prepare the meals, he does not go further to show how.

This woman's comments are in contrast to the unquestioning acceptance by the woman in the taxi of whatever men assign to women. These contrasting attitudes suggest that even in a largely traditional society individuals can attempt to resist or question gender roles and gender stereotypes. However, even in the woman's questioning attitude is a tacit concession that in Dagomba marriage it is the man

who ‘brings’ the woman. As Mahama notes, ‘in Dagbani language the man “takes the woman”’. The woman does not “take the man”’. (Mahama 2004: 105).

In stating the research problem, one of the questions we asked was whether the changes that are taking place in Dagomba society could have any effect on the linguistic behaviour of men and women. The example above and another that we shall see in section 7.2.2 are instances where some elements in a woman’s speech appear not to conform to traditional norms or beliefs and could probably point to shifts in ideas or attitudes.

The following statements, reported to me by a male informant who works with an NGO, suggest that women now seem less inhibited in verbalizing deep-felt sentiments about men in a way that they might not have done in the past. His NGO trains rural women in some parts of the Northern Region, including two of the districts covered by this study, in income generation activities and home management, and he engages the women in a lot of talk about their lives. He reports that women generally feel frustrated and very bitter about what they consider to be men’s ‘wickedness, unfairness, oppression’. Some of them put these feelings in the following sayings that he reported:

- (a) If you see a man in heaven, he will be wearing a dress borrowed from a woman.
- (b) If you come across a pot on fire and they tell you it is a man they are cooking, push in some more firewood.

These were said after the women concerned had recounted stories of unfair treatment or abuse from their husbands or other men. Whatever it is that men may

have done to these women to elicit these comments may have been taken as part of women's life in the past.

7.2.2. Questioning the status quo

Situation 8

Setting: Verandah in front of a hairdresser's salon

Participants: 4; hairdresser, two elderly men probably in their 60's, a younger man, and this researcher.

Event: Casual conversation

The venue of this conversation was two separate but contiguous locations. The hairdresser was inside her salon and the rest of us were in a verandah opposite but very close to the salon. The conversation was a short exchange between the woman and two elderly men in their 60's which turned out to be a situation that provided a context for a young woman between 20 and 30 to question gender, or a particular behavior expected of her as a wife. The hairdresser and her husband, also a young man, live in a suburb outside the city centre where they both work. The husband had passed by his wife's salon for a brief moment, and as he was moving towards his motor bicycle which he had parked at the side of the main road, his wife who was inside her salon shouted out to her small sister to ask him if he had removed their laundry from the drying lines before leaving the house. The two elderly men, with whom I was sitting and having a chat found this conduct not proper as the short conversation that followed shows.

Hairdresser: [*Shouting to younger sister from salon*] Look, ask him whether he collected our washing. [*Younger sister runs to husband*]

[...*Brief silence...*]

1st Man: Amina, is it your husband you say they should ask whether he remove your washing?

Hairdresser: *ẽẽ...* (yes).
[*Brief silence*]

1st Man: You have not done well. Is he the one who should remove your washing?

Hairdresser: *Ai*. [*Exclamation indicating surprise*] Why haven't I done well? The clothes are dried outside, and when we leave home there is no one in the house.

2nd Man: Then you should have asked him yourself. When you sit and shout for everyone to hear that you asked your husband to remove the washing, you have not given him respect.

Hairdresser: *Ai*, (*Chuckling*) that is old days' talk you are talking.

1st Man: (*In an undertone to 2nd man*) Forget about her. You know, her husband is a non-native person.

2nd Man: *ẽh hẽẽ*, that explains it.
(See appendix IIIb for Dagbanli transcription)

Discussion 4.

The two men seem to have two objections to the hairdresser's conduct. First they seem scandalized that she should expect her husband to take in the washed clothes. Washing is a woman's job, and no married man will have anything to do with it; he will be called a *do loo* (see section 4.3c.). The woman gives a very good reason why, to her, any person in their situation would remove the washing. It appears that her husband was the last to leave home, and without anybody left behind to watch over the clothes which were hanging in the open, it made sense to expect him to remove the clothes.

The two men may have been compelled by the reasonableness of the hairdresser's argument so they abandon their initial objection and shift ground to fault the manner in which she communicated with her husband. Schafer (1991) has

observed that a Dagomba woman is expected to speak respectfully to her husband, and we have discussed some of the ways in which a wife should not talk to her husband. As noted earlier (section **6.1.1.**), a woman does not summon her husband, or issue instructions, orders or commands to him, or talk to him from a distance. For the two men, shouting out a query to her husband even if indirectly was not showing him respect as we hear from the second man.

The man seems to have grudgingly accepted that the hairdresser had a case but he still thought she had nevertheless overstepped the norms of wife-husband communication by not walking up to him to ask the question. His concern now is that people observing or overhearing what had transpired between her and the husband and not knowing their situation at home will have a very low opinion of the man.

The hairdresser's chuckle and her response sums up her own opinion of the concerns of the two men. To her their criticisms and concerns are *na daa* talk (*na daa* is a Hausa phrase meaning 'archaic', 'obsolete' or 'belonging to the past'). The 1st man is not amused by her dismissal of their concerns as archaic, and tries to assuage his hurt feelings by explaining away her behavior. He assumes that she is taking advantage of the fact that her husband is a non-Dagomba and may have a different set of cultural values to which her conduct is acceptable. The 2nd man readily agrees with his suggestion.

In this brief interaction we see a young woman confronted with a situation that presents a challenge to her playing one of her roles as a wife. Unlike the

traditional housewife, the young woman has to leave home to come into the city centre to work but she must have done the washing and left home before the man, who also works in the city. When they both come to work there is nobody left behind to keep an eye on the laundry, so it would be expected that the last to leave should collect in the clothes for safety. The two men seem to concede a point here, but then they shift their attention to her manner of talk which they insist does not conform to the traditional norm of speaking to a husband. She shows open resistance to or defiance of the tradition, calling it archaic.

Thus in this causal conversational interaction we see practical expressions of gender role expectations from the two elderly men and we also see that in a changing society some of these role expectations may be met with new challenges leading to some resistance from those from whom these behaviors are expected. The final exchanges between the two men suggest that they have a different interpretation of the hairdresser's conduct. To them she is behaving the way she does because her husband is non-Dagomba and so may have a different set of cultural norms. However, their interpretation of her attitude as being a result of her taking advantage of her husband's different ethnic background was probably a way of avoiding an obvious threat to their face and mine too.

7.3. Gender miscellany in conversation

The next two texts are transcripts of a single conversational event that involved several participants, two women and about seven men. The men were not all present throughout the period as some of them moved away at different times.

The setting was in the verandah of a tailor's shop where the group often meets to take a break from their various tasks in the hot afternoons. The two women are traders; one sells assorted men's wear and the other sells women's wax prints. They are also close friends who appear to share a lot of their private personal experiences as the conversation shows. Their shops are across the street from the tailor's shop and adjacent each to other. The conversation was largely a narrative by Zalia, supported by her friend Hajia, and is in two parts. In the first part, Zalia talks about a problem between another friend (Ziina) and the friend's husband. The exchanges bring out women's and men's attitude towards polygamy.

All the participants in these speech events are very familiar with each other as they often sit together for long periods engaging in such small talk, hence the conversation is in a light mood, characteristic of a friendly chat between 'social equals'-shared experiences, 'co-operative' style or co-construction of narratives, simultaneous speech etc. (Jones 1980, Coates 1998). In this environment the women did not feel constrained by the presence of the males, and I did not let any of them or the others know that I was recording. The names used here are however not the real names of the participants.

7.3.1. Polygamy and other matters

Situation 9.

Setting: In the shop of a tailor

Event: Casual conversation

Participants: Two women: Zalia and Hajia . A group of four men Mustapha, Afa, Rauf, and Shani. (These are not the real names of the participants):

Topic: A squabble between a non-present friend of the two women and her husband narrated by Zalia.

Only four of the participants Zalia, Shani, Rauf, and Afa, talk in this segment. The Dagbanli transcription is attached as Appendix IIIc (i). Because of the length of the texts, speaker turns are numbered for easy reference⁶³.

1. **Zalia:** So it is the woman herself who is...who is encouraging this man[...]
2. **Afa:** You, sit properly... you are sitting across the way[...]
3. **Zalia:** ... the man and Ziina are still living in the same room. He has no means yet to...*ẽh*...to....so this woman, who is a *bazawara*... and said she will...she is the one who is encouraging him...that she will find a room and rent...and be there...when she comes and sleeps with him for two days...then she will go back home for two days[...]
4. **Shani:** ...the man said so?
5. **Zalia:** It is the woman who said that to him [...]
6. **Shani:** [oooh]
7. **Zalia:** ...and the man then said that she should be patient. As for the man, he has said he will not cheat Ziina...eye...before he marries that person...he wants to find money for Ziina...so that she will be doing something...eye...and get a room... in their house there are still open spaces...and build, and move Ziina into it...that he will not cheat her... but because Ziina still hasn't got (anything) in her hands to be doing something small it makes her irritable... eye...when he does something...Ziina will complain ...and he will say, 'don't get grumpy with me for your poverty'...ha...ha...ha...ha...
8. **Shani:** Who says she shouldn't get grumpy with him for her poverty[...]
9. **Zalia :** [the man says so...] (*laughter*)
10. **Shani:** ..that Ziina should not [...]
11. **Zalia:** ...that she shouldn't get testy...and Ziina will get angrier ...complaining why he should say that to her[...]
12. **Shani:** ...but, it's not that the man is driving her away?
13. **Zalia:** The man is not driving her away...she and the man are not

⁶³ There were several interruptions, like greetings by passers-by or when some of the participants engaged briefly in other activities. I turned off the recorder when the interruption was long and turned it on again when the conversation returned to the topic that I was interested in. At the beginning there are a few utterances (e.g 3 and 5) not related to Zalia's narrative.

fighting [...]

14. **Shani:** It's just because she knows the husband is courting another woman

15. **Zalia:** *Èhèè*...she and the man are not fighting...

The main issue that comes out in this short conversation is polygamy and the attitude of both sexes to polygamy. Ziina's husband is courting another woman, but according to Zalia (3) it is the un-named woman who is encouraging Ziina's husband. In traditional polygynous Dagomba marriages a man lived with all his wives in the same compound (some of the wives shared rooms), and one still finds this in the rural areas. However, in the urban environment of Tamale, family compound houses are no longer able to accommodate all members and so some members may move out to live in rented rooms elsewhere. Sometimes to avoid conflict or as a result of opposition from a wife a man may be compelled to provide rented rooms for other wives elsewhere.

This is what the un-named woman proposes in order to expedite the marriage. Ziina's problem, if her friend is to be believed, is not that her husband is preparing to take another wife but that she has no money to start trading. Ziina herself might have recounted her little tiffs with her husband to her friend Zalia, and from Zalia's jovial attitude as she re-tells this account, both of them must have had a laugh over it. In fact Zalia confirms this in (13) when she comments that Ziina and her husband are not fighting;

13. **Zalia:** The man is not driving her away...she and the man are not fighting [...]

But Ziina has a genuine difficulty; she wants to start doing something for herself, buying and selling petty goods as most women in an urban area do, but she has no money. Yet she knows that her husband is courting another woman, and she knows that it is the practice for men to spend more readily on a woman when they are courting her (see section 5.2.2). However in the next turn (14) Shani ignores what appears to be a genuine grievance, and reduces her complaints to jealousy;

14. **Shani:** It's just because she knows the husband is courting another woman[...]

To him if Ziina is having some little quarrels with her husband it is because she is aware that her husband is courting another woman. This sums up the way Dagomba men often interpret a woman's complaints, especially if they come at a time a man is contemplating taking another wife. Once a wife knows, or it is assumed that she knows that her husband is courting another woman, any complaint or action of the wife that displeases the man is seen as motivated by jealousy. A woman has no right to prevent her husband from taking another wife because in Dagomba custom it is the right of a man to have many wives. As Andani (n. d.) observes:

Pay' bɔbigu kpuyibu nyɛla ti Dagbɔɲ taada din wuhiri yidaanlim ni ninvuy' malibo. (Andani p. 18)

Taking many wives is our Dagbon custom that shows ability as a husband and responsibility of looking after many people.

Having many wives was an indicator of aman's social worth, and a means of ensuring his economic power as it could assure him of a large work force on the farm. Chiefs could have wives numbering in the tens and other commoners could

marry several women too. Though Islam came and limited the number of wives to four, its teaching on polygamy only confirmed an already existing tradition.

Any indication of displeasure by a wife at her husband's plan to marry is interpreted as jealousy, selfishness or greed; she wants the man all to herself. When a dispute arises between a wife and a husband out of such a situation or between co-wives, a woman may be rebuked with remarks such as:

Pay' nyulilana m b̄ri o ko.

(Only a jealous woman wants to be alone) or

Ka paya yino ko zuɣu ka Nawuni nam doo.

(It is not because of one woman that God created a man).

Even a misunderstanding that may have nothing at all to do with a husband's plan to marry can be interpreted as motivated by a wife's jealousy as, Shani does in turn (14). Surprisingly, in the next turn (15) Zalia seems to agree with this suggestion with the utterance *ẽhẽẽ*, an exclamation of agreement. However, this may rather be in support of her friend's need for money, which as a woman and friend of Ziina she thinks must be the man's priority.

We notice that in the early part of her narration, (3), Zalia uses the word *bazawara* to describe the unnamed woman in her story, and I indicated in section 4 (ii) that the word *bazawara* is a derogatory term used for an unmarried woman, usually a divorced woman. In fact if Zalia herself who has children became unmarried, she would be surreptitiously called *bazawara* by others. By using this derogatory term for another woman Zalia is clearly showing contempt for her friend's rival and 'solidarity' with her friend Ziina. Perhaps that is the reason she

unwittingly admits that part of the cause of her friend's impatience with her husband may have to do with the other woman.

Lastly, in this narration, there is an indication of the Dagomba woman's dependence on her husband. Ziina has no means of earning an income. She is unemployed, and like many Dagomba women, has to rely on her husband to find her some money as start-up capital for buying and selling petty goods. Meanwhile her husband is involved with a second woman, which means any money he makes might go into meeting the costs of a second marriage. Already we are told he is looking for money to build another room where the new wife can move into. It is clear that Ziina and her friend Zalia are restrained by custom from openly faulting the man lest Ziina be labeled a jealous women (*pay'nyulilana*, see section 4.2.4.j), a selfish women who does not want her husband to marry another woman, and also probably because they are only two women in the company of about five men. They blame only the unnamed woman who, according to Zalia (3) is the one encouraging her friend's husband to marry her

7.3.2. Doing a woman's work - a man's dilemma

Situation 9b

Setting: Same as in situation 5

Participants: Zalia, Shani, Mustapha, Hajia, Rauf, Afa, Self.

Event: Same as above

Zalia's last turn above (20) was interrupted by the arrival of a group of women who were passing by and stopped to exchange greetings with us. I stopped my recording during this interval and when I resumed the topic had changed, but Zalia was still the principal speaker. This time the narrative is about herself and

her own husband, but I had missed what caused the transition to a new topic. It is an account (over which all of us, the participants had a good laugh) of her husband's protestations against being asked to help in some household tasks, and it is evident that Hajia already knows the story as she acts as a co-narrator, chipping in with some bits of detail. This conversation illustrates some of the issues on gender discussed in previous sections, especially attitudes towards a man doing what is considered woman's work.

1. Zalia: ...maize; I bought it...I do this...I do that...making it look like he is being forced to...

2. Shani: ...who says that?

3. Hajia: It was Mr. Ahmed saying so to his wife...you see, when he says he fetches the water...when the taps are not running...*(laughing)*...and they put jerry cans in his pick-up...or when they go to the mill...there is no mill in their neighborhood...so they bring the maize here...so whenever there is an argument he enumerates all these...

4. Zalia: ...He himself started it oo...from the time we were in Damango...whenever he collects his maize... we will take it to the millers...and they will dehusk it...he will not allow them to keep the chaff for themselves,...sometimes he will bring it home for us to winnow... you want to do it yourself...I didn't ask you to do it...
(See Appendix III(ii) for transcription of full conversation)

The issue at the centre of Zalia's narrative is her husband's protest in the form of exaggerated claims about performing household tasks; fetching water and milling maize. We have noted earlier that only women are permitted by custom to cook, or perform tasks connected with cooking (Mahama 2004), like fetching water or milling grain, but we learn from Hajia (3) that when there is no running water at home, Mr. Ahmed uses his pick-up vehicle to provide water in jerry cans from other places, and also carry maize to the mill.

We also hear from Hajia (4) that Mr. Ahmed began helping in this way when the family was in Damongo, and on his own volition.

Two factors may explain why Mr. Ahmed performs tasks which his Dagomba tradition does not allow a man to perform. Dagomba society generally holds the view that western education makes a Dagomba lose his or her cultural values either because he or she acquires a different set of values or simply fails to properly learn his own culture and remains ignorant of it into adulthood. It is common to hear the elderly describe an educated person as not being a 'true' Dagomba when he or she has flouts a traditional norm. Mr. Ahmed, is an agricultural officer. In what appears to be a confirmation of the belief about educated people, Mr. Ahmed's education seems to have given him a different attitude towards performing household tasks which his Dagomba culture regards as the exclusive responsibility of women. Added to his education is the fact that the couple had been stationed in Damongo in Gonjaland where they would be strangers and he would not feel fettered by Dagomba custom, or worry about what neighbours will say. This point is made later by Rauf who says (20):

Rauf: You see when you were in Damongo was he complaining?
...ẽhẽẽ...because this place is a Dagomba town, ...if anyone
sees it...they will say 'as for Mr. Ahmed, his wife
controls him...'

Social sanctions are important in ensuring conformity to societal norms. The fear of being labelled by neighbours, as we discussed above, is a strong reason why no male will want to do what is generally regarded as woman's work. In

I had not been following the conversation from the beginning so I asked (5) to know who it was about:

LAUGHTER

10. Zalia: ...and tug Rahima along...so you see; ...even you yourself...it would

be embarrassing to you...

11. Shani: ...that's right...

12. Zalia: ...then you carry us... when we get to *Kantiin*, we will mill...dry it there... then I will carry it home ...sometimes you remain there with us ...you and me alone...and that was how it was till we came home here...when we came here... I on my part will not allow you ...to be doing that...

13. Rauf: ...when they say one's home town, *ẽhẽẽ*... as for the Dagomba place...

14. Zalia: ...it will look as if I have control over you or something...[...] but ...when we came back to this town...when he collects the maize from agric, he will take it to the mill for dehusking, then we winnow it...*ẽhẽẽ*...even groundnuts...he never agrees that...like...as one may buy groundnut paste from the market...he will not agree...that you should do it yourself...when I was in my home I never did the milling.....that you must do all...then you do it...and when there is no water...even you yourself you use the water...

15. Self: ...yes...even my small car...we've all done it...I used to drive with jerry cans in my small car...when I'm going home I pass by the water works ...to fetch water...because if you don't do that how are you going to get water?...

Zalia (8 and 10) paints a vivid picture of the multiple tasks a Dagomba woman sometimes has to perform simultaneously, and the comment at the end of (10) shows that she expects her husband to help her. This is an expectation Zalia can have only while she lives in a non-Dagomba environment, and she gets the help so long as the family lives in Damongo until they return to Tamale (12) which is a Dagomba environment. The reason why she can no longer get her husband to relieve her of some the tasks is given in 14:-

“Zalia: ...it will look as if I exercise control over you or something...[...]”.

In the discussion of (4.3.c) we noted that a man who performs domestic tasks regarded as women's duties is labeled *do loo*; a weak man who is under the

control of his wife. Zalia's remark confirms this view. It also shows that even a woman does not want the perception to be created that she 'controls' her husband.

In the next turn **16**, Zalia shows that even during pregnancy the Dagomba woman is expected to continue doing her work. Even when she is pregnant she walks all over the neighbourhood looking for water. If she has no one to help her she cannot expect help from her husband. Indeed as we have seen all along, he would be the last person from whom she can expect a helping hand. Note the emphatic 'No!' and the subsequent 'eruption' as Zalia herself describes her husband's reaction. The expression '*kaai*' (**18**) is an exclamation of caution; it is also used to introduce an angry reaction from a third person who is being reported as we see in Mr. Ahmed's reported outburst at the end of **18**.

16. Zalia: We will carry containers, and walk all over *rashia bangulu*,⁶⁴ going round...till we find *awaana* (bore hole with hand pump), then we collect a container each...but that is never enough for us...sometimes...our chores...we can't do our chores... then when I had...then when I was pregnant with Mpagu... when you bring the maize...I can't bend down...so then... after milling let them winnow it...and tell them you need the chaff...then give them a small tip ...then you say 'Nooo!'...because of this I had to bring in Ziina and others to winnow the maize...

17. Rauf: ... you see?...This is Dagbon...not Damongo...

18. Zalia: ...then we were going to measure out some maize and then I said, 'Mr. Ahmed please, let me measure out the maize so that' ...*kaii!!!*...he just erupted... 'IT IS I WHO FETCH WATER!...IT IS I WHO DO THE MILLING!...I DO THIS...I DO THAT...[laughter from all participants]....So I said, 'Just leave me here...'

⁶⁴*rashia bangulu*, (Russian Bungalows), a housing estate built by Russian engineers in the 1960's for public servants.

From another perspective his claim that it is he who ‘fetches water’ and ‘mills the corn’ may not just be an exaggeration. It is a statement of the verdict that the society will pronounce on him if he is as much as seen near the mill, and it is a judgment that will diminish his stature in the opinion of neighbors. He is not protesting because he thinks he is doing too much; he is protesting because he is doing what a man should not be doing in the first place no matter how little it is.

Zalia does not want her husband’s protest to be heard beyond the home, so she pleads with her husband:

zalimi ma kpe
[put down-IMPER me here](..leave me here), i.e. let this matter end here.

She does not want neighbours to know what she is asking her husband to do, because if they do it will become the subject of gossip in the community as Shani (21) and Rauf (22), both of them men, agree. The rest of the conversation presents a contrast in the husband’s attitude between when the family was in Damongo and his attitude now in Tamale, and the reason for the change.

- 19. Rauf:** ha-ha-ha-ha...The Dagomba habit has taken over...he fetches the water...ha-ha...he is fed up...You see when you were in Damongo was he complaining?...*ẽhẽẽ*...because this place is a Dagomba town, ...if anyone sees it...they will say as for Mr. Ahmed, his wife controls him...
- 20. Zalia:** When we were in Damongo, even *fufu* he used to pound...whenever he came...and saw that...he will take over the pestle ...and pound ...at that time Rahima was too young to pound fufu...
- 21. Shani:** Look if he does that here... let someone walk in and see him...
- 22. Rauf:** They will just carry his story out...

- 23. Zalia:** So even as we sit here in this market, when he ...it is only when he feels like it that he comes here to pick us...you can't tell him: 'Mr. Ahmed, when you are going home this is it...this is it: "WALK!...WALK HOME!...you are not grateful...walk home and see...others like you walk home...they carry their children on their backs...and carry loads...and walk mile upon mile...and when night falls the husband will not leave them alone"...'(ALL LAUGHING)...so...we just walk...and if he wants to...when he is going home he will call: 'Are you still around?'...I will say, 'we are around'...then he will come...
(see APPENDIX IVb for a Dagbanli transcription of the full conversation)

In Damango, 'even fufu, he used to pound', (20). However, the couple moves back to Tamale and now, living within their own cultural environment, his attitude changes. Here in Tamale, the husband now has to measure his actions against the norms of his culture, so a request from his wife that he pass by from work to pick her up to go home in his vehicle results in another outburst. Zalia herself concedes that with the couple now back in Tamale things can no longer be as they used to be when they were in Damongo.

Zalia: ...and that was how it was till we came home here...when we came here... I, on my part, will not expect you to be doing that...

This is what was alluded to above on what Dagomba think about other Dagomba living outside Dagbon. Back within their own cultural environment she can no longer expect her husband to continue helping her as he was doing in a different cultural context.

The society will pass a harsh judgment on her if it is noticed that she allows her husband to fetch water. When a man performs domestic tasks it is not only he who suffers the ridicule and loss of esteem; the wife who consents to her husband doing such tasks is despised and accused of 'controlling' her husband. We noticed it in the attitude of the two elderly men in section situation 3 (section 7.2.). It is

the fear of the judgment which the society will pass on her that makes her decide that she can no longer expect her husband to help in the domestic work, and she is not the only one who is aware of this fact; Rauf, agrees in (15) and (17).

The claim that gender is not fixed but performed within a rigid regulatory framework (Butler 1990) is illustrated in this conversation. Outside the rigid norms of their culture, Mr. Ahmed can perform tasks that are reserved for women without any social constraints. He even helps to pound fufu (20), something he would never do if they were in a Dagomba community. In another environment Mr. Ahmed and his wife need not be concerned about what those around them will say or how they will judge them. However, within their own culture they are both constrained by the norms of the society.

Through Zalia's narrative we see husband and wife 'performing gender' differently at different times. Outside their own culture and far from the scrutiny and judgment of neighbors both husband and wife could step out of the 'rigid regulatory framework' (Butler 1990: 33) and perform different gender roles, but back in Tamale they have to be mindful of the two restrictive factors in their conduct. The other participants in this event are also engaged in reconstructing and reaffirming gender roles as they all seem to agree to what a man should not be seen doing.

Zalia refers to her husband as 'Mr. Ahmed' (23, 31), just as the other speakers do. As we noted in the discussion of address terms (section 6.3.2.), a wife does not address a husband by name alone, and the traditional norm would have required

that she use a kin term, but because her husband has some school education (an Agricultural officer), she uses Mr.

7.4. Summary

In this chapter we have seen men and women actively involved in performing gender in various ways. Some of the gender stereotypes and practices that we have discussed in previous chapters have been reproduced, reaffirmed, challenged or questioned in real everyday situations in conversation. Speakers have reaffirmed the cultural stereotypes of the woman as talkative, a child, powerless and dependent on a man, and reaffirmed attitudes that disapprove of a man behaving in a way that could be likened to a woman.

In some of the incidents the speakers reach for gender stereotypes as a convenient way of dealing with the real issues. Talbot has noted that stereotyping ‘reduces and simplifies’ Talbot (2003: 471) or prescribes unstated expectations of behavior. It provides an easy and convenient way of explaining or dealing with a problem arising from a complex set of behaviors. So instead of dealing with the problem that causes his friend to block the way, the taxi driver in Situation 1, rather accuses him of behaving like a woman, and confronted by the face threatening act of the hairdresser who dismisses their concerns as old fashioned, the two elderly men in Situation 8, find solace in a cultural stereotype; she has behaved in that unacceptable manner because her husband is non-Dagomba.

We have also seen speakers actively questioning some gender roles and the status quo, the expression and confirmation of views about polygamy and in the

dilemma of an educated man as told by his wife we see the strength of the cultural environment in gender role performance. These are not instances where people merely enumerate to a researcher what a man or woman should do or not do, but perform gender in conversation. Cameron (1998) has observed that conversationalists construct stories about themselves and others with a view to performing certain kinds of gender identity.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.0. Introduction

In this study I have examined the role of language and its use in the construction and reproduction of gender among speakers of Dagbanli. Specifically, my objectives were to identify linguistic items that may be used differently by females or by males, to find out whether such differences, if they exist are imposed by rules of usage or are preferred usages, to examine the manifestation of gender in vocabulary and in proverbs, and to examine how gender and gender relations are shaped, maintained or contested in male/female conversational interaction.

I drew from the theoretical conceptions of gender as a social construct and as a performance involving the use of the linguistic resources available within a culture that defines males and females as different and accords them unequal statuses and privileges. Some initial data was obtained from published works and from my own native knowledge of the language, but the bulk of the data was obtained through interviews and interactions with key informants, by observing or listening to others and through participation in normal everyday conversation involving both sexes. I have examined the use of a number of linguistic forms and the social significance of their use. In the analysis of linguistic data I have reached for historical facts, cultural values and social norms that motivate usage and illuminate meanings of linguistic items and usage.

8.1. Foundations of Gender in Dagbanli

Analyses of the data have provided some insight into some of the ways in which speakers of Dagbanli use the linguistic resources available to them to express their views about males and females through various labels, and informed by the norms and values of their society to structure and maintain relations between men and women. The core point that emerges is that gender among the Dagomba is grounded in the concept of the dual sex categorization of human beings and focuses on physiological, psychological and mental difference between males and females. Acceptable linguistic behaviour is taught early in life as part of the general socialization of the child, and the principle of difference between the two sexes which is built in the overarching social structures is nurtured and reproduced by and in a wide range of linguistic structures and in linguistic practices,

8.2. Language and male–female difference

The Dagomba view males and females as essentially different and they express this view in what they say about them. These views come out in the vocabulary they use to label them and in proverbs. A number of different linguistic forms are also prescribed for the use of males and females whilst some appear to be preferred usage of males and females.

The prescribed forms for responding to summons for males and females are deliberately taught to children as part of their socialization process. They are not choices the individual makes because he or she sees others of their own sex using

them. The child learns them as part of the process of learning to identify himself or herself as a male or female or boy or girl, and as different from the other person who answers differently.

It is however not clear how the two sexes come to adopt the forms that were identified as preferred usage, like the male preference for *zori* and female preference for *n zo* as address forms for an unfamiliar person. Both males and females seem to adopt these forms as they grow up and hear persons of the same sex use them. This will be in accordance with the difference theory which says that males and females may acquire different ways of speaking as they grow up within the environment of their different sub-cultures.

Though not many different usage forms have been found for males and females in Dagbanli there is some significance in the two that have been described. Both have been shown to be linked to the signalling of status differentiation which has implications for gender. The female response and accompanying posture remains the same even as she grows older while the male form changes to an adult form. The male matures into an adult and assumes an adult response form, but the female remains a child throughout her life. Her response and posture especially when she appears in the company of men remains the same as a child's. The difference in the use of address forms between husband and wife also states and reaffirms a husband's superior status and the wife's inferior status. Speakers are obliged to use these different forms and as they do they define themselves and

their addressees within the different status-power parameters encoded in these forms.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) have argued that in a society where the dominant gender ideology is difference, this ideology does not simply prescribe that male and female should be different – it insists that they are simply different, and it ascribes these differences to an unchanging essential quality of males and females (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:35). The male-female dichotomy is stated and reiterated in several forms and at different levels of the Dagbanli language from the simple linguistic acts of responding and addressing through the complexities of historical and cultural processes that produce the ascribed meanings and associations of lexical items and phrases to the powerful medium of proverbs and in everyday interaction.

The ideology of difference and inequality is shown in other ways by the data. Women are categorized and labelled in many more ways than men are. Where similar words and terms are used for males and females they may not have equivalent meanings. Words and terms that refer to the male tend to denote positive values, while those that refer to females tend to be derogatory or to denote negative values. Beyond the use of words of naming and description, the Dagomba also use the more powerful rhetorical device of proverbs to construct and maintain the ideology of difference between the male and female.

8.3. Language and domination

Dagbanli linguistic structures and forms of representation that define males and females as different function in and support a social structure in which males are in positions of power. Any discourse about gender is characterized by profuse derogatory labels and images of the woman in vocabulary and in proverbs. Some linguistic forms assigned for the use of females signal their inferior status, and in interaction the norms of good behaviour places constraints on the speech of females in the presence of men and on their ability to make decisions. The reiteration of and emphasis on the inadequacies of the female in all forms of discourse reproduce and strengthen existing beliefs and dispositions accumulated through the experiences of members of the society.

The negativity in Dagomba vocabulary and proverbs about females may at first suggest that the Dagomba society is misogynistic, but that will be an inaccurate conclusion, because one finds equally powerful positive statements in Dagbanli proverbs about the woman. The Dagomba society fits the perspectives of gender put forward by Kiteku (2006) and Olajubu (2002) that in Africa gender differences are perceived as 'normal' and male and female are different but complimentary (see section 2.1.4). The Dagomba present a picture of a society with an ambivalent attitude towards women; the society acknowledges the important values of the woman, but because of men's access to economic resources and power, they tend to adopt strategies to dominate and control women. Gal (2001) has noted that the ability to make others accept and enact one's representation of the world is a powerful aspect of domination. The strategy

seems to be to use language to dominate and control women by constantly alluding to their perceived weaknesses.

8.4. Contesting gender

But the control or domination of men does not absolutely deprive women of a means of expressing their minds. A woman may not challenge or disagree strongly with her husband, but she would grumble to herself, deliberately making sure that the man hears all that she says. If she was challenged she would say she was not talking to him. The incidents involving the Kings' wives (sections **4.4.1.** and **6.1.**) provide examples of some of the ways in which women could make themselves heard.

Another subtle way in which a woman could speak her mind without seeming to be addressing her husband was by directing her speech to a third person, a child for instance, or even an object. Thirdly a woman could resort to song in order to send a message of protest, defiance or complaint to her husband, or to some other person. The message could be embedded in a lullaby to a baby, or it could be woven into songs usually sung by women as they put finishing to a new building.

The use of song as an avenue for women to express their minds without direct talk has also been described in the '*halo*' songs of the Anlo Ewes (Anyidoho 1988), the 'Kundum' of the Nzema and the 'apoo' festival among the Bono of Techiman where women may use the relaxation of the restriction on their speech to criticize even the chief through song (Yankah 1998). Peek and Yankah (2004) also note that while planting, harvesting, decorating walls or milling corn, Builsa women

use song to communicate indirectly to their husbands, co-wives and difficult in-laws about various problems (Peek and Yankah 2004:519). Such indirect ways, were effective in getting a woman's message to a man without making him lose face in a direct face-to-face interaction.⁶⁵

I noted in the statement of my research problem that the present Dagomba society and its traditions have not remained unaffected by the changes going on in the larger society. Modernization, direct government policy and intervention by NGO's have introduced new ideas and opportunities, especially for women. In some of the interactions cited in this study we have seen women openly questioning or contesting some of the gender roles assigned to them by society. We also heard the account about a male who ignores the traditional code of male avoidance of women's work and performs some household tasks. These instances are too few to enable one make a firm statement that the values and beliefs that support gender differentiation are weakening but they are significant and seem to underscore the point that domination and power rarely go uncontested (Gal 2001: 426).

The signals that traditional gender constructs may now be challenged appear however to be stronger in the urban setting as we saw in the sample conversations. These could be an indication of the proposition I made earlier that modernization may, imperceptibly, be nibbling away at the cultural foundations of gender differentiation and male dominance.

⁶⁵ The use of songs for self-expression among Dagomba women does not form part of this study. It is a subject that is worth pursuing as studies in the other languages mentioned above show.

However these women may have been more forthcoming with their opinions because these conversations took place in public settings between participants engaged in friendly conversation. In a domestic setting where the formal structures of kin and marital relations impose more constraints on speech of women the expression of opinion of women may be less forthcoming. However there is a difficulty of recording conversations in a domestic setting, even in a place like Tamale.

Current language and gender research in Western scholarship has shifted focus from thinking of gender in terms of difference and dominance to thinking in terms of diversity of gender identities and gender practices (Cameron 2005:482). Cameron refers to this as the ‘post-modernist’ approach. In this framework gender hierarchies are no longer seen as rigid as they were in the past because there has been a perceptible weakening of the extreme forms of gender dualism. According to Cameron the shift is not just occasioned by a change in theorization but reflects a change in attitudes.

‘Young men and women growing up in the West today are more similar to each other than their grandfathers and grandmothers were, in everything from the clothes they wear to the education they receive, from the jobs they might aspire to do to their attitudes to sex and sport’ (Cameron 2005:490).

In spite of the few protests noted above, Dagomba society is very far from this state. Even in the larger modern Ghanaian society, it may be only in the institutions of higher learning and in the public services and among the educated elite that one can find a semblance of the situation described by Cameron; a situation of equal opportunities for men and women.

The manifestations of gender in the linguistic structures and usage as observed in this study may not be peculiar to the Dagomba; their significance may be in the particulars or details of expression. Moreover, recent protests across the country, from the streets to the Presidency itself, against reported lesbian and homosexual activities in the country show that at least in the case of sexuality as a gender issue traditional attitudes are still very strong all over Ghana.

8.5. Limitation

All the interview sessions and the sample conversations recorded for this study involved groups that were either all-male or mixed-sex groups. Though most of the women who agreed to speak with us did so with little or no reservations, I was not able to get samples of all-female interaction. It is well known among the Dagomba that women engage in their most private conversations on the footpath as they walk to the stream to fetch water or to the bush to gather firewood. A man can never be part of this setting, so there is a sense of absolute privacy and freedom from the intrusive ears of men and children. This is where they share secrets and intimacies, and say things about their husbands, co-wives, in-laws, or other members of their households, or even their friends that they would be hesitant to verbalize at home or in the presence of men. As they walk in line along the footpath, usually in groups of two to four, each carrying a load on her head, voices have to be raised so that those at the ends of the line can hear what is said. Anyone in the bush near the footpath may catch snippets of the conversation as they pass by. The fact that women's private 'footpath conversations' may

sometimes be overheard by unintentional eavesdroppers is known by both men and women and is expressed in the saying:

Kuligu soli jengbariga;...
[Water place path mouse;

o wumdi yela pam ku tooi yeli.
3S hear-IMPF matters plenty NEG be able say]
The mouse by the side of the footpath to the stream; it hears a lot of things but cannot tell it.

This saying is usually used by a speaker as a prelude to reporting something that has been heard. The sharing of secrets or intimacies among women on their way to the watering place appears to be a conversational practice that is common to other ethnic groups. In Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1971) three women on their way to and from the stream serve the role of narrator letting the audience into the off-stage happenings in the village.

A female researcher participating in these all-female activities and 'private' settings can get more interesting insights from Dagomba women's conversation. This notwithstanding, the cooperation I got from the women who participated in this project reassures me that the information they gave reflected their true feelings. Sometimes their answers or comments became cues that enabled me to ask questions that I was at first hesitant to ask. Moreover, besides the interview sessions, the conversations recorded were spontaneous.

This study cannot lay claim to have exhausted all the issues involved in gender in Dagbanli. As I have indicated above, all-female interactional situations have not been explored in this study.

Other areas that might provide interesting insights would include the language of marriage, and conversations in domestic settings. I hope however that the attempt has added a new dimension to the few scholarly studies of the Dagbanli language and will stimulate further interest in the sociolinguistics of the language.

8.6. Recommendations for further research

As I have just noted above, the situations where some individual Dagomba men and women seem to be challenging gender roles could be an indication of a process of change in gender attitudes. The situations cited here are however too few to allow for any statement to be made on the manner and scope of such challenges, so this remains a question that requires a fuller exploration to be answered.

Another area that should also attract the interest of researchers for further interrogation is the representation of men and women in proverbs. The African proverb has been extolled for its many virtues, its linguistic richness and social value. The proverb has a reputation as a shaper of thought and attitude because of its authoritativeness which is rooted in what is said to be the wisdom of the elders and its claim to cultural truths. Yet in Dagbanli, as in other African languages, perhaps the most disparaging forms of representation of women are in the proverbs (see also Yusuf 1994b, 1998, 2002; Ssetuba 2005; Hussein 2005; Oha 1998). Dagbanli proverbs and proverbs from other African languages studied in the works cited above acknowledge the woman as a symbol of warmth and all nourishing goodness, but this image is overshadowed by proverbs that represent her as foolish, weak, jealous, evil, unfaithful, dependent, frivolous and seductive

(Hussein 2005, Oha 1998). For this reasons Ssetuba (2005) observes that of all the definitional ingredients of the proverb, the claim over truthfulness and wisdom is rather disturbing. He argues that proverbs actually reflect the user's or society's aspiration for control and desire to impose a given view of life as unshakeable and accepted. This way the proverb helps patriarchy to live on from generation to generation by presenting it as a stable immutable part of social order (Ssetuba 2005: 38).

This calls for a re-evaluation and re-definition of the proverb with a view to its possible negative effects on the shaping of thought and attitudes to gender. Ssetuba suggests a re-interpretation of proverbs where we simply extract the desirable and favorable meanings then stick to and live with that. The other alternative is to rephrase proverbs as 'a form of deconstructive re-interpretation' (Ssetuba 2005:46). For instance the neutral nouns which have been shown to occur in many proverbs and give them a generic reference (discussed in section 5.4.3.4.) could be used in place of 'woman' in proverbs that use animal images.

This may not easily catch on with the larger society as proverbs are not formally taught, except perhaps the few that may occur in Dagbanli language school textbooks. Today users of the English language try to avoid the generics he, man, and occupational or descriptive words that indicate the sex of the referent. More regularly we hear references to chair or chairperson instead of chairman. The tendency now is to be gender sensitive in usage by choosing gender neutral or gender inclusive terms. These are aimed at achieving what Pauwels calls 'linguistic equality' at word level and eliminating sexism at discourse level

(Pauwels 2003: 556). Such transformations in the use of the English language did not come about spontaneously. They are the long term consequences of the exposure and documentation of sexist practices in language use and communication by feminists and language researchers in language and gender, and deliberate reform in usage (Pauwels 2003).

Whilst many educated Ghanaians seem to be conscious of these transformations and avoid overt sexism in their use of the English language, it seems the same cannot be said when we switch to the use of our own languages. Cracking bawdy jokes in our local languages seems less offensive to many speakers than in English. Not too long ago a male politician sought to dismiss the chances of a prospective female challenger for his Parliamentary seat by making an unsavory comment in Twi to the effect that a public election was not a political appointment which a female could win by doing sexual favors. This statement, made during an interview in a local language on radio, was widely condemned. Whilst political opponents were interested in the statement only as evidence of corruption, gender activists rightly saw it as sexist and an insult not only to a well educated woman, but to all women who had made it to the highest echelons in their chosen professions.

Even though graphic profanities are not permitted in public discourse, sexually explicit images are common in African proverbs as ‘vehicles for teachings about human values’ (Lange 2006: viii; see also Salifu 2008, Yusuf 1994, 1995). Sometimes some license is given if the speaker is seen as joking, but in the situation under reference, the speaker used a well-known derogatory Akan

expression which emerged in the late 1970's concerning the alleged use of sex for corrupt practices by the then military rulers.

With the increasing public use of our local languages especially on radio and television, there is the need for more research on gender in all the forms of African traditional communication, like folktales, music, myths and legends and so on as all these forms of communication provide the idiom for our daily discourse.

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APPENDIX I**Interview Guide for respondents and key informants**
Males, Females and Language Use

This questionnaire is part of a research that is being conducted for purely academic purposes. Information given will be used only for the purpose of this research.

Name
(optional).....Male/Female.....
Age: a) 18-29.....
b) 30-40.....
c) Above 40.....
Location.....

A. Male-female language differences.

- 1) How does each of the following persons respond when he or she is summoned/called?
 - i) boy
 - ii) girl
 - iii) adult male
 - iv) adult female
 - v) old persons (male/female).....
- 2) Are there other different response forms?
- 3) What is the explanation for these difference?
- 4) *Ooo* is another response form in Dagbani. Who uses it, and when is it used?
- 5) How do husbands respond to their wives' summons?
How do wives respond to husbands' summons?
- 6) Are there any ways in which males and females greet or respond to greetings differently?

B. Terms of address

- 1) How do you address (or call) your [wife/wives] [husband]?

- 2) How does your [husband] [wife] address (or call) you?
- 3) Is there any reason why he [she] calls you so?
- 4) What persons can one address as *zori*?
- 5) Do females use the word *zori* to address others?
- 6) Can a male use *zori* to address a female?

C. Taboo words/Euphemisms

- 1) Are there other word(s)/expressions used to name the male/female sex organ?
(Probe for explanations for the use of particular words.)
- 2) What expression(s) is/are used when people do not want to talk openly about sexual intercourse?
- 3) Are there words or expressions which males use but females do not use?
- 4) Are there words or expressions which females use that males do not use?
- 5) “*A n’ nya*” is an expression of a threat (You’ll see). What is the difference when a man uses it and when a woman uses it?

D. Miscellaneous

- 1) What does the word *dapala* mean?
- 2) Can a woman refer to her child as *N dapala*?
- 3) If no, why?
- 4) Pairs of musical instruments, (e.g. *timpana*) are classified as male (*timpan’ laa*) and female (*timpan’ nyaŋ*) – what makes one male and the other female?
- 4) In some languages natural elements like the sun, moon, wind, fire, rain, and so on and even days of week, months of the year are classified as either male or female? Does Dagbanli classify natural elements, days of the week or months of the year as male or female?

- 5) If yes, which elements are male and which are female?
- 6) What are the basis for calling these things male or female?
- 7) Why are some trees referred to as male or female? e.g. *taandɔyɔ*
gambirlɔyɔ/gampirlaa, gampirnyan
- 8) What other things, objects, etc. are classified as male/female in Dagbanli?
- 9) What is (a) *dotali*?...
(b) *pay' tali*?
- 10) When the birth of a new child is announced people immediately want to know its sex. How do you usually ask about the sex of the new baby?
a) *paya bee doo*
b) *doo bee paya*
- 11) Is there a reason for choosing a particular order?
- 12) When you have to talk about *doo* (male) and *paya* (female) or *ma* (mother) and *ba* (father) do you say:
a) *doo nipaya* or *paya ni doo*
b) *mba ni ma* or *mma ni ba*
- 13) Who do the following words refer to?
kpema
doyri kpema
paya kpema

E. Proverbs.

What are the meanings/interpretations of the following proverbs? For each of these proverbs find out the possible situation(s) that can produce it. Note other proverbs that may be used about males and females.

Paya suŋ n nye yili suŋ.

Paybegu lana sola dakoli.

A yi ka ma pay' kpema, a baya ka nayili boligu ni.

Yilisheli paya yi tua ni a nyiri kpaysi, a (yiŋ) paya n tua ka o wum.

Doo bori ka o nini nya, din' ngari be yeliya'.

Be payi doo ni logu ka o zaŋ toli nyayi.

LEXICAL GUIDE

The words below are related to or refer to males/females or characteristics related to them. Whenever they occur in the course of interaction, note their contexts of usage. Ask for any other possible meanings attached to the word.

awazakali:

bazawara
bidibga:
bidibbini
bikoba-lana,

bibielli:
bidiblim:
bikoba,
bikoba-wobbu

dabiringa
dagbandoo
dagorli,
dagorsigu
dapala
dokurigu
donyan

dablim
dagbanpaya
dagorlim,
dakoli, dakolim
dataa
doo
dotali

gandoyu

jayimelo

jayimeltali

nyintaa

nyuli-lana

pagorli
payabaleliga
payanyuli –lana
payatali
payatinmara
payawayini
payapini
payazilinli
paykpema
pakoli
pakurugu

paya
payadede
paya sonnya
payatikuba
payayihin
payitaa
payapuhigu
paykohingu
paypali
pakolim

yidana
yidantaa

yidanpaya

zori

APPENDIX II

Excerpts from Key informant discussions

(a) Mba Alasani's explanation of terms used for women

Paya jẹrigu n gbubi yili. Dun' ti mali yem ti yayi o ku tooi gbubi yili. Dun be zaṅdi binsheṣu kam n niṅ binsheṣu, ka kuli zia ka jẹrigu maa, to ṅuni n gbibi a yili. Ka o tabi naan yi boon'o ni jẹrigu. A bi nya mpaya so ṅun beni ṅo maa?...dahin sheli m mabihi daa yi bi ya kana.. n daa be la puuni. .ka bi yelima na, ni saamba puhiri ma...o mi di chebsi ma ni o yen go mi...ka n bohi "Mayambili...o yi ya?...odi yeli ni o yen go mi...o yi ya?...di saha ka lala nir' maa yeli ... "o kuli tohimi yina...n tuhi ba soli..." o ye o mi lahi labi duu.. ma n yeli, "to, din ṅuna n suhi doni ya...m paya ṅuni maa ni duyri sayim yaaa...ka ṅun kpe duu n ti yina ...n ti yen paai na kpeni ṅo ka o pun duyi shinkaafa ..n niṅ binsheṣu kam na ti zali ba ka ṅun bala maa naan yi moni sayim na. A n' nya ṅo o yi di mali yem yayi o naan niṅ lala? Pumponjo payaba ṅo...o di kuli yen puhiba mi ka pili yi...ni kuli bohi ka bi yeli ni o beni, man yeli ye nsuhu doni ya. Ye Mayambili ni kuli beni ṅo ṅuna, ye saamba maa ni di. Ka nti shiri kuna ka lala maa ti shiri niṅ.....

Paya sun yi be a yiṅa a ni toi nya payaba pam m pahi o zuṣu...n yili ṅo maa payaba anu ka n yi mali...be bayi ṅuna Nawuni ṅun gbahi be ba ayi...Be mi bihi m beni maa. Kpem sani maa ṅun bihi paai bihi pia, ka che ṅun bala maa mi...ka ṅun bala maa mi ka alaafe, ka guui payaba ayi...to bohima Zoo Naa n ziya ṅo, payaba ayi ni be yili ni ka di ti nye hee hee ṅo a kum wum li man yili ṅo...

A yi yen tuui nya paya ka Naawuni yi yura ka a nya paya pieṣu a yili maa kuli cheni mi...pieṣu ṅun je o konko...a yi da pie'yino na ti bahi, a n' niṅ wahala... paya pieṣu ka pa ni a ti nyala so pahi a zugu o ku zini a yiṅa. A ni ti mali payaba pia a yili maa ni ka so ku wum yi damli..pieṣu bori la bobgu...o je o konko...To Naawuni yi yuri ka a nya lala paya to a vuhi ya....amaa paya bua ṅuni n nayi bori o konko...Paya baa...ayi mali paya baa maa...paya bazuṣu...to din ṅuna sokam zaa ni wum yi damli... hali nyin bi lahi nyari so puhiri o gba; ka di nyela yei, yei, yei....ṅuni ka be booni paya baa maa... Paya baa ...baa ka daṅ...Di zuṣu ka be yeli ni paya baa maa...

Yulima, yili ṅo ni kuli ziya ṅo ka baa yi doyi yili ṅo yaa... ka yili ṅo nim piigi o...beṣu yi sa nei ka baa maa kperi yili maa ni o ku sayi ka o kpe... ana min nya ka bahi tuhi tabi soli ka pa ni bi zabi mi? to baa ka daṅ.. to dini n nye...to paga lala yi ti kpe a, to a yi bi yi n zani gba, to hali a lahi ka daṅ...a lahi ka ma bia...nyin ma bia ku lahi tabili a...to a mi yi mali paya bua yaa...o yi doyi bihi ṅun mi la o bihi konko..to kpahima, a yi mali buhi balibu bu yi a yi ti kpehiba napoyu ni, bu kurli maa kariti la ban' kpalim maa bahi duu tinṅli, ka tayi o bihi na ka bi ze dundoli ni. ... Paya pani nye la ṅun ka bukaata...hali a yi yen chan sheli ka kuli yeli ni a paya be ni, o ku tum doo ni bori shem. To ṅuni n nye paya pani maa.

(a) M ma Shetu's description of *paya dede*

Di nyela buyi; so min mali hal' beyu pam' ka so kam mi o yela...ka o ninvuyuyo' tali ni toi che ka o yi garita ka be toi soyi yeli 'paya dede'...ka so mi beni ka kpan̄di o maŋ pam...mani ni ziya ŋɔ, ti min ti kuli chen n ti tuhi tabi soli ka payaba maa ŋma n salim ma 'paya dede'...di mi pala tuun beri ka m mali...so min yeli ni n ku toi niŋ sheli ka nti niŋ li...

(c) Key informants on the limit of a woman's authority

i. M ma Shetu

N yidana ni kani ka che m mini m bihi ŋo... Di saha m mali yaansi luyu sheli polo. - N yaan si maa luyusheli polo ka bi zooigi. Ka bi zaŋ ba na... be yino na ti tima... ni n yaang' yaakaza mboŋo ka be zaŋ kana n ti tima ni n deeg o n ti doo... N yidana maa ni kani maa o mali mabihi. Ni too yeli din ŋuna n yidan tuzo bihi ŋo yelli m bala...paya be ŋmari wayu zuyu; n ku toi zini ...Di mini n kpem ba maa zaa yoli...Paya bi ŋmari woyu zuyu.

N yi zi la n tuzo doo yili ka be zaŋ n yaangi na, disaha di kpalim la n tuzo dabbi maa nuu ni. N ku toi gari tooni ŋme nyɔyɔ, nka yeligu di puuni...

ii. Kpanalana

Kpanalana: Din lan pahi, o ku tooi zaŋ paya ti doo...Paya ku tooi niŋ doyri kpem dahin sheli kam... kpem ku tooi kani, kamani Vohindi Naa ni daa kani ŋo maa, ka paya kana ti zia ka bi zaŋ ku ŋmani na ti gbaaig o. Din' ka bi yeli ni paya bi ŋmari wayu zuyu maa:

Researcher: Di ze n ti la yelapam mbala maa bebo?...Ka di yi ti nyela daŋ maa ni so bi lahi kpem o, bee n gari o ninkurlim...yi ku toi boli o doyri kpema?

Kpanalana: Paya ŋuna so kam kpemi o mi...di koi niŋ ka ŋun kpem so...din' nye shem: o yi nye bia, o ma nwubsir o; ka o niŋ bayaana na ka o ba wubsi o; ka o ti kuli doo ka o yidana wubsi o; ka o yidana maa gba ti kpi ka o bihi gba deegi o n wubsira. Din' zuyu ŋo maa wuhiya ni paya ku tooi ŋma waya zuyu. Dahin sheli nkani ka ŋun yen niŋ doyri kpema...ŋun kuli kpalim la daŋ maa kuŋmani duu kpema...ti dundoli paya kpem mbala ...o guli la tilo...yeli kura...ku ŋmani ku gbai o, o ku toi va kuli na ti mali...

iii. Luŋ Mahamadu

...paya yi nye ninkurugu binshegu kam o ku tooi zali zaligu...nayla doo nuu m beni... Paya bi ŋmari wayu zuɣu,... paya ku tooi mali bayayuli...paya yi lan nye doɣri kpema...ka bi kana ni bi ti bo paya...o yen chaŋ bo la doo...hali daŋ maa puuni yi lan ka bidibga...o yen chaŋ bo la simnima nti zili ..n zan ba zili ka yeliba ni bi zaŋ...ni bii yaa kaza ka bi kana ni bi bo ka n yeli ni a zan o ti doo ŋo...bin' bo paga maa o sani ammaa doo n yen gari zani...

iv. Afa Tafirli

Paya ŋun bi niŋdi kpema...to di zuɣu ka Dagbambi yeli ni paya ŋuna o be kpem so maa. ... paya ni tooi mali yuun pihita ka doo mali pina anu ka toi kpuy' o. Dimi zaa yoli o ku toi bola a yuli nayla o kabgi voɣu pa 'mbe zaɣla' (14:16). To be ni booni mbe zaɣla mbe zaɣla ka di kuli nye ŋuni n nye kpem maa...
 ...Din lahi pahi... kaman paya yi mali yuun kobiga ka o tuzo mali yuun pia...yuun kobgi maa lani ku toi mali bayayuli ti yuun pia maa lana... ..din zuɣu ka be yeli ni paya bi ŋmari wayu zuɣu maa...be n yeri maa yaa...paya bi kuri wahu gba... ben yeli ni paya be ŋmari wayu zuɣu maa paya be maani bayayuli tiri doo...lala ka be yeli maa...Daŋ tilo ni tooi be paya sani o yi kpamlim ninkurugu daŋ maa ni...di mini din' be o sani maa zaa yoli,..nyin' ku tooi da noo n chang ka o mali li ti a...Nyin yen kari mi ka o lee yela 'bolimi a yaba yaa ka za yuli, a yabi yaa ka za tee mi o yela...ŋuni mmi kpiin' kura maa...ka o wuhi ra be yuya...di zugu paya bi maani bayayuli tiri doo...

...Dang tilo ni too be paga sani o yi kpamlim ninkurugu dang maa ni...di mini din be o sani maa zaa yoli,..nyini ku toi da noo tsang ka o malli ti a...Nyin yen kari mi ka o lee yela 'bolimi a yab yaa ka za yuli, a yabi yaa ka za tee mi o yela...nuni mmi kpiin kura maa...ka o wuhi ra bi yuya...di zugu paga bi maani bagayuli tiri doo...

v. Excerpt from *Dagbon Kaya ni Wahi* (Tia Sulemana, 1969:43-44).*Dagbon bihi wubsibu*

Dagbon bihi wubsibu lula zii bunahi zuɣu. Dini n nye bidibsi wubsibu, bipuyinsi wubsibu, nabihi wubsibu ni tarimbi bihi mi wubsibu. To be mi yi yen zaŋ bia maa ti ti ŋun yen wubsi o ŋo be yeri mi ni tumo ŋo yi paai ŋun yeli mi o pirba ŋo ni be ti o la yuli, bee kuli siɣra be bi ti o la dokuɣu ŋmara. ..To be yi yeli o ŋŋo o gba baŋ ya ni o kuli yen wubsi la bia maa. A maa o ka yiko ni o zaŋ o niŋ fukumsi. O kuli yen wubsi o mi ka o ti bi paya ka o zaŋ o tahi ti ti o banim ka be mi zaŋ o ti doo. To amaa be yi zaŋ o ti o ka yeli o ni o zaŋ o bo dokuɣu, to dinŋuna di niŋ korgili. Doo zaa yi dɛamdi o bee n sɔŋdi o dokuɣu o ni tooi tiri wuhi **bia** ba nim ka be zaŋ **bia** ŋo ti ŋun dɛamdi o ŋo. Dagbon kali soli zuɣu paya

be zaṇḍi **bia** tiri doo. Dinzuṇu ka Dagban ninkura yeri ni paya beṇmari woṇu zuṇu la.

(d) Afa Tafirli on the woman as a child

Paya ka ninkurugu... be bi wubsir o naai ra...o yi nye payasarli bi yen wubsir o mi ..di yi pa o ma o pirba...ka o yi ni maa ni, o doo yili kundi dali ka a zaṇ o zili n naan yi lahi wubsi o wubsir palli yaha ka naan yi zaṇ o tahi...dama o yiri la yili ni o loo yili... O yi paai yili palli maa ni ka o yidana yili nim...disaha bi mi gba lahi yen pilo mi wumsibu yaha...be ni bori ni o be shem...lala ka bi lahi yen gbibi o haali ka o ti gbai kpamdi. Ka o bihi me yili....be yi zaṇo kuli di saha o lahi tayla yili maa...bi lahi yen pilo la wumsibu maa

(e) Transcript of anecdote

Doo n daa yi sambani polo n kuli yiṇa ka gbibi galli. O ni paai, o boli la a paga na n ti zaṇ galli maa ti o ka yeli o ni o gbibi li venyalinga ni dama o nyevili be la galli maa ni; ni di yi ti ṇma dahin sheli o mi ni kpi. Di saha ka paya maa kpe duu nti suu dugri tam taba zugu haali ti paai dugu din be gbinni maa, ka zaṇ galli maa nin di puuni ka naan yi labsi din bala nim maa tam taba yaha. Di bi yuui ka doo ṇo mini o paya ṇo ti zabi, ka o bu o. O ni bu o ṇo ka suli wum paya ṇo ka o dii kabi kpe duu n ti suui dugri la zaa hali ti paai galli la. Di saha n nye o yihi galli ṇo n ti wuhi o yidana ka yelo, ‘Lihima a nyevilli bela n nuuni, zuṇo a naai ya’. Doo ṇo ti yen yeli sheli la ka o dii zaṇ galli bahi tiṇa, ka yeli, ‘ka a zaa maa mbala?’ Di saha ka doo guhim guhim o zuṇu ka yeli, ‘Dagbamba yetoga maa shiri nyela yelmanli. Paya yi baṇ a daashili a naaiya. Paya ka naani. Galli maa binshegu ka dini, di kuli nyela no galli.’

APPENDIX III**Transcripts of conversations****(a) Wanzam's conversation with woman**

Woman: Ban boŋo nim bana...ban yela so... Dagban doo ŋun kuli yen zaŋla kawan

kpalaŋ tili a...zaa mbala...ka bori ni a kana ka bindirigu ti zeya...

Wanzam: Abaa ...ti soŋdi ya...)

Woman: Ya?...hmm... o mi yi yen di a fiila di bi ŋmani ka man ŋuni n daa chaŋ ti zaŋ a

na...kaman yurlim daa be yi sunsuuni ...nkuli yela ŋo...

Wanzam: Ka lala n nyeli...)

Woman: Ya ka di pa lala?...

(b) Conversation with Hairdresser

Hairdresser: Nyema bohimi o ni o paai ti payabu la?

1st Man: Amina, a yidana ka a yeli ni bi bohi o ni o paai payabu maa?

Hairdresser: eeh,

1st Man: A bi mali, ŋuni n nye a payi paai ra?

Hairdresser: Ai, m bi mali wula? Nemamaa pala sambani ni. Ti mi yi yina so lan ka yili maani.

2nd Man: Din ŋuna a di paairi o mi ha ti bohi o. A ni zini ka tahi ha ni sokam wum ni a yeli mi ni o paai payabu maa, a bi ti o jilima mbala.

Hairdresser: Ai, na daa ha yetoŋa mbala.

1st Man: (*In an undertone*) Yim o yela ni. Ma o yidana maa tinzunbilla mbala.

2nd Man: Ehee. Di zuŋu.

(c) Conversation with shop keepers

(i)

Event: Casual conversation

Topic: Discussing a dispute between a non-present friend of the two women and her husband.

Zalia: eh

noises

Shani: ...ye de, ye O nniŋdi shem maa...ye dee... []

Rauf: ...che ka di chaŋ ŋo ha...

Zalia: din zuŋu paya maa maŋ maŋa mbori o...mbori doo ŋo maa...[]

Afa: A gba mali zini, nyin ba nzia soli maani

- Zalia: ka doo ɲo maa mi mini Ziina na layinla duu...O na ka yiko din yen niɲ...
Din saha ka pay' so ɲun nye bazawara... ka yeli ni o yen...ɲun maɲ
maɲ m boro... ni o yen bo la duu haayi, ka be ni maa ni. O yi kana ti
gbe o sani dab' ayi, ka kuli o yiɲ dab ayi []
- Shani: doo maa n'yeli maa?
- Zalia: Paga ɲo n wuhi doo ɲo shem maa...[]
- Shani: oooi
- Zalia: ka doo maa mi naan yeli ni o maa mi o ni. Doo maa ɲun yeli mi, ni o
ku di Ziina amaana... ehe...kaafin ka o ti yen mbo lala nir maa...o
bori mi ni o nye ligri ti Ziina...ka o walinda...ehe...ni ka bo duu ...bi
mi yiɲ' maa polti na beni...ni mme, n walgi Ziina; ni o ku di o
amaana...Amaa Ziina mi ni na ka o nuu ni nniɲdi bela bela maa di che
mi ka o nyia...ehee..O yi kuli niɲ binsheyu ka .. doo ɲo pun yeli 'di
zaɲ a fara nyinyiyu nyi ma...ha ha ha ha ha []
- Shani: ɲu lee yeli ni o di zaɲ o nyinyiyu....[]
- Zalia: doo ɲo nyeri o ɲo...(laughter)
- Shani: ooo ni Ziina di zaɲ o fara [nyinyu nyi o.]
- Zalia: ni o di zaɲ o fara nyinyiyu nyi o
- Shani: Ooo amaa doo maa ɲun bi karti o ...[]
- Zalia: doo maa bi kari ti..o mini doo maa bi zabira
- Shani: A maa o ni kuli baɲ ni o bori la paya so maa []
- Zalia: ehee
- Shani: oi
- Zalia: O mini doo maa bi zabira

(ii)

- Zalia: ...kwana mani n da, mani n niɲdi bin'bo, mani n niɲdi bin'bo...ka di
ɲmani la *force* n nyela...
- Shani: ɲun' lee yeli lala maa?
- Hajia: Mr Ahmed n daa yeri o paya...kaman yaa, o nyeli ni o siyri kulgi maa,
kaman
pompi yi ti kpari...
- Shani : [ehh]
- Zalia : laughing
- Hajia: ...ka bi zaɲ gaya nniɲ o *pick-up* ni...[
- Shani [oo,...oo...εεhn]
- Hajia: a kpahin lala bebo? Bee bi chaɲ la maneeke
- Shani : εεhn
- Hajia: ...maneeke ka foɲ maa ni...kabi zaɲdi kawana maa kanna kpe...di
yi niɲ yetoya o yerila di zaa...
- Zalia: ...ɲun maɲ maɲa n pil' li fa oo... tun ti n be Damango....o yi chaɲ ti
kpuyi o
kawana...o yen zaɲ mi chaɲ...ma o bori la diffu maa...

- Shani: ɛɛɛhn
 Zalia: dinzuyu o yen zaŋ mi chaŋ ti ti maneeka nim ŋo...ka bi febi [eh]...
 Rauf: ...ka pobsi yihi diffu maa zaŋ ti o...
 Zalia: ...o bi yen che ka bi pobsi ka zaŋ diffu maa,...o yen zaŋ mi na ka n pobsi li... ka deli kawana maa
 Shani: mmmm
 Zalia: ...ka di kuui, ka tooi tin bori sheli lohi...ma nyini n niŋ, ka mani yeli naa niŋ...di
 yi ti.....*apart from* febu maa gba, nembu maa... o daa ka di puuni...
 Self: Ka ŋuni yetoga n lee kuli bala
 Zalia: Mr Ahmed kati kuli...
 Rauf: ...oooo ka daa Mr Ahmed ntaairi ni ŋuni nnemdi maneeka maa?...ooo
 ...din ŋuna yelimaŋli ka o yeli maa.
 Zalia: Nŋo yaa...din tahili ka o ti yeli shem ŋo ka n yen yeli ŋo oo ...Ti n' be Damango...
 Self: [eh]..
 Zalia: ...ti yiŋ maa mini *kantiin* daa wagi pam...
 Self: aaan...ma n mi Damango...n mi Damango...
 Zalia: ..yili mi daa bi tabi ti...to din zuyu di yi nye la n zili mi...bihi mi beni,...Rahima beni ka...ka... ehm...Rams beni...Rams mi pa...bi pa bihi gba...Rams daa gari ka...o yuli?...Naamawu...ka Rahima be ka Mpaye...ka n'yen kpabi Rams ka zhi kawana,
 Hajia: ka yen vo eehn...
 Zalia: ...ka vori Rahima...
 Self: o yea]
 Zalia: ...a nyeya bebo; ...nyin' maŋ maŋa, ma din mali vi gba zaŋ ti a...
 Shani: lala n nyeli...
 Zalia: Ka a kpuyi ti niŋ... ka ti yi ti shee *canteen* maa, ka ti nem...n deli dinni...di saha din zeya maa, ma di ku lan tibsaa... ka n lan zaŋ kuna ...sheli ni ka a mini ba beni...m mini a ko nko...to ka di niŋ haali ka ti ti kana yeŋo...ti n kana yeŋo... man' gba ku sayi gba ni a gba ...ni a gba niŋdi lala...[]
 Rauf: ...ni yeli ni tiŋ doyrili maa, ehee Dagban tiŋ' maa ŋuna a ...to e heee..]
 Zalia: ...di yen ŋmani la kamani dee n nyen a mi bee yetoy' sheli...
 Rauf: tɔɔ...eheee
 Zalia: to amaa o yi chaŋ...ti ni labi na yaŋo, o yi chaŋ ti kpuyi kawana maa *agric* n kana, o lahi ya n zaŋmi chaŋ maneeka ni ka bi ti febi, ka ti pobsi, eh hee ka niŋ...hali sima...ŋun bi sayri ka...kaman nir niyi da sim' moli daa ni ...o ku sayi ...ni a niŋ mi di zaa...man' ni be n yiŋa n zi zim nembu...ammaa di zaa ni a niŋ ma ...ka a niŋda...kom mi yi kani, a gba maŋ maŋa a *yuusir* la kom maa...a
 Self: ...hali n loori bil' ŋo gba...ma ti zaa niŋ lala...n looio bil'...n loori bil ŋo, mani n daa min kuli chani ka gaya be dini ..n yi yen kuli ka nzaŋ doli *wata waksi* ni ...ti toi kom...

- Zalia: *too... too..*
- Self: to dama a yi bi niŋ lala; ye ka yi yen nya kom?
- Zalia: Ye ka yi yen nya kom?
- Shani: yi zaa wahala mbala...
- Zalia: Ti zaa yen kpuyila ziya yaa, n gbai rashia bangulu, n chanŋ ginda...awaana ka ti yen nya, n naan yi toi. Naponŋ yini maa di bin yen sayi ti...
- Shani: ...ka o zaŋ niŋ *pick up* ni...
- Zalia: ...yiŋ tuma ti ku tooi tum yiŋ tuma...a yi yen chanŋ *ofisi* ka che ka ti..to dini n nye n daa ti mali...Ka n ti mali Mpaga puu yaa... a yi chanŋ ti zi kawana...n ku toi kurum...to din zuyu yaa... a yi lan niŋ, nyin che ka bi pobsi li din ni ka...ka yeli ba ni a bori la diffu maa...bi yi pobsi, ka a nye bela tiba...ka o ye' ni *noo* ni...Ziina nim zaa n daa chemi ka bi kani na n ti pobsir kawana maa...
- Rauf: .. a nyeya Dagbon mboŋo maa, ka Damongo...
- Zalia: ...ka ti ti yen yaai kawana ka n yeli Mr Ahmed dim suglo, che ka n yaai kawana maa niŋ ka bihi ŋo chanŋ ...kaai!!!...ka o dii tai...'mani n sigri kuliga, mani nnemdi maneeka...mani n niŋdi bimbo...*LAUGHTER ALL OVER*
- Rauf: : ha, ha, ha, ha...Dagbantali maa yiysi mi maa...ŋuni n siyri kuliga...ha, ha...o nyee n nyoni maa...
- Afa: ...*di be veli mi...*
- Hajia: ...*kaman di be veli mi wula?*
- Zalia: *wula mbi vela?*... N ŋo yaa...ti bori ya gari yi nim ni niŋdi ..ma ti nim' ŋuna yi soŋdi ti mi maa...da lir n yen niŋ ka di kana lala maa...*eehn hee*... bihi maa ni yen zi bini maa... toyulima ti ni kuli be sheli ŋo ...ti yiŋ maa mini maneeka ni...ti yen chanŋ la Kar' Na guŋ gbini.. a nyeya bebo...n naan yi chanŋ di puuni maa ha n ti nem...
- Mustafa: Yi yiŋ maa ni mini maneeka maani waya?
- Zalia: di waya....a nyeya bebo?...ka n yeli... dim sulyo che ka ti zaŋ nniŋ na...a kuli yen chanŋ la nimaa ni... palli maa zuyu ha ka a yen shee ba ...ka bi zi li paai ha...ka di nyela... 'mani n siyri kuliga...mani...ha ha ha...mani n nemdi maneeka...he he he...
- Shani: A wumda...? ashee agba kurila lari lala...? ...ka lan kana ti yerti..
- Afa: Bi yiŋ maa ni lari beni ooo...nayla ŋun bi nyeli mi...
- Zalia: Man' dii yeli yaa. 'zalimi ma kpe ...'
- Rauf: *A nyeŋo yin' daa be Damongo o daa kompleeni ra? ...ehhe...kpe ni nye Dgban tiŋ maa, nawuni zugu so yi kuli nye a aa bi yen yelimi ni Mr Ahmed ŋuna ni o pga ŋo nyeŋo...*
- Zalia: Ti n daa be Damongo hali sayim gba o daa tori mi...O yi kuli kana tilgi maa di waya ŋo maa...ka o nya ka nyen...o yen kami na ti deegi [S: eee] n tora...di *tam* maa Rahima ku too to
- Shani: Nyema o yi niŋ lala kpeŋo... o bi mi o ni yen niŋ shem ka so kpena dundoŋ maa
ni

Rauf: Bi dii yen zaŋ o mi yi.

Zalia: To dini n nye ti ni ʒi daa ŋo ni ŋo, o ti ...o suhu n ti kuli yen bora ka o kana ti kpuyi ya...a ku toi yeli o: dim suylo a yi kuna nnyeli...nnyeli...'chemi ya tiŋa...chemi ya tiŋ tsan...yi mbi pag' Naawuni maa...chemi tiŋ' paai ti nya...mini yi tabi..kpabiri la bihi...ka ʒi ʒili...ka chaŋ maali ni maali...yuu yi paai ka o yidan bi lahi che o...*several voices laughing*...

Afa: Konseeti mbala...

Zalia: ...to di zugu...a kuli yi soli...a tseni mi...o mi yi bora...o yi kuna ka o *kooli* na...

Yi na be ʒishee bee...ka n yeli ti na beni...ka ti chaŋ...

