

## MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX OF DAGBANI PROVERBIAL NAMES

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This paper presents a detailed analysis of the morphosyntax of proverbial names in Dagbani (Gur, Ghana). It demonstrates that these proverb-based names can comprise of 1. single morphemes, **Nasara**, ‘victory’, 2. two morphemes, **Neesim** ‘lights’. The third group consists of phrases and sentences with other grammatical particles fused in the sentences to form those name sets. I argue that the morphology provides the template for syntax to apply in this name formation. The data for this paper are from three sources: the author's knowledge as a native speaker of the language and those drawn from existing Dagbani literature on personal names. I also interviewed three parents to take some data for this paper. Phonological processes such as homorganic nasal assimilation **n+baŋ+ba** → /m.báŋ.bá/, ‘I have known them’, vowel epenthesis and deletion **bɛ+neei+ti** → /bɛneeti/ ‘they have woken us (from sleep) apply phonotactically in the formation of these proverb-based names. The findings showed that there is an interwoven relationship between morphology, syntax and phonology in the formation of proverbial names.

Keywords: Proverbial name, Structure, Dagbani, Mabilia (Gur), compound.

### 1. Introduction\*

This paper explores the structure of proverbial names among the Dagbamba, an ethnic group in Ghana, West Africa. The people refer to themselves as Dagbamba ‘plural’ and Dagbana ‘singular’ but the name has been anglicized as Dagomba ‘singular’ and Dagombas ‘plural’. Dagbamba, an ethnic group that speaks Dagbani as their mother tongue and a member of the Mabilia language family is in northern Ghana (Naden 1988). Dagbani is a tonal language (Hudu and O 2020, Hudu 2010, Olawsky 1999) where meaning is distinguished at the morpheme level. Dagbani is predominantly spoken in western and eastern Dagbani. The dialect spoken in western Dagbani i.e., Tamale and its environs is the Tomo (western dialect), while that of eastern Dagbani is Nayahili (eastern dialect). Nanuni, which has been identified as a dialect of Dagbani (Hudu, 2010) is spoken in Yendi and Bimbilla and their neighbouring communities respectively. These three dialects make up the language, which is also spoken in other parts of the Northern region and some parts of the country. Dagbani is closely related to Mampurili, Waala, Dagaare, Gurene, and Kusaal among the Gur language family (Naden, 1988).

The goals of this research are as follows: firstly, the paper will look at the structure of proverbial names in Dagbani. Secondly, it will look at the possible linguistic elements that come together to form a proverbial name. Finally, the paper will discuss the interaction between morphology, syntax, and phonology in giving these proverb-based names in Dagbani.

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According to Musere (1999) cited in (Simelane-Kalumba, Mabeqa and Ngubane 2015), “a proverbial name is formed when a distinctive word or morpheme (most commonly nouns) from a proverb is employed as a personal or other type of name”. These names are usually made from the first word of a proverb (Finnegan 1970). By their morphology and pragmatic effects, name forms are lexical (Ogunwale 2012). This lexical nature of names does not mean that names, and for the purposes of this paper, a proverbial name does not contain other lexical items in them. A proverbial name in Dagbani may contain many lexical items compounded together as a lexical unit to form a single name such as **Ya-ka-di-ka** ‘Where does it not exist?’ and **Ti-wum-tiyi** ‘We have heard enough’.

Researchers of Dagbani morpho-syntax have not done much in analyzing the structure of personal names in Dagbani. Apart from Dakubu (2000), the most recent publication on Dagbani personal names is (Abubakari et al. 2023) where they did a comparative study on names among four Mabia languages. In this case, what I try to discuss is the linguistic items that form a proverbial name. I discuss the structure of the Dagbamba proverbial names based on their linguistic structures such as single morphemes, phrases and sentences that are present in them. Dagbani proverbial names may consist of just a morpheme, for example, **Kasi** ‘cleanliness’, two morphemes **Wum-ya** ‘heard’, a compound **Baḡba** ‘Know them’ or a phrase such as **Wuni+pini** ‘God’s gift’ or a sentence, **N+niḡ+dini** ‘What have I done’. It is shown that syntactically a proverbial name might be a whole sentence whose linguistic form in Dagbani allows it to be used as a name. The paper also examined some phonological processes involved in the formation of the proverbial names.

A circumstance always leads to the choice of a name for a newborn baby. Proverbial names are unique in form and carry deep meaning, mainly known by the “giver” (parent of the newborn) and interpreted by society based on the names. That is why the Dagbamba say **ḡahira nyɛla vubɔra, ḡun baḡ li ḡba nyɛla vubɔra** that is, ‘both the user of proverbs and the interpreter are trouble rousers’. For instance, the proverb seen below is a complex sentence, but a name can be carved out of it in the form of a word.

#### (1) **Tikuma ni puhi vari, n libigi dakabiriba**

‘dry trees will shoot leaves to the amazement of firewood hunters’

Truncated name: **Tikuma** “dry trees”

A child can be named ‘**Tikuma**’ depending on several circumstances; a) if a father feels that his brothers expect him to fail or his brothers think he will fail in life then he finally made it, he can name his child ‘Tikuma’, or b) if two brothers, one wealthy and the other poor are contesting for a title and the wealthy man has more support because of his wealth and the poor finally wins the contest, he can name his child “**Tikuma**”. This is to communicate to the brothers that money cannot do everything. Every proverb has a meaning and a reason for the person saying it. The reason and meaning make people give proverbial names to their children. Proverbial names are good and appropriate, but one will have to be cautious when giving it to a child. These kinds of names can bring enmity to the innocent child who has no idea about the reason for his name.

Linguists of Dagbani have not paid much attention to the morphosyntax of proverbial names of the Dagbamba. Dakubu (2000) observes that personal names are given based on the following: names given with the aid of a soothsayer, names of ancestors and shrines etc. She opines that there are also names given based on time **Tisua**, festival **Damba** and **Chimsi**, as

well as day and month names. Dakubu (2000) worked on the documentation of Dagbamba personal names and does not touch on their linguistic structures. This current paper, therefore, presents an analysis of the morphology and syntax of the Dagbamba proverbial names.

### 1.0 Previous studies on Mabilia personal names

The study of personal names is not new to the Mabilia literature as there have been studies on different aspects of names within the language family. Most recent works in this field are (Abubakari et al. 2023), (Amidu 2020), (Abubakari 2020) etc. In this section, I review previous literature on the topic of naming within the Mabilia language family and other languages.

According to Abubakari et al. (2023), names in Mabilia languages tell stories of the circumstances of birth, place of birth, religious beliefs, family history, and genealogy. Their study focused on the socio-cultural significance and typology of personal names in some selected Mabilia languages of Ghana such as Dagbani, Kusaal, Likpakpaanl and Sɩsaalt. The study established ten (10) categories of personal names including proverbial names. They assert that “the experiences of people, which may range from expressions of emotions of joy, sorrow, anger, among others, towards another person(s) or situation, may influence the choice of name parents may give to a newborn who happens to be born around that time of the said experience”.

Suuriboma (2014:58) postulates that the majority of Dagaare's personal names are proverbial. Such names are the expression of the philosophy of life and equally of the religious attitude of the parents. It is in such names that deeds like jealousy, love, hatred, hypocrisy, rivalry, anger, enmity, kindness; witchcraft, fighting, and peaceful co-existence among others are expressed.

Though Suuriboma (2014) does a sociocultural study of Dagaare personal names, it is realized that the proverbial names in that structure have a resemblance/structure as the Dagbamba proverbial names. Names such as **Ambataayɛɛ** ‘who has no problem’, **Anlaameŋɛ** ‘Who is righteous’, **Nobalakpeɛ** ‘People are strength’ etc. have the same structure as names such as **Nniŋdini** ‘what have I done’, **Tiyumba** ‘let’s love them’ and **Yakadika** ‘Where does it not exist?’ in Dagbani.

A person's name may reflect the linguistic and phonological characteristics of the language, their place in society, as well as the collective history and experiences of those close to them. She indicated that the introduction of foreign religions and ‘modernization’ function as the main reasons why the people neglect giving Kusaal names to newborn babies. Touching on the structure of names, she notes that, “the Kusaas usually begin all names with the prefix ‘A’ be it a native name, a Christian name or a Muslim name as seen below.

#### (2) Kusaal Names (Abubakari 2020:25)

Source Name	Name prefixed with ‘A’	
Mbugur	Ambugur	Local Kusaal names
Ndeog	Andeog	
Moses	Amoses	Christian names
Deborah	Adeborah	
Yakubu (Jacob)	Ayakubu	Muslim names

Saratu (Sarah) Asaratu

She argues that most sources of names do not have the prefix ‘A’, so, to differentiate persons and things, the prefix ‘A’ identifies a personal name from names of animals, shrines, objects etc.

Given the above brief review of the literature on the studies of personal names, I am convinced that a paper on the structure of proverbial names and the circumstances that call for it will serve as the beginning of a new era in the studies of names in Dagbani.

### 1.1 Naming in Dagbani

Personal names are a unique part of every society across the globe. They are given to newly born children purposely for identification in society and they are varied based on the cultures of a particular tribe or a society. According to (Agyekum 2006), they are iconic representations of composite social variables that indexicalise and relate to the name and the person. Among the Dagbamba, names can be given based on; time, day, situation, month, fetish/shrine, proverbs, death prevention, reincarnation etc. A newborn baby is named on the 7th day after birth according to the Dagbamba traditions. If a male is born, he is circumcised by a barber locally referred to as ‘wanzam’ (Mahama 2004). The circumcision is done depending on the health status of the newborn baby. If healthy, the circumcision is done on the third day after birth. However, if the baby is unwell, the circumcision is delayed until after the seventh day. The child is shaved and is given the right facial marks on the same day of the naming. The name to be given is determined through soothsaying before the 7th day and is kept secret until the day of the naming ceremony termed **suuna** in the language. Apart from circumcision, the rest of the processes are the same for a female baby as well. It is stated in Dakubu (2000) that Dagbamba names are given with the aid of a soothsayer, or based on names of ancestors or shrines etc. She opines that there are also names given based on ‘time’ **Tisua**, festival (**Damba** and **Chimsi**), as well as day and month names.

### 1.2 The Morphology and Syntax of Dagbani

By virtue of their morphology, Dagbani nouns and adjectives have a stem and a suffix marking number. The suffix is either a singular or a plural suffix. The two suffixes do not co-occur on one stem. To mark plurality, the singular suffix is deleted to make way for the plural suffix to be attached to the noun as can be seen below.

#### (3) Singular versus plural forms of nouns and adjectives

Noun-SG	Noun-Pl	Gloss	Adjective-SG	Adjective-Pl	Gloss
a) sim-li	sim-a	‘groundnut’	piɛl-li	piɛl-a	‘white’
b) yil-li	yil-a	‘song’	viɛl-li	viɛl-a	‘nice’
c) ju-yu	ju-ri	‘vulture’	mɔ-yu	mɔ-ri	‘square’
d) lɛ-yu	lɛ-ri	‘diminutive’	biɛ-yu	biɛ-ri	‘be ugly’

Morphologically, Dagbani verbs take on suffixes such as  $\emptyset$  or **-ya** to mark past and **-da** to mark habitual. The habitual marker can also surface as **-ta**, **-ra**, **-na**, and **-da**. So, depending on the

environment, the habitual marker has four allomorphs. The verb stem can take two suffixes at a time, when there is the need for a third suffix, it is written separately as a word.

Just like English and many other languages, Dagbani operates a subject (S) verb (V) object (O) structure of a simple sentence. The subject and the object could be optional, but there is always a verb in a Dagbani sentence. The subject and object positions could also be phrases, basically simple noun phrases. According to Issah (2013:202-03) “the Simple Noun Phrase (SNP) of Dagbani is made up of the head noun (HN), which could be a bare noun, a pronoun, or a proper noun and several other elements within the syntactic configuration of the SNP, which serve as modifiers”. The figure below shows the structure of the simple noun phrase in Dagbani.

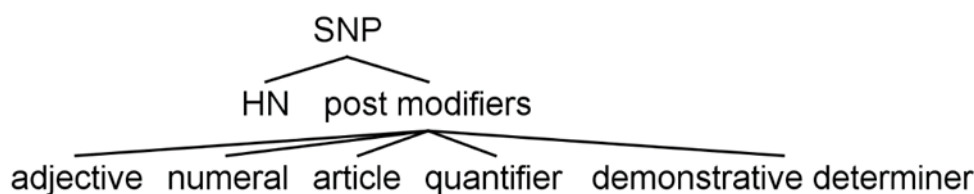


Fig.1 The structure of a simple noun phrase in Dagbani (Issah 2013)

### 1.3 Methodology

The data in this paper are based on the Tomo dialect, which the researcher speaks. The data consists of primarily unstructured data of different types. 1) The researcher picked different varieties of proverbial names as used by the people in the society. 2) Some of the data were also obtained from written texts in the language, (Dawuni 2013, Kofi 2006). 3) I also interviewed 3 parents whose children have proverbial names. These parents were selected purposefully because of their interest in personal proverbial names. Among the parents, IS had 2 children named **Mbo** ‘Good’ and **Neesim** ‘Light’. He is in his late 40s and a lecturer from a public university in the southern part of Ghana. The second respondent, SMA is also a lecturer at a public university in the north with two children named **Dingariyurilim** ‘what is better than love’ and **Mbo** ‘good’. The final respondent SN is an agronomist and named two of his children **Kasi** ‘cleanliness’ and **Malititi** ‘Make it for us’.

## 2. The morphology and syntax of Dagbani proverbial names

In this section, I will be doing an analysis of some Dagbamba proverbial names based on their morphology and syntax. The analysis is done in connection with the discussion in section 1.2 which discussed the morphology and syntax of Dagbani. The first sub-section deals with the morphology while the second part deals with the syntax.

### 2.1 Single morpheme names

A morpheme, according to (La Mantia 2020:335) “is an irreducible (or indecomposable) unit of meaning in a given language. By this definition, a proverbial name that is said to be a single morpheme cannot be reduced in any form without the name losing its meaning. Such names,

even though morphemes, have extended meanings associated with them. The data below shows some of such names in Dagbani.

**(4) single morpheme names**

- a) Jílímá ‘respect’
- b) Kàtárí ‘luck’
- c) Mbó ‘good’
- d) Kásí ‘spotless’
- e) Sáhá ‘luck’

According to one of my respondents who named his son **Saha** ‘luck’, he chose the name to proverbially send a message to his colleague who completed the university before him but is still jobless after 12 years, while he (the respondent) is employed. He mentioned that he had had a number of encounters with a colleague where he ridiculed him for the course he was pursuing in the university. All that made him name his son Saha which means ‘Luck is always better than being the first to seek for something’.

An attempt on single proverbial morpheme names in the Mabilia languages was done by (Amidu 2020:207) where he indicated that some of these names are free single morphemes that cannot be split. However, he presented data with two morphemes as seen below; the plural forms are modifications I added based on consultations with Mampruli speakers including Amidu.

**(4) Personal proverbial names in Mampruli (Amidu 2020:207)**

Name	morpheme-SG	morpheme-PL	Gloss
a) títabì	titabi (N)	titabi	a weed with thorns
b) náṙṙṙṙù	napṙṙ-ṙṙ (N)	napṙṙ-a	foot/leg
c) bṙhìgù	bṙhig-u (N)	bṙs-a	a short poisonous snake

**2.2 Compounding in Dagbani proverbial names**

Another productive form through which proverbial names are given in Dagbani is through compounding. “Compounding is the process by which a word is formed by concatenating two or more bases each of which potentially occurs alone elsewhere in the grammar as a syntactic atom” (Appah 2013:73).

**(5) Verb-Noun compounds in proverbial names**

Name	Vbase	Nbase	Gloss
a) Baṙsua	baṙ ‘know’	sua ‘knife’	‘to know an enemy’
b) Doliba	doli ‘follow’	ba ‘3PL’	‘follow them’
c) Fayam	fa ‘take’	yam ‘sense’	‘take away sense’

d) Kpaturi                    kpa    ‘bring upon’    turi    ‘insult’ ‘bring insults over oneself’

Through my interviews, I was informed that the name in (5a) is a note that the giver of the name has taken against his/her enemies. The giver/bearer of the name is saying that he has identified his ‘enemy’ who he refers to as a ‘knife’, therefore the enemy cannot hurt him/her anymore. In (5b), the name is given as a form of encouragement to a person who is being treated badly by his people, but he is still following them with patience to see how their lives will end. It is usually said by the people that patience is always victorious, therefore the giver/bearer is being encouraged to be patient. In all these names given in (5), there are two free morphemes that have been compounded to give the names in (5a-d). In these forms, the names are all V-N compounds. Other forms of compounding in this paper are discussed as part of phrasal names in the coming sub-section.

## 2.2 Phrasal Names

In 2.1, we discussed proverbial names that are single morphemes and V-N compound names. We also saw the category of words that are compounded to make these names. In this section, we are going to discuss proverbial names that have two morphemes in them in the form of phrases. In these names, there are only two words, which are put together as one to form these proverbial names.

### (6) Phrasal proverbial names

- |    |                 |                      |  |                                    |
|----|-----------------|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| a) | Suhuyini        | suhu + yini          |  |                                    |
|    | Proverbial name | heart one            |  | ‘one heart’                        |
| b) | suhudoo         | suhu + doo           |  |                                    |
|    | Proverbial name | ‘heart act of lying’ |  | ‘peace’                            |
| c) | Yumzaa          | Yumi + zaa           |  |                                    |
|    | Proverbial name | ‘love QUANT’         |  | ‘show love to all’                 |
| d) | Bangahim        | bana + n-gahim       |  |                                    |
|    | Proverbial name | 3PL + FOC-choose     |  | ‘they made their choice/selection’ |
| e) | Bemaɲa          | bɛ + maɲa            |  |                                    |
|    | Proverbial name | 3PL + self           |  | ‘onto them’                        |

The names in the above data are phrases in structure. Apart from (6c) which is a verb phrase, (6a, 6b, 6d) and (6e) are noun phrases that are lexicalized, which is a reflection of the syntax of the language where nouns and verbs can be heads of phrases. However, in (6d), the head morpheme of the name is **bana** ‘those’ which had /a/ deleted and the /n/ assimilates to the place of articulation with the /g/ in **gahim** ‘select/unique’. In these names, they are basically truncated proverbs that have been used as names. A native Dagbani speaker can associate as

many interpretations as possible to it. For instance, Kofi (2006) captures several proverbs that the name in (6a) can be derived from as seen in (7).

### (7) Proverbs related to the proverbial name *Suhuyini* (Kofi 2006:371)

a) *Suhuyini baya ni andunia garibu* (garigu)

‘A single-hearted person is not concerned about the worries of the world’.

b) *Suhuyini gari suhu bɔbigu*

‘One heart (single-mindedness) is greater than many hearts (ideas)’

c) *Suhuyini n-ɲoori naanigoo*

‘A single-minded person is patient concerning his/her disappointed trust’.

It is obvious now that even though the names are just two words/morphemes, they are proverbs that have been truncated to serve the purpose of identification. These forms of proverbs are seen as a way of indirect communication to people around the persons who are using them as names for their newborn children.

Katamba (1993) observes that “sometimes it is bear roots that are combined in compounding and sometimes an input base contains an affixed form”. This form of compounding where an input base contains an affix is testified with the data in (8) below.

### (8) Proverbial names with suffixes

a) *Banya*                      *baŋ-ya* (Dawuni 2013:3)

Proverbial name    1SG know-PERF ‘I have learned’

b) *Tabira*                      *tabi-ra*

Proverbial name    support -IMPERF ‘supporter’

c) *Sɔŋda*                      *sɔŋ-da*

Proverbial name    help-agent ‘helper’

In the above names, all the verbs have suffixes that are joined with the verb to form them. In (8a) **baŋ** ‘know’ takes the suffix **-ya** which marks past on verbs. This **-ya** marks perfective in the language and is suffixed only to verbs. On the other hand, the names in (8b) and (8c) are bases that have **-da** and its variant **-ra** suffixed to them. This **-da** together with its allomorphs marks a habitual aspect in Dagbani. The habitual marker **-da** has four allomorphs **-ta/ti**, **-na/ni**, **-ra/ri** **-da/di**. Their distribution is based on the final sound/syllable of the morpheme they are suffixed to. For instance, in (8b) the morpheme ends with the syllable **/bi/**, and therefore the morpheme **-ra** is suffixed to it. While in (8c) the morpheme ends in the velar nasal **/ŋ/** and therefore picks the suffix **-da**.

### 2.3 Sentential proverbial names

Among the Dagbamba ethnic group, proverbial names can be in the form of a whole sentence. In this case, the words that are combined to form those names are morphologically compounded



together as a word. Though they are compounds, the sentence structure of the language is taken into consideration in their formation. This subsection of the work looks at proverbial names that have the structure of sentences. Sentences are grouped into two major types, sentences described by function and those that are defined according to their structure. This paper only looks at proverbial names of sentence forms according to their functions. According to Jindayu (2013), sentences are grouped into four by their function, i.e., declarative, commands, and question or interrogatives and exclamatory. Many of the Dagbamba proverbial names are sentential just as observed by Jindayu (2013). Therefore, this section studies sentential proverbial names in Dagbani.

As noted earlier, sentential proverbial names are structured according to the sentence structure of Dagbani which is (S)V(O). The (S) and (O) may be optional, but the verb is obligatory. The names presented below are all in the SVO structure.

### (9) proverbial names with SVO

Name	subject	verb	object	Gloss
a) <b>Mbaŋba</b> ← <b>n</b>	<b>n</b> 1SG	<b>baŋ</b> know	<b>ba</b> them	‘I have known them’
b) <b>Nniŋdini</b> ← <b>n</b>	<b>n</b> 1SG	<b>niŋ</b> do	<b>dini</b> what	‘What have I done?’
c) <b>Beneeti</b> ← <b>bɛ</b>	<b>bɛ</b> 3PL	<b>neei</b> wake	<b>ti</b> us	‘They have woken us (from sleep).’
d) <b>Tiwumtiyi</b> ← <b>ti</b>	<b>ti</b> 1PL	<b>wum</b> hear	<b>tiyi</b> satisfy	‘We have heard enough.’

The data in (9) above shows that the proverbial names given are nothing but sentences based on the sentence structure of Dagbani. The words are compounded to form the names. Fabb (2001) defines a compound as a word that consists of two or more words. He indicates that compounds are subject to phonological and morphological processes, which may be specific to compounds or may be shared with other structures. It is clear, then, that the data in (9) are sentential compounds in Dagbani. The initial morphemes in (9a & 9b) i.e. (*m & n*) which are the first-person singular pronouns have /n/ as the underlying representation in Dagbani but will have to undergo a homorganic nasal assimilation process to become /m/ in the name *Mbaŋba* due to the place of articulation of the initial sound of the second word in the compound. The coda of the verb however maintained its place of articulation feature because assimilation is blocked at word boundaries. In (9b) the /n/ maintains its place of articulation because the initial consonant of the following word *niŋ* has the same place of articulation as the morpheme /n/. In (9c) there is a deletion of the final /i/ of the verb *neei*. Before the morphemic pronoun *ti* is compounded with the verb, the elision of the vowel /i/ occurs before it is attached to the verb. This highlights the fact that there is an interface between morphology, syntax and phonology.

Based on their functions, sentences are declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamative. Some of these types manifest in the proverbial names. The names that are represented in (10) are based on declarative functions.

### (10) Sentential proverbial names with declarative functions

#### Name

- a) Tiyuuniba (Kofi, 2006:394)  
 ti      yuuni-∅                      ba  
 1PL   watch-IMPF   3PL.OBJ  
 ‘We are watching them.’

- b) Bɛtamɛpiligu (Kofi, 2006:80)  
 Bɛ tam bɛ piligu  
 3PL forgot 3PL begin  
 ‘They have forgotten their’ beginning/origin’
- c) Shinikadoliba  
 shina ka doli ba  
 Quiet CON follow 3PL.OBJ.  
 ‘Keep quiet, follow them’
- d) diŋmaniya  
 di ŋmani ya  
 3SG.INAN resembles 2PL.OBJ  
 ‘It resembles you’

All the sentences in (10) are declarative sentences containing subjects, verbs, and objects. It is shown in (10c) that the **a** in **shina** is weakened to **i** before it is compounded to form the name **Shinikadoliba** which also contains the conjunction **ka**. The full proverb as it is used by the speakers is, **shini ka doli ba n-nya di bahigu** ‘just keep quiet and follow them to see how it ends’. However, when used as a proverbial name, the last part of the proverb **n-nya di bahigu** is truncated. The names in (10a, 10b) are sayings that are referenced to people who are either closely related to those giving the names to their children or it could be at a workplace where there is a rivalry between two people. But the names are such that the people who are close to those giving the names are those who will read the meaning to it, either positively or negatively.

In another form, there are proverbial names that function as questions. These types of names are a form of lamentation by the fathers of the children who are giving them those names. They are born out of rivalry, hatred, or witchcraft. So, the nature of these questions is rhetoric as seen in (11) below.

**(11) Sentential proverbial names with question functions**

- a) Nniŋdini  
 n niŋ dini  
 1SG do what  
 ‘what have I done?’
- b) Nniŋmibawula  
 n niŋmi ba wula  
 1SG do 3PL.OBJ what  
 ‘what should I do to them?’
- c) Bɔritinyuriya  
 bɔri-ta nyu-ri ya  
 ‘stir-HAB drink-IMPF where’  
 ‘where does the one who stirs water drink from?’
- d) Diniŋbo  
 di niŋ bɔ  
 3SG. do what

‘what has it done?’

- e) Bɔnsuduŋ  
 bɔ n-su duŋ  
 what FOC-cause enmity  
 ‘what causes enmity?’

In the above data from (11a-e), it is observed that each of the names begins with a question word i.e. **dini**, **wula**, **ya**, and **bɔ**.

Issah (2015) observed that Dagbani interrogative words might occur either in clause-initial or clause-final (base) position. This, he claims, indicates that Dagbani is an optional fronting language. Issah’s observation, therefore, confirms the fact that **bɔ** appeared in the final base slot in (11d) and at the initial slot of (11e). This change in position, however, does not change the function of **bɔ** as a question word.

Also, in (11c) the vowel /a/ is weakened to /i/ in /ta/ which is the derivational morpheme that changed the verb **bɔri** (to stir) into a noun. This weakening of a vowel once again confirms that there is also a morpho-phonological interface when dealing with the linguistic analysis of Dagbamba proverbial names. This form of vowel reduction is prevalent in Dagbani between /o/ → /ɔ/ and /e/ → /ɛ/. When the vowel /o/ ends a verb and takes a suffix, the /o/ will surface as /ɔ/, and when the vowel /e/ ends a verb and takes a suffix the /e/ surfaces as /ɛ/. See the data in (12) for a better illustration of these occurrences.

#### (12) The realization of /e/ → /ɛ/ and /o/ → /ɔ/

- a) ko + ra → kɔra “farm”  
 b) bo + ra → bɔra “want”  
 c) kpe + ra → kpɛra “enter”  
 d) le + ra → lɛra “feed”

As indicated in the discussions earlier, other grammatical particles such as negation and perfective markers. These particles are used in the names following the sentence structure of the language. Preverbal particles are used before the verbs and question words can be at both the initial and final of a sentence. Some of these names are presented in the data below.

#### (13) Proverbial names containing negatives and perfectives

Name	structure	Gloss
a) <b>Wumbiyɛli</b>	<b>Wuni + bi + yɛli</b> God not say	‘If God does not ordain something...’
b) <b>Zaansuma</b>	<b>Zaa + n-su + ma</b> All own me	‘I am owned by everybody’
c) <b>Salipawuni</b>	<b>Sala + pa+ wuni</b>	‘Man is not God’

## Human NEG God

In the data above, it is shown in (13a) that the name **Wumbiyeli** is made up of three categories of words. **Wuni** ‘God’, a noun, has its **i** deleted and the last consonant assimilates to the place of articulation of the following consonant that starts the second-word **bi** ‘NEG’ which negates continuous and past events in Dagbani (Nindow 2014) before the final word (verb) is attached to complete the name. There is the presence of preverbal negative marker **bi** and negative copular verb **pa** in (13a, 13c) whereas the **bi** negate verbs the **pa** negates nominals, see (Adam 2010, Nindow 2014).

Pulleyblank and Akinlabi (1988) observe that there are instances where morphology will be the input for syntax and in other instances, the syntax will be provided as the input for morphology within the Modular Theory of grammar. The model they use is shown below:

**(14) The Modular Theory of Grammar (Pulleyblank & Akinlabi 1988)**

**(14a) MORPHOLOGY** → **SYNTAX**

**(14b) MORPHOLOGY<sub>i</sub>** → **SYNTAX** → **MORPHOLOGY<sub>i</sub>**

If we look at the name **b̄ritinyuriya**, the underlying representation is **b̄ri +ta+nyu-ra+ya**. The first verb **b̄ri** is nominalised by the morpheme **-ta**. The next verb, in order to form the verbal compound, **nyu**, has to take the habitual marker **-ra** to form the transitive verb **nyura** before it can be compounded with the initial nominalized verb plus the question word **ya** to form **b̄ritanyuraya**. After forming the new word, phonological processes such as vowel reduction will take place to ensure the word complies with the phonotactics of Dagbani. Therefore, (14a) of Pulleyblank and Akinlabi (1988) best explain how Dagbani morphology and syntax interface work within the language. That is, it is morphology that provides the input/template for syntax to apply.

**2.4 Some Phonological processes in Dagbamba proverbial names**

Throughout the discussion, we have seen the forms and structure of the Dagbamba proverbial names. In this section, we are focusing on some phonological processes that exist in the proverb-based names. As indicated earlier, the morphology feeds the syntax in the formation of the names, but within that, the phonology plays a role as captured in the data below.

**(15) Nasal assimilation**

Name	Structure	Gloss
a) Wumpini	wuni pini	‘God’s gift’
b) Mbaṅba	n baṅ ba	‘I have known them’
c) Mburidiba	n buri di ba	‘I have defeated them’

From the above names, we can see that two phonological processes took place in (15a). It is seen that before **wuni** and **pini** compound to form the name there is vowel /i/-deletion. Then after the deletion, the alveolar nasal assimilates to the place of articulation of the bilabial plosive. The same form of assimilation is seen in (15b and 15c) where the /n/ assimilates to the place of articulation of the /b/.

The underlying form of the first person singular pronominal is /n/ in Dagbani. This /n/ assimilates to /m/ before /m, p, and b/ but no assimilation takes place in other environments as can be seen in the names below.

**(16) No assimilation**

Name	Structure	Gloss
a) <b>Nniṅdini</b>	<b>n niṅ dini</b>	‘what have I done?’
b) <b>Wunintira</b>	<b>wuni n tira</b>	‘it is God who gives’
c) <b>Wuntia</b>	<b>wuni -tia</b>	‘faith in God’

Another phonological process that is evident in the formation of proverbial names among the Dagbamba is segment deletion. Final segments of the initial noun’s vowels are usually deleted before the words are compounded to form the proverbial name. Vowels are usually the targets for this form of deletion. The data in (17) below shows this form of deletion.

**(17) Segment deletion in proverbial names**

Name	Structure	Gloss
a) <b>Tuṅteeya</b>	<b>tuṅa teei -ya</b>	‘our family has grown’
b) <b>Tuusimli</b>	<b>tuui simli</b>	‘met friendship’
c) <b>Wumbiyeli</b>	<b>wuni bi yeli</b>	‘if God has not ordained something’

In the data in (17a), two vowels are deleted before the formation of the name. The number suffix of **tuṅa** ‘vine’ which is **-a** was deleted and the final vowel of **teei** ‘spread’ is also deleted before the two words are compounded to form the name. In (17b) the /i/ in **tuui** is deleted before the second word is joined to the first word, and the same process took place in (17c) where the /i/ in **wuni** is deleted to create an environment for assimilation to take place.

This process discussed also exists in Yoruba where final vowels are deleted in compound formation as indicated by (Taiwo 2008), and is shown below in (18).

**(18) Compound words in Yoruba (Taiwo, 2008: 346)**

a. <b>sòrò</b>	←	<b>sọ + òrò</b>
‘to speak’		say word
b. <b>kíyèsára</b>	←	<b>kó iyè sí ara</b>
‘to be observant’		put mind to body

c. <b>Babaláwo</b>	←	<b>Baba ní awo</b>
‘Herbalist’		old man/father has cult ‘The old man has a cult’.
d. <b>Adéwálé</b>	←	<b>Adé wá sí ilé</b>
personal name		Ade come prep. House
		‘Ade came to the house’/‘Ade came home’.

Taiwo (2008) observes that in derivations, some phonological processes such as vowel elision, contraction, tonal displacement/replacement, etc., are employed. For example, in the derivation of *sòrò* ‘to speak’, the vowel of *sò* ‘to throw’ is elided with its mid-tone, and in *kíyèsára*, ‘to be observant’, the vowels of *kó* ‘to put’ and that of *sí* (prep) are elided, but their high tones remain, and these high tones displace the adjacent mid tone of *iyè* ‘mind’ and *ara* ‘body’.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine the structure of Dagbani proverbial names. The study has shown that there is a relationship between morphology, syntax and phonology of proverbial names among the Dagbamba. It is observed that the structure of those names follows the sentential arrangement of the language. The paper further showed that linguistic elements that can be found in a proverbial name in Dagbani vary depending on the purpose of the said name. It showed that linguistic units such as nouns, verbs, pronouns, negative markers etc. can co-occur in a proverbial name. They can occur in the form of single morphemes **saha** ‘luck’, two morphemes **Bajya** ‘learned’ or phrases and can be in the form of a whole sentence **Nniḡdini** ‘What did I do?’. Both men and women can bear proverb base names in Dagbani. In all these analyses, it was observed that there is an interface between morphology, syntax, and phonology when it comes to the morphosyntactic analysis of the Dagbamba proverbial names. It is realized that the input will usually have to undergo some morpho-phonological process to produce the output form. This study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine the structure of proverbial names within formal linguistics in the language. The results from the findings therefore show a new dimension to the study of names. Further research is needed to study the reasons for the types of names parents give to their children.

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