

NOTES

NOTES ON TAG ANSWERS IN DAGBANI

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In Dagbani,¹ Yes/No questions may be simply answered with **iin** [iɪ] indicating agreement, or **aayi** indicating disagreement. However, in normal polite conversation these items are followed by a tag answer echoing the question, but paring the information down to its barest minimum, even to deletion of inanimate pronouns in non-subject function.

In Yes/No questions, the interrogative marker consists both of an extreme lowering of the last tonal terrace, whether high or low and of a lengthening of the last segmental phoneme. This is adequately indicated by use of a question mark, as in the official orthography. Though **iin** and **aayi** respectively indicate agreement and non-agreement, they are usually rendered in English as 'yes' and 'no', respectively, so that they seem at cross purposes with English usage in answering negative questions. It is not unusual to hear an answer such as 'Yes, he didn't come' when English is spoken.

In a one-verb answer in the non-future tense, an affirmative verb will frequently have the suffix **-ya** which may be glossed as 'non-future absolute (NFABS)'. This **-ya** is used only in the absence of any complement or emphatic particle, or of a clause initial conjunction other than the quotation marking **ni**. It can be followed by a time reference such as **zuŋo** 'today'.

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| <p>(1) a da chi maa
 you bought corn DET
 Have you bought the corn? Yes, I have.</p> | <p>iin n da-ya
 yes I bought-NFABS</p> |
| <p>(2) a nya loori maa / a nya li
 you saw car DET / you saw it
 Have you seen the car / it? Yes, I have.</p> | <p>iin n nya-ya
 yes I saw-NFABS</p> |
| <p>(3) a nya doo maa / a nya o
 you saw man DET / you saw him
 Have you seen the man / him? Yes, I have.</p> | <p>iin n nya o
 yes I saw him</p> |
| <p>(4) o chaŋ Tamali / o chaŋ ni
 he went place^name / he went there
 Has he gone to Tamale / there? Yes, he has.</p> | <p>iin o chaŋ-ya
 yes he went-NFABS</p> |

In (3) the object is animate, and the answer shows an object pronoun. In (1) and (2) the object is inanimate, and in (4) there is a locative complement; in each case the pronoun is deleted from the tag answer. The verbs, being in the non-future, then take the suffix **-ya**, as explained earlier.

When the question involves a sequence of verbs, either or both may be retained, depending on the semantic relationship of the verbs, and on the main thrust of the question.

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|---|--|
| <p>(5) a ni tooi chaŋ
 you FUT be^able go
 Can you go? Yes, I can.</p> | <p>iin n ni tooi
 yes I FUT be^able</p> |
| <p>(6) a ni zaŋ li chaŋ
 you FUT take it go
 Will you take it with you? Yes, I will.</p> | <p>iin n ni zaŋ chaŋ
 yes I FUT take go</p> |

¹ Gur group, Northern Ghana, 300,000 speakers

In (5) the thrust of the question is taken to be 'being able', and the answer uses the first verb alone. In (6) the two verbs are semantically interdependent, so both need to be retained in the answer.

- (7) a. **a duhi loori chaṅ**
you drove car went
b. **a duhi loori chaṅ**
you drove car went
c. **a duhi loori chaṅ**
you drove car went
Did you go by car? Yes, I did.
- iin n duhi-ya
yes I drove-NFABS
iin n chaṅ-ya
yes I went-NFABS
iin n duhi chaṅ
yes I drove went

- (8) a. **o zo n-kpe duu**
he ran LINK-entered room
b. **o zo n-kpe duu**
he ran LINK-entered room
c. **o zo n-kpe duu**
he ran LINK-entered room
Did he run into the room? Yes, he did.
- *iin o zo-ya
yes he fled-NFABS
iin o kpe-ya
yes he entered-NFABS
iin o zo n-kpe
yes he ran LINK-entered

In (7) the semantic weight of the verbs is about equal, and each retains its essential meaning, so either of the three answer options is possible, depending on the perceived thrust of the question. In (8), however, there is a slight difference, in that the verb **zo** when used alone includes the semantic component of 'fleeing' which would not be appropriate in the answer to the question posed. Answer (8a) should actually be glossed as 'yes, he ran away'.

In (9), likewise, the first verb has a semantic component when used alone which is not suitable in answer to a question using it in a series.

- (9) a. **bɛ layim di**
they gathered ate
b. **bɛ layim di**
they gathered ate
c. **bɛ layim di**
they gathered ate
Did they eat together? Yes, they did.
- *iin bɛ layim-ya
yes they gathered-NFABS
iin bɛ di-ya
yes they ate
iin bɛ layim di
yes they gathered ate

In answer (9c), as in the question, the verb **layim** is reduced to little more than the semantic component of 'togetherness', but when used alone, as in (9a), the component of 'coming' or 'bringing' together is prominent. (9a) therefore actually means 'yes, they met together'.

- (10) a. **bɛ ɲubi li naai**
they ate it finished
b. **bɛ ɲubi li naai**
they ate it finished
c. **bɛ ɲubi li naai**
they ate it finished
Did they eat it all? Yes, they did.
- (*)iin bɛ ɲubi-ya
yes they ate-NFABS
iin bɛ naa-ya
yes they finished-NFABS
iin bɛ ɲubi naai
yes they ate finished

In (10) the first verb might seem to be the primary one, yet it is not really the thrust of the question, so (10a) is not a good answer. The main thrust is in fact on the 'finishing', hence the suitability of (10b). (The verb **ɲubi** is reserved for eating certain foods, such as meat and rice.)

(11) o walim je iin o wali je
Did he give up in vain? Yes, he did.

(12) a. **a zi n-chaḡ Tamali iin n zi n-chaḡ**
 you never LINK-went place^name yes I never LINK-went
 b. **a zi n-chaḡ Tamali iin m bi chaḡ**
 you never LINK-went place^name yes I NEG went
 Have you never been to Tamale? No, I never have / haven't.