NATURAL GENDER CLASSIFIERS IN DAGBANI

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Dagbani, a Gur language spoken in Northern Region of Ghana, is not a gender sensitive language. Like English, Dagbani has no concept of grammatical gender (where nouns are categorised as belonging to a certain gender class - masculine, feminine or neuter - and other parts of speech connected to the noun must agree). Apart from the nouns that exhibit natural masculinity and femininity of an entity like ba 'father', **ma** 'mother', **doo** 'man' and **paɣa** 'woman' only to mention a few, most nouns referring to living things are genderless nouns. The names used to refer to these living things do not distinguish the gender of these entities. To show that an entity is male or female, some markers have to be added to the root forms of these neutral nouns to distinguish their gender. The combination of the gender classifiers and nouns to form compounds are phonologically motivated to some extent, despite the exceptions. This paper therefore examines the markers which are added to noun root forms to distinguish gender (male or female) and the way these markers are distributed in Dagbani.

Le dagbani, une langue parlée dans le septentrion du Ghana, est une de ces langues dont le genre n'est pas lexicalisé. Comme en anglais, le dagbani n'a pas de concept de genre grammatical (où les noms sont catégorisés selon qu'ils appartiennent à un genre de classe – féminin, masculin ou neutre- et où les autres parties du discours connectées au nom doivent s'accorder). A part les noms qui montrent une masculinité ou une féminité naturelle d'une entité telle que **ba** 'père', **ma** 'mère' **doo**, 'homme', et **paɣa** 'femme', pour ne citer que ceux-là, la plupart des noms qui se réfèrent aux êtres vivants sont des noms sans genre. Les noms utilisés pour désigner ces êtres vivants ne distinguent pas le genre de ces entités. Pour montrer qu'une entité est mâle ou femelle, il y a des marqueurs qui sont ajoutés aux formes du radical de ces noms neutres pour identifier leur genre. La combinaison des classificateurs de genre et des noms pour former des mots composés est, dans une certaine mesure, phonologiquement motivée ; il y a bien sûr des exceptions. Cet article a pour objet d'examiner les marqueurs qui sont ajoutés aux formes du radical du nom pour distinguer le genre (mâle ou femelle) et leur distribution en dagbani.

0. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to discuss natural gender classifiers (henceforth NGCs) of living things in Dagbani, a Gur language spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana. Dagbani is a central Gur language and has been classified as Northern Oti-Volta language, Naden (1989).

Almost all living things in the world are categorised as male or female. Living things that are categorised to have sex include animates and plants in Dagbani. The classification of living things on the basis of sex is referred to in this paper as natural or biological gender. Natural gender classification is mostly based on animacy, (Corbett 2011b). A 'mystic' living thing which is believed to have sex in Dagbani is the **luŋa** 'drum'. It is categorised to be male or female on the basis of its sound quality and size. Non-living things such as **kuɣili** 'stone', **yili** 'house' and **dɔɣu** 'stick' and many others do not have sex and will not be dealt with in this discussion because they cannot be categorised sexually. Sex is a biological characteristic of humans and animals. It is culturally bound and varies from society to society or language to language. What some societies will consider being masculine, the same thing will be regarded as feminine in some other societies. In gender languages for instance, the form of the noun and its agreement systems normally determine the

noun's gender class[1] and not the referent entity. Such classifications are not based on natural gender of the referent entity. In some contexts sex is synonymous with gender as gender and class are sometimes co-referential, (Awedoba 1996:9). In non-linguistic literature, while sex is a state of being either a male or female, gender is a social or physical condition of being male or female, or " sex category, or the concepts of male and female identity", Kraaikamp (2010:1) . In this paper the terms natural gender, sex and gender will be used interchangeably to refer to natural classification of living things as males and females. In most languages including Dagbani, a generic term may be used to refer to a particular species of animals, for instance **wahu** 'horse'. This term does not differentiate sex. It denotes a male or female horse. How then do we refer to a male horse or female horse? This paper therefore focuses on NGCs of animates and sometimes trees by the use of adjectival bound morphemes translated into English as male and female, (Olawsky 1999:113). Cross-linguistically, languages express distinctions based on sex and the method varies from language to language. While some languages use separate lexical items (based on different roots or derivationally linked), other languages use qualifying items meaning male and female (Corbett 2011b). Discussing gender marking in Dagbani, Abu-Bakari (1980:77) argues that **laa, daa, lɔɣu, dɔɣu** and **dibiga** denote maleness and **nyaŋ** and **saa** on the other hand denote femaleness. He remains silent over the use of **puɣiŋga** as a gender classifier. Abu-Bakari's treatment of these 'gender markers' is superficial as he only assigns these markers to noun roots. I argue in this paper that these are NGCs and not 'gender' markers as Abu-Bakari (1980) claims. This is because there is no syntactic evidence in the language to support his claim. Normally in gender languages (Russian, German and Swahili for instance), there are agreement systems and Dagbani lacks such agreement systems. The language rather marks natural gender. Natural gender in Dagbani has received no attention and this paper attempts to discuss the assignment and agreement systems.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 0 is the introduction. Section 1 discusses the gender nouns in Dagbani. Section 2 focuses on the NGCs in Dagbani and Section 3 discusses the assignment of these classifiers. Section 4 concludes the discussion.

1. GENDER NOUNS

There are few nouns in Dagbani that mark natural gender. For instance, nouns like **ba** 'father' and **ma** 'mother' denote male and female. The same **ba** 'father' and **ma** 'mother' are regarded as lexical contrasts. In Ilocano (Rubino 1997:75-6 cited in Aikhenvald 2000:314), natural gender of humans is distinguished lexically, e.g. **lalaki** 'boy' and **babai** 'girl'. Dagbani happens to be a language with few lexical contrasts. In some languages including English, such lexical oppositions may be instantiated through derivational morphology, as exemplified in **poet** and **poetess,** (Corbett 2011a:§30.1). What happens in English is opposed to Dagbani as the female gender is derived from the male gender. The case in Dagbani is rather similar to Kanuri (a Northern Nigeria language) to some extent, (Hutchison 1981, cited in Corbett 2011a) where lexical nouns contrast. There are other contrastive nouns which are derived from neutral nouns, e.g., **no-nyaŋ** 'hen' and **no-lɔɣu** 'cock' as the

[1] Awedoba (1979) cited in Awedoba (1996:9) defines class as a 'grouping of nouns or nominals on syntactic grounds which exhibit common morphological and syntactic patterns such as suffix and prefix selections as well as choice of determiners'. In Bantuist tradition, the term 'noun class' refers to singular and plural forms of a noun and the agreement markers they trigger on modifiers and on the predicate. The plural and singular markers are regarded as 'gender', Aikhenvald (2000:9).

neutral noun itself does not denote gender. There are other nouns which do not contrast but denote male gender (**nachima**, 'male servant' and **ŋahiba** 'maternal uncle') and female gender (**priba** 'paternal aunt').

(1) Lexical contrast nouns

	Male		Female	
a.	**ba**	'father'	**ma**	'mother'
b.	**doo**	'man'	**paɣa**	'woman'
c.	**bukpaha**	'wizard'	**sonya**	'witch'

There are other categories of animate nouns formed as the result of compounding lexical nouns and age-marking morphemes. The nouns often denote human gender and can be used to denote specifically single kinship terms like 'father' and 'mother'. When this kinship terms are suffixed with age-marking morphemes, a process similar to Munda (Indian language :Bhattacharya 1976) occurs, where the sex-based gender nouns often come at the initial position. For instance, **ba** 'father' and **ma** 'mother' on one hand can be suffixed with age-marking morphemes like **kpɛma** and –**pra** respectively to derive **bakpɛma** 'father's senior brother' and **makpɛma** 'mother's senior sister' on one hand and **mapra** 'mother's junior sister' and **bapra** 'father's junior brother on the other. Unlike –**pra** which is a bound morpheme, **kpɛma** is a lexical free noun

2. NATURAL GENDER CLASSIFIERS

Classifiers in general can (1) 'occur as morphemes in surface structures under specifiable conditions' and (2) 'they have meaning' (Allan 1977:285). The classifiers according to Allan (1977) are categorised into seven which include, material, shape, consistency, size, location, arrangement and quanta. Classifiers have properties like numeral, demonstrative, concordial, verb-incorporated and genitive classifiers as exemplified in Tariana, (Aikhenvald 1994). The NGCs in Dagbani seem to have meaning. Their function as gender classifiers in Dagbani cannot be disputed as they are solely used to distinguish male animates from females referent nouns. The NGCs are anchored to noun root. In Dagbani a simple noun is made up of a root and a noun class marker. It is only nouns and adjectives that have been assigned the noun class status, (Hudu 2007:2). (Detailed information on noun class system in some Gur languages can be found in Olawsky 1999, 2004 for Dagbani; Nsoh 2002, 1997 for Gurunɛ and Bodomo & Marfo 2007 for Dagaare and Akan). Like nouns or adjectives, all NGCs can be pluralised. But they are identified with adjectives more than nouns. In Dagbani alone, six different NGCs indicating maleness as shown in Table 1 below are identified. Each NGC agrees with some particular nominal roots in the language. In the table below are singular and plural forms of the male NGCs markers and their roots.

Table 1: NGCs for male gender in Dagbani

	Singular	Root	Plural	Gloss
1	**doo**	**do-**	**dabba**	male
2	**-dibiga**	**-dib-**	**-dibisi**	male
3	**-laa**	**-la-**	**-lahi**	male
4	**-lɔɣu**	**-lɔ-**	**-lɔri**	male
5	**-daa**	**-da-**	**-dahi**	male
6	**-dɔɣu**	**-dɔ-**	**-dɔri**	male

When we look at the NGCs in Table 1 above, there is no classifier that distinguishes age difference among the masculine classifiers. They all indicate maleness of an entity. A critical look at the above NGCs reveals a remarkable resemblance between some forms, for instance, between -**dɔɣu** and -**lɔɣu** and between –**daa** and –**laa**. It is only **/d/** and **/l/** that contrast the forms, thus making them completely different NGCs in form except meaning. Olawsky (1999:113) notes 'the alternation of **/l/** surfacing as [**d**] after **/n/**' and argues that it may not be phonologically motivated.

NGC systems in some Gur languages in Ghana seem to show the similar pattern, for instance Nabt seems to have only four male gender classifiers which include: **dibk** in **nu-dibk** 'cock', **-daa** in **kpa'aŋ-daa** 'male guinea-fowl, **dɔɔk** in **sakɔ-dɔɔk** 'male cat' and -**ribk** in **bu-ribk** 'boy'. It can be argued that **/d/** alternates to [**r**] in **dibk** and **ribk**. Talni exhibits three male NGCs such as –**dibik** in **bu-dibik** 'boy', -**duug** in **nɔ-duug** 'cock' and –**daa** in **kpan-daa** 'guinea-fowl'. Mampruli exhibits two. **dibiga** in **bi-dibiga** and -**doo** in **jankun-doo**. **/d/** sometimes alternates to [**r**] in some instances. In Dagaare, three NGC systems are identified and they are -**dɔɔ** in **bi-dɔɔ** 'boy' –**dalee** in **pe-dalee** 'ram' and –**daa** in **nɔ-daa** 'cock'. The researcher personally interacted with the native speakers of Nabt, Talni, Gurunɛ, Mampruli and Dagaare, when he wanted to compare Dagbani data with other neighbouring Gur languages.

There are also four female NGCs and they are **paɣa**, **nyaŋ**, -**puɣiŋga** and -**saa**. The term –**saa** denotes female youthfulness, while the rest do not show age difference. These classifiers agree with animate noun roots.

Table 2: Female gender classifiers in Dagbani

	Singular	Root	Plural	Gloss
1	**paɣa**	**paɣ-**	**paɣba**	female
2	**nyaŋ**	**-nya-**	**-nyama**	female
3	**-saa**	**-sa-**	**-sahi**	female young
4	**-puɣiŋga**	**-puɣiŋ-**	**-puɣinsi**	female

3. ASSIGNMENT OF NGCS

Simple nouns like **doo** 'man' and **paɣa** 'woman' are free words. They can also mean male and female respectively when it comes to gender of humans. This is because all humans fall into this classificatory system. For instance, a human being is either **doo** 'male' or **paɣa** 'female'. This may be extended to include all living things. Even hermaphrodites identify themselves with a particular sex in the language. The meanings of all sex terms to be discussed below are therefore related to these words in terms of meaning. For instance, when we want to find the sex of a newly born baby, this question is often asked:

(2). **O dɔɣi la do-o bee paɣ-a**?
3SG give-birth FOC male-SG or female-SG
'Has she given birth to a male or female?'

3.1 HUMAN SEX MARKERS

3.1.1 -**doo** and -**paɣa** as classifiers

The classifiers **doo** and **paɣa** are exclusively reserved for humans and they are used contrastively to distinguish sex. They do not make any reference to age in the language. They are often identified with personal, ethnic, town and professional or occupational names to denote the maleness and femaleness of the referent person. It is important to note that **doo** and **paɣa** are not bound morphemes but rather, they are free words merged with other nouns to denote gender in Dagbani. However, in Gurunɛ, Nabt, Talen and Mampruli, the word **doo** (realised in the languages as **dɔɔ**, **dɔɔk**, **duug** and **doo** respectively) is a gender classifier of both humans and animals. In traditional grammar, **doo** 'male' and **paɣa** 'female' are identified with proper nouns in Dagbani. There are instances of consonantal alternations when -**doo** is attached to some roots to distinguish sex. According to Bendor-Samuel & Wilson (1969 cited in Olawsky 1999:255), **/d/** is realised as [**r**] after vowels and consonants like **/b/**, **/g/** and **/s/**. They claim that **/g/** and **/s/** in coda positions are always realised as [**ɣ**] and [**h**] respectively. This means that the consonant **/d/** in -**doo** will change to [**r**] accordingly as demonstrated below.

Typical Dagbani personal names do not distinguish gender. To make them gender specific, they are merged with -**doo** and -**paɣa**.

(3) Personal names with -**doo** and -**paɣa**

Genderless Name	**Doo** 'male'	**Paɣa** 'female'
a. **Tia**	**Tidoo/Tiroo**	**Tipaɣa**
b. **Azima**	**Azindoo**	**Azimpaɣa**
c. **Napari**	**Naporoo**	**Napapaɣa**
d. **Wumbee**	**Wumbedoo/wumberoo**	**Wumbepaɣa**
e. **Niina**	**Niindoo**	**Niimpaɣa**

Apart from consonant alternations, there are also assimilation processes that occur in some of the names. For instance in (3b) **/d/** assimilates **/m/** and changes it to

/n/ and also in (3e) **/p/** assimilates **/n/** to **/m/**. Also in (3c), when the root **Napa-** and -**doo** are merged, **/d/** is changed to [**r**]. This alternation between /d/ and /r/ has been observed by Bendor-Samuel & Wilson (1969) and other researchers on Dagbani. The same is seen in (3a, d). The long vowels assimilate **/a/** and change it to **/o/** in the same example. The same **/d/** is changed to [**r**] when it is positioned immediately after [**ɣ**] as seen in (4a) below. When that happens, the vowels in -**doo** assimilate the final vowel of the root totally.

Sometimes human beings are identified by their ethnic groups or tribes. This is a common practice in Dagbon. Their personal names do not matter any longer. Some natives acquire the above gender terms as their personal names through customary practice as their biological parents allow them to be 'bought' on the naming ceremony day. The tribe of the buyer becomes the child's name and the child's sex is added to the name.

(4) Ethnic groups with -**doo** and -**paɣa**

Genderless Names	**Doo** ' man,male'	**Paɣa** 'woman, female'	Gloss
a. **zabaɣa**	**zabaɣdoo/roo**	**zabaɣpaɣa**	Gonja
b. **kambɔŋa**	**kambɔndoo**	**kambɔmpaɣa**	Akan
c. **aligbe**	**aligbedoo/roo**	**aligbepaɣa**	Ewe
d. **moo**	**moroo**	**mopaɣa**	Moshi
e. **guriŋga**	**gurindoo**	**gurimpaɣa**	Gurushi
f. **silimiiŋa**	**silimiindoo**	**silimiimpaɣa**	white person

There are instances where one is identified by the place s/he comes from. The term **doo** or **paɣa** is added to the place name as shown in (5) below to mark gender.

(5) Place names with -**doo** and -**paɣa**

Place name	**Doo** 'man'	**Paɣa** 'woman'	Gloss
a. **malshɛɣu**	**malshɛɣudoo**	**malshɛɣupaɣa**	from Malshegu
b. **kumbungu**	**kumbundoo**	**kumbumpaɣa**	from Kumbungu
c. **nyɔŋni**	**nyɔndoo**	**nyɔmpaɣa**	from the forest region
d. **saafa**	**saafadoo**	**saafapaɣa**	from south
e. **tiŋkpaŋa**	**tiŋkpandoo**	**tiŋkpampaɣa**	from village

Human beings are identified by their profession and are assigned gender terms when -**doo** and -**paɣa** are attached to the professions. It should however be noted that in a larger Ghanaian society there are some biases in gender assignment to these professions/designations. Professions/designations like doctors and tailors are often associated with men so, one is more likely to hear **dɔɣitepaɣa** and **teelapaɣa** than **dɔɣitedoo** and **teeladoo** as speakers try to point out that the doctor or tailor in question is a female likewise **nɛɛsidoo** will be heard regularly than **nɛɛsipaɣa.**

(6) Professions with -**doo** and -**paɣa**

Profession	**doo** 'male'	**Paɣa** 'female'	Gloss
a. **dɔɣite**	**dɔɣitedoo**	**dɔɣitepaɣa**	doctor
b. **nɛɛsi**	**nɛɛsidoo**	**nɛɛsipaɣa**	nurse
c. **teela**	**teeladoo**	**teelapaɣa**	tailor/seamstress
d. **jinwara**	**jinwaridoo**	**jinwaripaɣa**	seer

Unlike the above, there are instances where **doo** and **paɣa** will precede other nouns in compounding process. This is often done to derive male and female twin names in Dagbani. The vowel **/o/** in **do**- is changed to **/a/** in the process. This is realised when doo 'male' is merged with another word to form a compound name (personal name). The vowel **/o/** is changed to **/a/** before compounding. But nothing happens to the vowels in **paɣa**.

(7) Compounding **doo/paɣa** with other nouns

a.	**do-o** +	**wun-i**	=>	**dawuni**
	male-SG	god-SG		personal name
b.	**do-o** +	**na-a**	=>	**danaa**
	male-SG	chief-SG		personal name
c.	**paɣ-a** +	**wun-i**	=>	**paɣwuni**
	female-SG	god-SG		personal name
d.	**paɣ-a** +	**na-a**	=>	**paɣnaa**
	female-SG	chief-SG		personal name

There are instances where **doo** 'man' and **paɣa** 'woman' will merge with adjectives to derive personal names and other nouns. Vowel alternation is not realised when compounding the root **do**- 'male' and **kur-gu** 'old-SG'. But when compounding the same form with **ji-a** 'short-SG' and **kɔ-ɣu** 'slim-SG', -**gɔrli** 'journey'and -**koli** 'lonely' the vowel **/o/** alternates to **/a/** following the same process in (7) above.

(8). **Doo** and adjectives

a.	**do-o** +	**kur-gu**	=>	**dokurgu**
	male-SG	old-SG		personal name
b.	**do-o** +	**ji-a**	=>	**dajia**
	male-SG	short-SG		personal name
c.	**do-o** +	**kɔ-ɣu**	=>	**dakɔɣu**
	male-SG	slim-SG		personal name
d.	**do-o** +	**gɔr-li**	=>	**dagɔr-li**
	man-SG	journey-SG		promiscuous man -SG
e.	**do-o** +	**ko-li**	=>	**dako-li**
	man-SG	alone-SG	=>	bachelor-SG

(9) **Paɣa** and adjectives

a.	**paɣ-a**	+	**kur-gu**	=>	**pakurugu**
	woman		old-SG		personal name
b.	**paɣ-a**	+	**ʒiɛ-ɣu**	=>	**paɣʒiɛɣu**
	woman		red-SG		personal name
c.	**paɣ-a**	+	**ko-li**	=>	**pako-li**
	woman-SG		alone-SG	=>	widower-SG
d.	**paɣ-a**	+	**gɔr-li**	=>	**pagɔr-li**
	woman		journey-SG		promiscuous woman

When a noun and an adjective are combined and the result is not a compound but a noun phrase where a noun is modified by an adjective, the root vowel does not change. However, the noun loses it number marker. Consider the following examples.

(10) a.	**do-o**	+	**ji-a**	=>	**do' jia**
	man-SG		short-SG		short man-SG
b.	**do-o**	+	**kur-gu**	=>	**do' kur-gu**
	man-SG		old-SG		old man-SG
c.	**do-o**	+	**kɔ-ɣu**	=>	**do' kɔ-ɣu**
	man-SG		slim-SG		slim man- SG

3.1.2 THE GENDER CLASSIFIER **–dibga**

This classifier is normally identified with both humans and lower animals. It is very unproductive as it is identified with only two roots in the language. These roots are **bi**- 'child' and **war**- 'horse'. The gender classifier **-dibga** is assigned to the root of **war**- 'horse' to show its value. According to an informant, the assignment is culturally motivated as a horse is one of the respectable animals in Dagbon. The arrival of a horse is equated to the birth of new born child. Neighbours and relatives are duly informed and when it dies, it is given a respectable burial with firing of musketry. A young man is also appointed to attend to the needs and comfort of a horse. It is a means of transport for a respectable person in Dagbon.

Table 3: The roots identified with the classifier **-dibga**

Generic Name	Root	Gender classifier	Male	Gloss
bia 'child'	**bi-**	**-dibga**	**bidibga**	boy
wahu 'horse'	**war-**	**-dibga**	**waridibga**	stallion

3.1.3 THE GENDER CLASSIFIER **-puɣiŋga**

This is one of the markers in Dagbani that is highly unproductive. This marker occurs only twice in the language and each time it occurs, it is attached to the root **bi-** 'child' or **nabi**- 'chief's child'. **Nabi**- is analysed to consist of **naa** 'chief' and **bia**

'child'. In each case, **bi**- 'child' is still part of the root. The classifier is associated with only humans, and it does not distinguish age.

Table 4: The stems identified with the gender classifier **-puɣiŋga**

Generic Name	Root	classifier	Female	Gloss
bia 'child'	**bi-**	**-puɣiŋga**	**bipuɣiŋga**	girl
nabia 'prince/princess'	**nabi-**	**-puɣiŋga**	**nabipuɣiŋga**	princess

3.2 NATURAL GENDER CLASSIFIERS OF LOWER ANIMALS

NGCs of a lower animal in the language are assigned by attaching the male or female gender classifier to a noun. Each classifier has to agree with a noun root it is attached to. Even though there are many gender classifiers of lower animals which mean male or female, each has a noun root it is attached to. Sometimes one cannot explain why a particular gender classifier agrees with a noun root. We shall now assign the NGCs to noun roots. We will focus on the male gender classifiers first.

3.2.1 MALE NGCs

The speakers of the language sometimes attach certain features to genderless nouns to denote maleness. These features are NGCs that are attached to root forms of nouns to distinguish gender. These NGCs are specifically reserved for lower animals. As already mentioned, four classifiers are specifically reserved for lower animals and they all denote maleness and they are **dɔɣu, lɔɣu, laa** and **daa**.

3.2.1.1 THE NGC **-dɔɣu**

This gender classifier -**dɔɣu** is identified with mammals. Formally, **dɔɣu** in **baandɔɣu** 'agama lizard' used to mark gender, but presently the meaning has been semantically shifted to mean agama lizards in general. Baŋli 'lizard' is no longer used. It does not include any reptiles. These mammals have manly features. This makes the gender classifier highly unproductive. The mammals which are identified with this NGC -**dɔɣu**, do not have horns. The gender classifier can be attached to noun roots ending with nasal consonants and **/r/**. The idea that the classifier **-dɔɣu** is identified with roots ending with nasals (Olawsky 1999:113) is inconsistent with some roots. For instance, it is ungrammatical to say *__jaŋkun-dɔɣu__ or *__jaŋgbun-dɔɣu__ but it is grammatical to say **jaŋkunlɔɣu** 'male cat' or **jaŋgbunlɔɣu** 'male tiger'. Also, [**r**] is not a nasal consonant, but the gender classifier is able to attach to a root that ends with it. This classifier is highly unproductive. A clear example is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5**:** The root and the marker **-dɔɣu**

Generic Name	Root	Marker	Male	Gloss
kparli 'baboon'	**kpar-**	**-dɔɣu**	**kpardɔɣu**	male baboon
jaŋa 'monkey'	**jaŋ-**	**-dɔɣu**	**jandɔɣu**	male monkey

3.2.1.2 THE NGC **-lɔɣu**

This gender classifier is identified with birds, mammals, reptiles and trees. It is the most productive gender classifier among all the male markers. It is the underlying form of animate gender classifiers as it is the only one used in questions relating to gender of lower animals.

(11) **O nyɛla zaɣ' lɔɣu?**
3SG COP DUM SM
Is it a male?

That is why we have noun phrases (NPs) like **binlɔɣu** 'male' or **zaɣ' lɔɣu** 'male'. The other classifiers will not agree with roots like **bin**- and **zaɣ**- which function as dummy nouns. For instance, it will be weird to say ***bindɔɣu**, ***bindaa** or ***binlaa** or ***zaɣdaa**, ***zaɣdɔɣu** or ***zaɣlaa** when referring to the sex of the entity.

The Tomo dialect of Dagbani uses the classifier **-lɔɣu** to denote maleness of trees. Other dialects of the language may use different classifiers. The classifier can be attached to monosyllabic roots as well as polysyllabic roots as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: The NGC -**lɔɣu** and other roots

Generic Term	Roots	Marker	Male	Gloss
noo 'fowl'	**no-**	**-lɔɣu**	**nolɔɣu**	cock
baa 'dog'	**ba-**	**-lɔɣu**	**balɔɣu**	male dog
jaŋkuno 'cat'	**jaŋkun-**	**-lɔɣu**	**jaŋkunlɔɣu**	male cat
gbunyaɣu 'duck'	**gbunyà-**	**-lɔɣu**	**gbunyalɔɣu**	drake
kuruchu 'pig'	**kuruchu-**	**-lɔɣu**	**kuruchulɔɣu**	boar
gɔndili 'pawpaw'	**gɔndi-**	**-lɔɣu**	**gɔndilɔɣu**	male pawpaw
gaa 'monkey-guava'	**ga-**	**-lɔɣu**	**galɔɣu**	male monkey-guava tree

3.2.1.3 THE NGC **–daa**

This classifier –**daa** is associated with mammals, birds, arachnid and insects only. Though it is considered to be associated with mammals, birds and insects, it is very selective. Among the birds, it only identifies with **kpaŋ** 'guinea-fowl'. It identifies itself with **gbuɣinli** 'lion' and **ŋamli** 'hippopotamus' in the mammalian family, **paaŋa** 'cricket' in the insect family and **nɔŋa** 'scorpion' in the arachnid family. It is very difficult to say what **gbuɣinli** 'lion', **kpaŋ** 'guinea-fowl' and **paaŋa** 'cricket' , **ŋamli** 'hippopotamus' and **nɔŋa** 'scorpion' have in common. One

noticeable feature that brings these animals together may be phonological conditioning as their roots all end with nasal consonants. But they are not the only roots that end with nasal consonants in the language; for instance it is ungrammatical to say *__jankun-daa__ or *__ŋɔn-daa__ even though the roots end with nasal consonants but they rather take the classifier __lɔɣu__ as in __jankun-lɔɣu__ 'male cat' and -__shilaa__ as __ŋɔŋshilaa__ 'male grasscutter'. The roots that take the classifier –__daa__ have CV:N or CVN syllable structures save __gbuɣin__- which has CVCVN, where C stands for any consonant, and V any vowel and N any nasal. One can therefore argue that phonology plays a major role in the determination of –__daa__ selection. This classifier is also noted to be productive. Examples are given in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Nominal roots identified with NGC **–daa**

Generic Term	Roots	Marker	Male	Gloss
paaŋa 'cricket'	**paaŋ-**	**–daa**	**paandaa**	male cricket
kpaŋ 'guinea-fowl'	**kpaan-**	**–daa**	**kpaandaa**	male guinea-fowl
gbuɣinli 'lion'	**gbuɣin-**	**–daa**	**gbuɣindaa**	male lion
ŋamli 'hippopotamus'	**ŋam-**	**-daa**	**ŋandaa**	male hippopotamus
nɔŋa 'scorpion'	**nɔŋ-**	**-daa**	**nɔndaa**	male scorpion

3.2.1.4 THE NGC –laa

The gender classifier –__laa__, is associated with mammals, insects and trees. Most animals which are associated with this classifier are domestic animals which have horns as can be seen in the case of a bull, a he-goat and a ram. They are associated with wealth in a family. In Eastern Dagbaŋ, the classifier -__laa__ is used to mark the gender of trees as Tomo dialect also uses __lɔɣu__ to denote maleness of trees. It is very difficult to say what might have necessitated __ŋɔŋli__ 'grass-cutter' to insert -__ʃi__- between the stem and the classifier. This is the first time a stem extender (as I may call it) is added to a root before a gender classifier is attached. The gender classifier is suffixed to roots ending with vowels, **/b/** and [ɣ]. One common feature about these animals is that they are herbivorous. But a question difficult to answer is what common feature has __yabili__ 'termite' got to do with the herbivorous animals?

Table 8: The roots identified with the gender classifier **-laa**

Generic Term	Root	Marker	Male	Gloss
nahu 'cattle'	**naɣ-**	**-laa**	**naɣlaa**	bull
bua 'goat'	**bu-**	**-laa**	**bulaa**	he-goat
piɛɣu 'sheep'	**piɛ-**	**-laa**	**piɛlaa**	ram
ŋɔŋli 'grass-cutter'	**ŋɔŋ-**	**-laa**	**ŋɔŋʃilaa**	male grasscutter
wɔbiga 'elephant'	**wɔb-**	**-laa**	**wɔblaa**	bull
yabili 'termite'	**yab-**	**-laa**	**yabilaa**	soldier (termite)
gɔndili 'pawpaw'	**gɔndi-**	**-laa**	**gɔndilaa**	pawpaw

3.2.2 THE FEMALE GENDER CLASSIFIERS

There are two natural gender classifiers that denote femaleness of lower animals in Dagbani. These gender classifiers like their male counterparts are merged with nominal roots to denote the femaleness of the referent entity. The female NGCs are **nyaŋ** and -**saa**. It is important to note here that **nyaŋ** is free morpheme while –**saa** is a bound morpheme.

3.2.2.1 THE FEMALE GENDER CLASSIFIER **–saa**

This gender classifier denotes the sex of young female animals, reptiles and birds. It refers to animals that have not yet given birth or laid some eggs. It is the only gender classifier in Dagbani that refers to youthfulness. It is attached to roots that end with vowels and consonants (nasals and non-nasals alike) as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: The roots identified with the gender classifier **–saa**

Generic Name	Root	Marker	Female	Gloss
bua 'goat'	**bu-**	**- saa**	**busaa**	young she-goat
nahu 'cattle'	**naɣ-**	**- saa**	**naɣsaa**	heifer
noo 'fowl'	**no-**	**- saa**	**nosaa**	pullet
piɛɣu 'sheep'	**piɛ-**	**- saa**	**piɛsaa**	young ewe
buŋa 'donkey'	**buŋ-**	**- saa**	**bunsaa**	young female. donkey

The human equivalent of –**saa** is -**sarli**. This bound morpheme does not mark gender. It is rather an age-marking morpheme. It is added to **paɣa** 'woman' to derive **paɣsarli** 'young lady'. It cannot form a compound with doo 'man' to get '***dosarli**' young man'.

Table 10: The roots identified with **sarli**.

Generic Name	Root	Marker	Female	Gloss
paɣa 'woman'	**paɣ-**	**sarli**	**paɣsarli**	young lady

Another bound morpheme associated with –**sarli**, which is also an age-marking morpheme is –**sariŋga**. This particular bound morpheme is associated with genderless human noun, nira 'person'. The root form of nira is ninvuɣ- which has been truncated to nin-. It is this form that goes with –sariŋga.

Table 11: The roots identified with –**sariŋga**

Generic Name	Root	marker	genderless noun	Gloss
nira 'person'	**ninvuɣ-**	**-sariŋga**	**ninsariŋga**	young person

3.2.2.2 THE GENDER CLASSIFIER **–nyaŋ**

The NGC -**nyaŋ** is not limited to specific animals. It denotes femaleness of mammals, birds, reptiles and insects. The gender classifier is very productive like -**saa**. The difference between the gender classifier –**nyaŋ** and –**saa** is that –**nyaŋ** is used when talking of the femaleness of an entity, be it young or old. But –**saa** denotes the femaleness of young animates only. Examples are given in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Names that are identified with the sex marker **–nyaŋ**

Generic Name	Root	Marker	Female	Gloss
bua	**bu-**	**-nyaŋ**	**bunyaŋ**	she-goat
nahu	**naɣ-**	**-nyaŋ**	**naɣnyaŋ**	cow
noo	**no-**	**-nyaŋ**	**nonyaŋ**	hen
piɛɣu	**piɛ**	**-nyaŋ**	**piɛnyaŋ**	ewe
paaŋa	**paan-**	**-nyaŋ**	**paannyaŋ**	female cricket

4. CONCLUSION

The paper has been discussing natural gender classifiers in Dagbani. It tries to classify animals on the basis of sex and assign them gender classifiers in the language. Assigning gender classifiers to nouns, some nouns did not need them, while others needed them before they could denote maleness or femaleness.

Dagbani happens to be one of the languages that assign male and female natural gender classifiers to nouns. Unlike English, both male and female nouns have gender classifiers and the female gender noun is not derived from the male gender noun as we saw in **poet** and **poetess**. Six different NGCs (-**doo**, -**daa**,- **laa, -dɔɣu, -lɔɣu** and -**dibiga**) are identified with the male gender while four gender classifiers **(-paɣa, -nyaŋ, -saa** and -**puɣiŋga**) are also associated with the female gender. Out of the six male gender classifiers, only one, **doo** 'male' is the only one solely associated with human gender. The classifier -**dibga** is identified with both humans and animals. The other four, -**daa, -laa, -dɔɣu** and -**lɔɣu** are used to mark the gender of lower animals. Out of the four female gender classifiers, two are also used to mark human gender and they are -**puɣiŋga** and **paɣa** and the other two, **-nyaŋ** and -**saa** are associated with the gender of lower animals only. Different reasons are given for the assignment of a particular gender classifier to a noun root. While some gender classifiers are arbitrarily assigned, some are also assigned based on phonological motivations. None of the assignment is semantically motivated. There are no problems when it comes to the assignment of female gender classifiers as, -**saa** is used to mark the gender of young female animals while –**nyaŋ** is reserved for adult females. The human equivalents of –**saa** are -**sarli** and -**sariŋga**.

In terms of productivity, it is found out that, -**laa, -lɔɣu** and -**doo** are very productive when it comes to male gender classifier assignments. On the other hand –**daa**, -**dibiga**, -**dɔɣu** are also highly unproductive. The female gender classifier, -**puɣiŋga** is also as highly unproductive as its contrastive counterpart, -**dibiga**.

ABBREVIATIONS

COP	Copula verb	NP	Noun Phrase
DUM	Dummy noun	SG	Singular
FOC	Focus marker	3	Third person
		SM	Same sex marker

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