

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v13i2.4>

THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF DAGBANI DIMINUTIVES

Fusheini Hudu

Abstract

This paper analyses the pragmatics of Dagbani diminutives. It describes the various diminutive markers in the language, the principal ones being *bia* ‘a child’, *bila* ‘small’ and *bini* ‘a thing’; the use of feminine gender markers as diminutives and the structure of diminutive constructions. It argues that the functions of diminutives can only be accurately portrayed by considering the context of usage and speakers’ conceptualisation of the diminutive morphemes. The diminutive function of *bini* only emerges in context, as the word lacks any semantic notion of smallness. In some contexts, the use of *bila* to encode smallness or young age semantically may apply to entities that emerge relatively later; in other contexts, it may refer to entities that emerge earlier. Similarly, the diminutive *bia* ‘child’ and morphemes that compare family relations do not strictly and consistently encode diminution based on age or physical size. These contradictory and seemingly inconsistent encodings are reconciled when the context of usage and sociolinguistics are considered. The paper concludes that even though the semantic content of smallness is present in most diminutive constructions, the unifying function of all diminutive constructions in the language is to encode lesser significance.

Keywords: Dagbani, diminutives, morphopragmatics, pragmatics, evaluative morphology

1. Introduction

Languages of the world employ various means to evaluate concepts and attributes. The common evaluative constructions include diminutives, augmentatives, pejoratives, contempt, amelioratives, endearment. Among these, diminutives are probably the most widespread in languages of the world, and the most widely researched. As presented extensively in the edited volume of Grandi and Körtevélyessy (2015), evaluative constructions are typically encoded within the morphological component of the grammar. This paper provides the first known description of diminutive constructions in Dagbani, a language of Ghana belonging to the Gur family of Niger-Congo languages and shows that diminutive forms are encoded morphologically (via compounding and suffixation) and lexically to express smallness in size or quantity, weakness in strength, attenuation, individuation, part-whole relations and temporal order of emergence. It also presents a pragmatic analysis of the functions of diminutives in Dagbani. It argues that it is only within the pragmatics that the diminutivising function of some of these markers emerge. It also shows that while various diminutive constructions express various meanings, within the pragmatics, they are all used to encode the lesser significance of an entity.

Several morphemes are used to express diminution in the morphology and syntax. The default and most common diminutive marker in Dagbani, as in most languages of the world (e.g. Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1994, Jurafsky 1996, Appah and Amfo 2011, Agbetsoamedo and Agbedor 2015) is the same or has the same lexical root as the word for child: *bia*. This word, or the semantically related word *bila* (pronounced /*bilá*/) ‘small’ are the most productive diminutive markers in Dagbani. They surface as the second lexeme in noun-adjective or noun-noun compounds. In addition to these two, the word *bini* (pronounced /*bínî*/) ‘a thing’ is also common as the first lexeme in noun-noun or noun-adjective compounds. While it lacks any inherent semantic content of smallness, it is used to mark diminution contextually.

Still within the morphology, there is one suffix (*-fu*) that is attached to nouns to encode diminution. There are also lexical items that are used to encode various forms of diminution and may either be reduced to form compounds or stand alone as diminutive markers. These include *biela* ‘small (quantity)’, *tuzo* ‘a younger sibling (of the same gender)’, *pira* ‘a parent’s younger sibling or cousin, and others. The language also employs gender markers for evaluative purposes, with the feminine gender marker (*nyan*) encoding diminution and various allomorphs of the masculine marker (*laa*, *daa*, *lyu*) serving as augmentative markers. The main argument presented in the paper is that, the overarching function of all diminutive forms is to encode lesser significance.

The analysis is largely descriptive. Beyond presenting an analysis based on the sociolinguistic contexts of use, no restrictive theoretical assumption (semantic or pragmatic) underpins the arguments presented here. The analysis is driven mainly by the argument that the lexical semantic content of individual words and morphemes only contributes to their role as diminutives; it is not sufficient to appreciate the full extent of their relevance as evaluative markers of diminution. When evidence is sought from the sociolinguistics and pragmatics of these lexical items, it becomes easier to understand not only their wider relevance as diminutives but also the deeper diminutive encoding common to all of them.

Most of the data were obtained from native speakers of two of the three major dialects of the language: the Eastern (Nayahili) and Western (Tomosili) dialects. No speakers of the Southern Dialect spoken by the Nanumba were consulted. Secondary data were also obtained from a Dagbani-English dictionary (Naden 2014) and other publications on the language. Since no phonetic or phonological analyses are carried out in the paper, the data are presented in the orthography of the language. For this reason, even though Dagbani is a tone language (Olawsky 1999), tone is not marked. The two main departures from the rules of the orthography are the marking of morpheme boundaries in some words with more than one morpheme, which is needed for a better understanding of the analyses, and the non-marking of elided letters with the elision mark (the apostrophe). For instance, the compound word /*na? bila*/ ‘a small cow’ (from *nah-u* ‘cow-sg.’ and *bil-a* ‘small-sg.’) is rendered in this paper as ‘<*nay-bila*>, even though the rules of the orthography dictate that it is written as <*nay’ bila*> (for an extensive discussion on Dagbani orthography, see Hudu (2021)).

The rest of this introductory section introduces aspects of Dagbani morphology that are needed to understand the discussion in this paper (Section 1.1) and presents a brief discussion on the role of pragmatics in the analysis of the functions of diminutives. Section 2 looks at the structure of diminutive constructions in the language, including various morphological processes and lexical items used to encode diminutive forms. In Section 3, the semantics and pragmatics of diminutivisation in Dagbani are discussed. Section 4 also discusses the pragmatics, with a focus on address terms among family

relations, the interaction between gender and diminutive marking as well as plausible diachronic changes that may have affected the productivity of the only diminutive suffix in the language. The paper ends with a summary and concluding remarks in Section 5.

1.1. Background to Dagbani morphology

For the analyses in this paper, the most essential aspect of the morphology is the structure of nouns and adjectives. This has received attention in the research of previous scholars, including Olawsky (1999, 2004); Hudu (2005, 2010, 2014); Issah (2013); Hudu and Iddrisu (2023). As noted in these studies, nouns and adjectives share a key morphological property that distinguishes them from verbs: they typically consist of a bound lexical root and an inflectional or derivational suffix whose primary function is to project these words as nouns and adjectives. The suffixes also encode various grammatical and lexical properties, the most dominant being (singular and plural) number (e.g. *zuy-u* ‘head-sg.’ /*zuy-ri*/ ‘head-pl.’, /*viel-li*/ ‘beautiful-sg.’ /*viel-a*/ ‘beautiful-pl.’). Because there has been no known study on diminution in Dagbani, the diminutive role of these suffixes, discussed in this paper, has not featured in any previous study.

This structure of nouns and adjectives is maintained in complex forms such as compounds, which may combine two or more nouns in their inflected forms (e.g. *do-o yil-i* man-sg. house-sg. ‘a man’s house’) or the lexical roots of two or more nouns and adjectives with one nominal suffix (e.g. *na-bi-a* chief-child-sg. ‘a prince’; *na-bi-puyiŋ-ga* chief-child-female-sg. ‘a princess’). In this paper, it will be shown that while some diminutives are suffixes added to bound lexical roots, some lexical roots are added to other lexical roots to derive compounds and encode diminution.

1.2. The pragmatic functions of diminutives

In the past few decades, one of the issues that have taken centre stage in analyses of diminution is the role of pragmatics, as reflected in studies such as Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994); Schneider (2003, 2013); Prieto (2005); Spasovski (2012); Ponsonnet (2018) (for further discussion, see Merlini Barbaresi (2015)). While it may be difficult in some instances to distinguish between the semantic and pragmatic functions of diminutives, as noted by Prieto (2005), many studies see smallness, littleness, or childness as the typical, purely semantic function of diminutives and categorise other functions such as lesser significance, amelioration, affection and pejoration as the pragmatic functions.

Pragmatic functions of diminutives are based on context and norms of the society. Some studies such as Prieto (2005) even include maxims of conversation as part of the factors that define the pragmatic use of diminutives. Schneider (2013) provides extensive discussion, citing many other previous studies, on the use of diminutives to encode intentional understatement. These include Schneider (2003) on English, Staverman (1953) on Dutch, Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994) on Italian, Ettinger (1974) on German, Sifianou (1992) on Greek and Agbetsoamedo (2011) on Selee. Schneider uses the English sentences in (1) (and many equivalents in different languages) to illustrate how speakers can sometimes use diminutives to show modesty and play down the value of things that may be of great value. In the examples shown below, the birthday gift could be as valuable as an expensive car and the chalet could be worth a fortune.

(1) The use of diminutives to encode understatement (Schneider 2013: 147)

a. *Here's a little something for your birthday.*

b. *I've got a little chalet in the mountains.*

Prieto (2005) notes that the use of diminutives to encode pragmatic effects constituted 78% of a corpus of 443 instances of diminutive use in Spanish, and affection-driven use, which, in his analysis, includes endearment, intensifying and commiseration functions constituted 49% of the entire corpus. Other pragmatic functions discussed by Prieto include derogation (consisting of irony and pejoration) and attenuation or politeness (consisting of mitigation and euphemism). Travis (2004) argues that the Spanish diminutive suffix *-ito/-ita* has taken on the pragmatic functions such as affection, contempt, and hedging speech acts. Wierzbicka (1992) (cited in Travis 2004) argues that in languages such as Russian and Polish, the frequent use of the diminutive positively contributes to speakers good feeling towards others.

Spasovski (2012) shows that in Macedonian, diminutives are typically associated with communication with children (see King and Melzi (2004) and Savickienė (2007) for similar studies on Spanish and Lithuanian respectively). Other pragmatic contexts of diminutive use discussed by Spasovski include requests, offers, compliments, in-group solidarity as well as irony, sarcasm and contempt. Spasovski also shows that diminutives also play a hedging function. Gibson et. al. (2017) discuss the pragmatic functions of diminutives in Bantu languages, noting many of the functions already mentioned with references to many previous studies. Ponsonnet (2018), in another survey, presents a typology of emotional connotations of diminutives, highlighting its role in encoding emotions such as compassion, love, admiration and contempt in nineteen languages. In arguing for the role of context, many of these studies also highlight the role of sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics in the analysis of diminutives (e.g. Prieto 2005; Spasovski 2012).

The argument that Dagbani diminutive construction can only be fully understood by resorting to the pragmatics is supported in several ways, including the lack of semantic notion of smallness in the marker *bini*, the semantically contradictory senses presented by the marker *bila* in different contexts and many others discussed in the sections below.

2. The structure of diminutive constructions

Diminutive constructions in Dagbani are marked mainly morphologically through compounding with lexemes that encode diminution, and through suffixation using the suffix *-fu*. But there are also a few lexical items that mark diminution syntactically by modifying nominal forms. These are discussed below.

2.1. Morphological encoding: Compounding

Many lexical morphemes are compounded to encode diminution. These are discussed below.

2.1.1. *bia/bila*

The most often used diminutive lexical forms in Dagbani are *bi-a* 'child-sg.' and *bil-a* 'small-sg'. When used to describe one thing relative to another, the diminution expressed by *bil-a* relates to the relative age, size, and temporal order of occurrence, as discussed further below. In their plural forms, the two words are the same: *bi-hi*. While these words are free morphemes in the lexicon, *bila* mostly surfaces in compound forms

as the second of the two or more lexical roots. In fact, the only time it surfaces in a non-compound form is when it is used to modify the pronoun *zay*, (*zay bil-a* pronoun small-sg. ‘a small one’). Thus, despite their position as free lexical forms, their diminutive use is morphologically encoded via compounding. Examples are shown below.

(2) The use of *bila* as a diminutive

- a. ***nu-bila***
hand-small ‘a finger’
- b. ***napɔm-bila***
foot-small ‘a toe’
- c. ***nim-bila***
face-small ‘an eye’
- d. ***bu-bila***
goat-small ‘a kid’
- e. ***piɛ-bila***
sheep-small ‘a lamb’
- f. ***yidaan-bila***
husband-small ‘a husband’s younger brother’

The use of *bia* as a diminutive is almost exclusively metaphorical. This is discussed extensively in Section 3. In its diminutive use, the word *bia* ‘child’ has more to do with the smallness of the human being than the humanness or animacy of the noun. A sample of examples are shown in (3). In a non-diminutive use, *bia* appears in associative construction to mean a child associated with the noun it follows (e.g. *na-bia* chief-child ‘prince’).

(3) Words with the diminutive *bia*.

- a. ***du-no-bia***
room-mouth-child ‘doorstep’
- b. ***tiŋ-bia***
town-child ‘a native’
- c. ***duum-bia***
knee-child ‘a knee cup’
- d. ***tib-bia***
ear-child ‘eardrum’
- e. ***ludu-bia***
ludo-child ‘a dice in a game of ludo’

2.1.2. *bini*

The word *bin-i* ‘thing-sg’ (a thing) is a noun. Like *bia* and *bila*, it is used in a compound form to encode diminution, which happens only in a pragmatic/metaphorical sense. Unlike *bia* and *bila*, it is the first lexeme in the compound that is constructed. It also differs from *bia* and *bila* in other respects. When it is used in a non-diminutive sense, it precedes an adjectival lexical root in the compound (e.g. *bin-suy* ‘a good thing’, *bin-sabinli* ‘a black thing’); when it is used to mark diminution, it precedes a nominal lexical root, as illustrated in (4).

(4) The use of *bini* as a diminutive marker

- a. ***bin-yaanga*** ‘the back’

- b. *bin-puli* ‘the stomach’
- c. *bin-sabli* ‘the liver’
- d. *bin-gbaŋ* ‘the skin’
- e. *bin-zuɣu* ‘the head’
- f. *bin-bɛma* ‘the shins’

A *bin-adjective* compound, which is non-diminutive, is resorted to when the speaker does not know the name of the entity, is not sure of the identity, or simply does not want to repeat or name the entity described by the adjective. A *bin-noun* compound may or may not encode diminution. It only gains a diminutive encoding when it refers to the severed limb of an animal. For all the words in (4), the addition of *bin-* to the word makes it a part of animal taken out as meat after slaughter. When *bin-* is not added, it merely refers to a part of any animate being, including humans.¹

2.2. Morphological encoding: Suffixation

The suffix *-fu* is added to nouns that connote weakness/insufficiency to express a greater degree of weakness/insufficiency. Evidence supporting the diminutive marking of this suffix comes from their plural forms, in which both diminutive and non-diminutive forms are the same.

(5) Words with *fu* marking diminution.

	reg. sg.	dim. sg.	pl.	
a.	<i>biɛl-a</i>	<i>biɛl-fu</i>	<i>biɛl-a</i>	‘small (in quantity)’
b.	<i>bil-a</i>	<i>bil-fu</i>	<i>bih-i</i>	‘small (in size)/tiny’
c.	<i>chɔyɪŋ-gu</i>	<i>chɔy-fu</i>	<i>chɔy-ma</i>	‘weak/timid’
d.	<i>lay-ri</i> (money)	<i>lay-fu</i>		‘a cowrie’

2.3. Syntactic encoding

Some lexical items in Dagbani inherently connote (relative) insufficiency in quantity, size, age, value, usefulness or significance (see Cahill 2015 for an observation about lexical encoding of diminution in Kɔnni, a genetically related Gur language). Examples of such lexical items in Dagbani include *tuzo* ‘a younger relative of the same gender’; *nyɛl-fu* ‘guinea worm’ and *difu* chaff/bran’). The data in (6) show different adjectives that are used to encode diminution. All but the last of these examples can loosely be translated as ‘a small piece’. A discussion on the semantics of these diminutive forms is presented in Section 3. The words in (6)a-c are cited from Hudu (2014).

(6) Other diminutive forms

- a. *chee*: A small piece that has to be small to be useful (e.g. *nim-chee* ‘a piece of meat that is of a suitable size for cooking/eating’; *tan chee* ‘a piece of cloth cut out to be sown into a dress’).
- b. *chɛyu*: A piece that is too small to serve any useful purpose (e.g. *la chɛyu* ‘a broken piece of earthenware’; *nim chɛyu* ‘a tiny piece of meat such as one picked out of the teeth’).
- c. *cherili*: a torn piece of a whole that renders the whole incomplete/inelegant (e.g. *daliya cherili* ‘a torn shirt’).

¹ This is not universal. Some speakers may choose to refer to the severed body part without the addition of *bin-*. However, such a reference may be ambiguous without the relevant context.

- d. *bulli*: A tiny piece out of a delicate object, typically used for a piece of cake (e.g. *mah bulli* ‘a piece of deep fried corn cake’).
- e. *bielli*: Used mainly to refer to particles of grains (e.g. *za bielli* ‘a grain of millet’).
- f. *biela*: A small amount, the equivalent of English *little*, and used to modify mass or non-count nouns (e.g. *bindirigu biela* ‘a little amount of food’).

In (6)e, the word *bielli* picks out a grain out of a mass noun, which is non-count. The diminutive thus serves the purpose of making the mass noun countable. Thus, several grains are *biel-a*.

3. The semantics and pragmatics of diminutives

The various diminutive forms discussed in the preceding section encode different semantic and pragmatic content. As already noted, when the pragmatics of these diminutive forms is considered, we arrive at the conclusion that all diminutive forms in Dagbani encode one effect: lesser significance or value. This is discussed in the different sub-sections below.

3.1. Size

When the most frequent diminutive word *bila* is used to describe one thing relative to another, one of the most common literal meanings that is encoded is smallness in size. For instance, *bila* is often used to distinguish between two people of the same name using their physical appearance, especially if their age is not known. Thus, *Azindo Bila* can mean the *Azindoo* with a smaller physique. In this usage, the lesser significance is to the physical size of the person.

The words *bila* and *bini* may also be added optionally to nouns that are inherently small (e.g. (7)a-b), or relatively small (7)c. In (7)c, the smallness of a lid is relative to the bigger object that it is used to cover (see Section 3.5 for further discussion of the use of diminutive markers to encode part-whole relations).

(7) The optional use of *bila* and *bini* as diminutives

- a. *ɲmani* ~ *ɲmam-bila* ‘a dove’
- b. *noon-ga* ~ *noom-bila* ‘a (flying) bird’
- c. *liɲa* ~ *bin-liɲa* ‘a lid’

In a number of ways, the semantics alone is not enough to appreciate the use of *bila* as a diminutive in these examples. The addition of *bila* or *bini* is not intended to add any further semantic content to the word. The meanings of these nouns with or without *bila* or *bini* are the same, so its addition is not strictly motivated by semantics. Besides, the objects depicted by these words are not the smallest of objects that can be found. There are animate beings much smaller than birds such as ants of various types, that do not receive optional *bila*. A plausible explanation for the optional use of *bila* can be obtained contextually when these birds are compared to other birds that are commonly eaten. The use of *bila* for a dove marks it as the smallest of all domesticated birds, compared with guinea fowls, turkeys, ducks and fowls. In the case of *noom-bila*, it is used as a cover term for all small birds that fly in the sky. Large birds such as hawks and eagles may be referred to with the cover term *noonga*, but not *noom-bila*.

3.2. Quantity

Smallness in quantity is encoded by the word *biela* post-nominally. Unlike *bila*, it cannot be compounded with a noun.

(8) The encoding of lesser quantity with *biela*.

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. | <i>taŋkpa-yu biela</i> | * <i>taŋkpa-biela</i> | a little quantity of sand |
| b. | <i>bindiri-gu biela</i> | * <i>bindiri-biela</i> | a little quantity of food |
| c. | <i>ze-ri biela</i> | * <i>ze-biela</i> | a little amount of soup |
| d. | <i>nambɔ-yu biela</i> | * <i>nambɔ-biela</i> | a little bit of pity |
| e. | <i>suhupiel-li biela</i> | * <i>suhupiel-biela</i> | a little bit of joy |

It is worth noting that the role of *biela* as a modifier is not restricted to nouns. It can also be used to modify actions (e.g. *chaŋ biela* ‘walk a little bit’, *gbihi biela* ‘sleep for a short while’). Thus, the position of *biela* as a nominal diminutive marker is relatively weak. It is merely a quantifier which expresses insufficiency of nouns, actions and attributes.

3.3. Immaturity

The diminutive *bila* is also used to encode immaturity or lesser maturity. While this is often conflated with size and age, there are cases where only the lack of maturity is encoded. The exact diminutive encoding depends on the context of use. In some contexts where it encodes lack of maturity, its addition is optional, as the data in (9) show.

(9) The addition of *bila* to words with relative diminutive connotation.

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------------|
| a. | <i>bi-a</i> ~ <i>bi-bila</i> | ‘a child’ |
| b. | <i>bi-dib-ga</i> ~ <i>bidib-bila</i> | ‘a boy’; |
| c. | <i>bi-puyiŋ-ga</i> ~ <i>bi-puyim-bila</i> | ‘a girl’ |
| d. | <i>pay-sarli</i> ~ <i>pay-sar-bila</i> | ‘an adolescent girl’ |
| e. | <i>nachimba</i> ~ <i>nachim-bihi</i> | ‘adolescent boys’ |

In other contexts, its addition may be intended to achieve contrast. For instance, the augmentative word *kurli* ‘old/mature/big’ may replace some of the words in (9), as shown in (10). Thus, both *bila* and *kurli* may be used in a conversation to categorise people based on their (perceived) maturity.

(10) The contrastive use of *kurli* to words with relative diminutive connotation.

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|-------------------------|
| a. | <i>bi-kurli</i> | ‘a big child’ |
| b. | <i>pay-sar-kurli</i> | ‘a big adolescent girl’ |
| c. | <i>nachin kurli</i> | ‘a big adolescent boy’ |

3.4. Order of realisation

One of the commonest meanings encoded by evaluative markers crosslinguistically (especially diminutives and augmentatives) is age, understood as the relative temporal order of realisation or coming into being of entities. Diminutive markers are typically used when comparing two entities standing in temporal relations, typically marking the one that comes later as the younger and usually also the smaller and less matured of the two. In Dagbani, there is more to the exact pragmatic content encoded than age or temporal order of existence. When the pragmatic and sociolinguistic contexts are considered, it turns out that the temporal order is useful only as a maker of relative

value or significance of an entity. The entity that receives the diminutive marker gets it not necessarily because it is younger or comes later, it gets diminutivised only when being younger is perceived to be of lesser significance. The various pragmatic encodings of diminutive forms encoding temporality are discussed in this section.

3.4.1. Age

For most animate beings, the typical means of distinguishing between the young and old is using *bila*. Examples are shown below.

(11) The use of *bila* to encode small size/age

- a. *bu-bila* 'goat-small' (a kid)
- b. *pe-bila* 'sheep-small' (a lamb)
- c. *no-bila* 'fowl-small' (a chick)
- d. *nay-bila* 'cow-small' (a calf)

The use of *bila* to encode younger age as shown in (11) is not always literal, but metaphorical. For a deeper understanding of the metaphorical use of *bila* and why the literal encoding does not provide a comprehensive account of its diminutive use, it is important to consider the value of age in Dagbani sociolinguistics. This is discussed in Section 4.1.

3.4.2. Order of ascension to a throne

Both *bila* (and sometimes also *kpema* 'elder/older') are also used to differentiate between chiefs of the same name who have occupied the same throne. It is the equivalent of the use of the numerals First, Second in English. Thus, in the Dagbon Kingdom, *bila* was added to the names of several kings because they bore the same name with others who occupied the same throne before them (e.g. *Naa Abdulai Bila*). The earlier king would acquire the term *kpema* (*Naa Abdulai Kpema*) only after the enthronement of the latter one with the same name.

The latter chief will typically be younger than the former. For this reason, the use of *bila* in this context also encodes the age difference between them. However, it does not strictly do so. The latter chief will still have *bila* added to his name even if he was older than his namesake who occupied the throne before him. The use of *bila* in this sense has more to do with the belief of the Dagomba that every chief is the son (or daughter) of the one that preceded him/her on the same throne even if the reigning chief is not a descendant of the preceding one. If the late chief even died at an age younger than the age of the successor at the time of his ascension to the throne, the late chief will be considered the father of the reigning chief. Thus, among chiefs who have occupied the same throne, precedence on a throne is of great significance (for further discussion on the relations between chiefs in Dagbon, see Hudu 2023). The addition of *bila* to the names of those who come later is intended to encode the message that they lack that significant trait relative to their namesake that preceded them on the same throne.

3.4.3. Names of months of the year

The analysis in this section (Section 3) rests on the argument that (a) precedence does not always imply older age and (b) it is not always the latter one that is diminutivised. The strongest source of evidence supporting both arguments comes from the names for the months of the year. Dagbani uses the lunar calendar, and festivals are reference

events for naming them. In addition to naming the months after festivals that are celebrated in them, months that lack festivals are paired with those with festivals using the word *bila*. Thus, a month that lacks any festival gets its significance by its association with another month that has one. But there is a further restriction: a festival-free month is only named after and for that matter is a diminutive of the month that follows it, not the one that precedes it.

There are six months in which festivals or some other religiously significant events are marked. Two of the festivals, the Fire and Kpini festivals, that serve as the basis for naming these months are native to the people. The remaining festivals are based on Islamic practices that have influenced the culture and traditions of the Dagomba due to its centuries-old presence in the Kingdom.

(12) Dagomba months with festivals

Order	Name	(Literal) meaning	Festival/significant event
1 st	<i>Buyum</i>	‘fire’	Fire festival.
3 rd	<i>Damba</i>	‘Damba’	Damba festival
7 th	<i>Kpini</i>	‘guinea fowl’	Kpini festival
9 th	<i>No-lɔri</i>	‘mouth-tying (fasting)’	Islamic fasting month (Ramadan)
10 th	<i>Ko-nyuri Chuyu</i>	‘water drinking feast’	Eid-ul-Fitr celebration
12 th	<i>Chimsi Chuyu</i>	(meaning unclear)	Eid-ul-adha celebration

Out of these six months, two are preceded by months in which festivals are celebrated. These are the first and the tenth months. For this reason, the months preceding them, the twelfth and the ninth, are not named after them. Each of the remaining four months is used as the referent in naming the month preceding it, as shown in (13):

(13) Months with diminutive *bila*

Order	Name	
2 nd	<i>Damba Bila</i>	‘small Damba’ (the 3 rd month).
6 th	<i>Kpini Bila</i>	‘small Kpini’ (the 7 th month).
8 th	<i>Nɔlɔri Bila</i>	‘small Nɔlɔri’ (the 9 th month).
11 th	<i>Chimsi Bila</i>	‘small Chimsi’ (the 12 th month).

Throughout the year, there are only three successive months that lack a festival. These are the fourth, fifth and sixth. The sixth month precedes the seventh, which has a festival, and is named as the ‘small Kpini’. Incidentally, neither the fourth nor fifth month is named with reference to the other. In other words, neither of them is of lesser or greater significance than the other. The fourth month is called ***Gaambanda***, the fifth is ***Bandacheena*** whose meanings are not clear. The fourth follows the third (*Damba*), which has a festival, and could have taken its name by its association with Damba if the associative naming were arbitrary. However, because it follows the Damba month, the appropriate name would have been ****Damba Kpema*** ‘the greater/elder *Damba*’. This is not the case. The Dagbani calendar is thus a set of four twin months each of which consists of a significant month and its diminutive twin sister, and another set of four single months.

The point about the use of *bila* to encode lesser significance is that, if a month lacks any festival, it becomes significant for being the month when the people prepare themselves for the festival in the month that follows it. This may not involve any rituals, and may be merely psychological, as they look forward to the month that will give them

the opportunity to celebrate the festival. However, the festival-free month preceding the festival gets the diminutive marker because preparing for a festival is of lesser significance than celebrating the festival. For a festival-free month following the festival, there is nothing about it that makes it deserving of association with the festival given that no cultural or ritual activities related to a festival takes place in the month following the celebration of the festival.

3.5. Part-whole relations

The final category of meaning encoded by diminutives is part-whole relations. This is manifested in different ways, as discussed below.

3.5.1. Individuation

When *bia/bila* is attached to the name of a group such as an ethnicity, clan, community or institution, it picks out an individual (or individuals, when the plural form *bihi* is used) as a member of the group. In this usage, the group identity or institution of affiliation of the individual is what is of interest to the user. Thus, the word for a *student/pupil* in Dagbani is *fikuru-bia* ‘school-child (school’s child)’ or *fikuru-bila* ‘school-small’. Other examples are shown below.

- (14) Individuating meaning of *bila/bia*.
- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| a. <i>Lagɔŋ-bia</i> | ‘a student of Legon’ |
| b. <i>Machɛl-bila</i> | ‘A blacksmith’ |
| c. <i>lum-bila</i> | ‘a drummer’ |
| d. <i>Kambom-bila</i> | ‘Akan person’ |
| e. <i>Silmiim-bila</i> | ‘a white person’ |
| f. <i>Mo-bila</i> | ‘a Moshi person’ |

In addition to groups or communities, the Dagbani word for twin, *ja-a*, is most often modified with *bila* when used in reference to a specific individual as *ja-bila/ja-bihi*, even if the twins are old enough to be grandparents. Thus, it is more common to hear a sentence such as *o nyela jabila* ‘s/he is a twin’ than *o nyela jaa*.

While the individuating sense is the surface meaning, there is a deeper sense of highlighting the lesser significance of individuals compared to the groups they belong to. That is because people are understood to live together as members belonging to the same clan or ethnic group. They derive their strength, value or significance from their collectivity. When referring to one or a few of them, the use of *bila* indicates that as individuals, they lack the strength and significance that define them as a collective. The same analysis holds for contexts where *bila* is used to indicate the institutional affiliation of an individual such as a student. In the compound *Lagɔŋ-bia* (a student of Legon), what is encoded is the lesser significance of the individual, in contrast to Legon as an institution, with thousands of students, professors and other workers.

3.5.2. Partitive marker

The words *bila/bia* can be used to indicate that the noun is a small, and thus, less significant part of a larger object. This is most common with body parts, as shown in (15).

- (15) Body part (Based on size: a small part of a whole)
- | | | |
|--|---------|------------|
| | literal | contextual |
|--|---------|------------|

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|---|
| a. <i>nu-bila</i> | ‘small hand’ | ‘finger’ |
| b. <i>napɔm-bila</i> | ‘small foot’ | ‘toe’ |
| c. <i>nim-bila</i> | ‘small face’ | ‘eye’ |
| d. <i>duum-bia</i> | ‘knee’s child’ | ‘knee cap’ |
| e. <i>tib-bia</i> | ‘ear’s child’ | ‘eardrum’ |
| f. <i>chinchin-bia</i> | ‘cloth’s child’ | ‘a small cloth worn on top of a bigger one’ |

The literal interpretations for these words are based on a purely semantic interpretation, which are not the actual meanings. The word *bin-i* ‘thing-sg’ (a thing) is also used to indicate a part-whole relation between two entities. When a part of an animate being is severed, usually as meat, *bini* is used to express the smallness or reduced significance of that part relative to the whole. Relevant data on this were shown in (4), repeated in (16).

(16) Words with *bini* marking part-whole relations.

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| a. <i>bin-yaanga</i> | ‘the back’ |
| b. <i>bin-puli</i> | ‘the stomach’ |
| c. <i>bin-sabli</i> | ‘the liver’ |
| d. <i>bin-gbaŋ</i> | ‘the skin’ |
| e. <i>bin-zuyu</i> | ‘the head’ |
| f. <i>bin-bema</i> | ‘the shins’ |

4. Other issues in the encoding of diminution

In this section, three issues that are important in the encoding of diminution are discussed. These are age-related address terms among family relations, gender and a possible diachronic change that may have affected the productivity of *-fu*, the only diminutive suffix in the language.

4.1. Diminutives in age-related address terms among family relations

One sociolinguistic domain within which diminutives emerge is address terms for family relations. This is because these terms are based on the relative age of the interlocutors. For this reason, many of the address terms also encode diminution. The purpose of the discussion in this page is to show that the use of these diminutives mostly emerges contextually. The use of a diminutive denoting a younger or smaller physical size does not often hold when the literal meaning of these words are considered. Rather, age or physical size interacts with gender and family relations to encode diminution.

Among the Dagomba, the social relationship between people in the community anchors largely on age and gender than any other social constructs. Within the clan, the oldest man is the leader by virtue of his gender and age. Every person carries an address term based on his or her age relative to the interlocutor, and each person is required to address the other, especially the ones older than them, using an age-related address term. However, as noted below, the use of these age-related address terms also has more to do with family relations than the date of birth of individuals. The data in (17) provides the address terms. The relevant age-related terms are *-pira* and *-kpɛma*. Note that while *-pira* is always used as a bound morpheme, *kpɛma* is a free morpheme. In the glossing of these terms, the contextual, and sometimes metaphorical meanings are put in parenthesis to distinguish them from the literal meanings. This is discussed further below.

- (17) Age-related names/address terms²
- a. Parents and their siblings, cousins
 - i. *ba* 'father'
 - ii. *ma* 'mother'
 - iii. *ba-pira* '(father's younger brother or younger male cousin)'
 - iv. *ma-pira* '(a mother's younger sister or younger female cousin)'
 - v. *ba-kpema* 'a father's elder brother or elder male cousin'
 - vi. *ma-kpema* 'a mother's elder sister or elder female cousin'
 - b. Siblings and cousins
 - i. *tuzo(-bila)* 'a younger sibling or cousin of the same gender.'
 - ii. *bieli* 'an older sibling or cousin of the same gender; (a woman's husband, a woman's sibling-in-law) (a woman's co-wife married into the family earlier)'
 - c. Spouses
 - i. *waljira* 'the first wife of a man'
 - ii. *pay-bila* '(the last wife of a man)'
 - d. Spouses' siblings
 - i. *yidaan-bila* ('a woman's husband's younger brother')
 - ii. *yidaan-kpema* ('a woman's husband's elder brother')

While all these are names of relatives, the only ones that are most often used as address terms and must be added to the personal names of relatives are the names for parents, parents' siblings, and older siblings. The term for younger sibling is not necessarily a title because younger siblings do not deserve recognition for their age. In an interaction between two people, the one who must be treated with deference is the older of the two. For this reason, in a household with two people bearing the same name, *kpema* and *bila* is often used to distinguish between them based on their age. Thus, *Azindo kpema* means the elder of two people bearing the name *Azindoo*, while *Azindo bila* is the younger of the two. This is regardless of the relative physique of the two persons, contrary to the discussion in Section 3.1 regarding the use of *bila* for people with smaller physique.

Many of these terms extend beyond the family. Within the larger community, people are addressed, especially by those younger than them, based on their age. Anyone old enough to be one's parent or elder sibling is addressed with the honorific *m ba* 'my father'; *m ma* 'my mother' or *m bieli* 'my elder'. For instance, *Azindoo* will be addressed as *m be-Azindoo* if he is older than the person addressing him but too young to be the addresser's father's age mate. He will then be entitled to more respect and other courtesies by virtue of his age. With age playing such an important role in the interpersonal relationship between people and in the entire sociolinguistics of the people, the reference to someone as *bila* implies the lack of something of significance.

² The data shown here are based on what is deemed relevant for the analysis here. Neither the terms nor the glosses for some of them are exhaustive. For instance, each of the address terms for parents and their siblings are also used by younger in-laws. For instance, *ba* also refers to one's father-in-law, *ma* for mother-in-law etc. Other age-related address terms not included here are *nahiba* (maternal uncle, regardless of his relative age with one's mother and *piriba* (a paternal aunt regardless of her age relative to one's father). And *tuzo-paya*, *tuzo-doo* refer respectively to a cross-gender sister/cousin and a cross-gender brother/cousin regardless of relative age.

However, the use of these age-related address terms goes beyond the relative date of birth between the addresser and addressee. Nephews or nieces will use the same address terms for uncles and aunts who are younger than them. In a polygamous family, the last wife of the man will always be referred to as the *pay-bila* ('wife-small/young') even if she is older and physically bigger than the first. What is of significance here is the relative time of marriage, not date of birth. The wife who was married first deserves more respect than the one married later. A married woman will address the husband as her *bieli* (literally, older sibling) even if she is older than him. What is significant here is the power relations between the couple. The husband is the head of the family, a position that elevates him above the wife to the position of the wife's elder brother. What is more, the husband's siblings get a share in this honour, as they also get addressed with the same title even if the wife is older than them by decades. Similarly, she will refer to her husband's younger brother as her *yidaam-bila* 'small husband' even if the brother-in-law is older than her. The use of *bila* applies to the age relations between the husband and his brother, not between the wife and the brother-in-law. Among siblings, *bila* is also often added to *tuzo*, such that the term for younger sibling is realized as *tuzo-bila*, even if the younger sibling is physically of bigger size. The overall effect is to re-enforce the understanding that the younger sibling lacks something of significance: age.

Beyond family relations, the same pragmatic sense is encoded in the use of the word *bia* 'child'. For instance, it is used to refer to a learner, *karim bia* 'learning child'. By contrast, a teacher is known as *karim ba* 'learning father'. These terms are used regardless of the age of the learner relative to the teacher. What is relevant here is the lesser status or significance of the learner as far as knowledge is concerned.

4.2. Gender markers in the encoding of diminution and augmentation

Across languages of the world, gender marking and diminution interact in two ways. Diminutive markers may also be used to mark one gender. For instance, Appah and Amfo (2011) argue that the diminutive morpheme (*-bal-wa*) whose origin is the Akan word for child, is also used to encode feminine gender. Another interaction involves the use of a gender suffix for evaluative purpose, including diminution and augmentation. For instance, citing several authors, Grandi 2015a, 2015b lists Maltese and Berber languages as examples of languages that encode diminution using the feminine gender-marking suffix³.

In Dagbani, the masculine gender is typically used as augmentatives and the feminine gender as diminutives. Dagbani has four different allomorphs of the morpheme that marks masculinity: *laa*, *lɔyɔ*, *daa* and *dibga*. All but *dibga* can be suffixed to nouns to project their relative size, strength, or significance. For instance, a sick person will not just hope to treat the sickness with *tim* 'medicine' but will hope to get a *ti-laa* 'a potent medicine' that can cure the sickness. Other examples include *so-lɔyɔ* 'big/major road', *bɔyi lɔyɔ* 'huge pit/crater' and *vuy-laa* 'a giant farm bed'. In many cases where masculine gender marks augmentation, the masculine suffix cannot be replaced by a feminine suffix or some other diminutive marker to diminutivise the noun. But in some cases, this is possible, as in the word *so-bila* 'a path', which contrasts with *so-lɔyɔ* 'main road'.

³ There are other languages such as Slovak (Gregová (2015) that use both feminine and masculine markers to encode diminution.

Similarly, the feminine morpheme *nyan* is used to mark objects that are (perceived to be) relatively smaller, weaker or of lesser value or significance. The commonest use of *nyan* to mark diminution is in the name of paired musical instruments. For such instruments, the smaller, usually high-pitched pair is named the female of the pair while the bigger and louder of the two is the male. For some of them, *bila* may replace *nyan* as an alternative means of diminutivising the smaller one. This is shown in (18)c-e.

(18) Gender morphemes as evaluative (augmentatives and diminutives) markers

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. | <i>kika-a</i> | <i>kika-lɔyɔ</i> | <i>kika-nyan</i> | ‘trumpet’ |
| b. | <i>timpan-i</i> | <i>timpan-daa</i> | <i>timpan-nyan</i> | ‘talking drum’ |
| c. | <i>dal-gu</i> | <i>dal-lɔyɔ</i> | <i>dal-nyan</i> / <i>dal-bila</i> | ‘standing drum’ |
| d. | <i>luŋ-a</i> | <i>luŋ-daa</i> | <i>luŋ-nyan</i> / <i>luŋ-bila</i> | ‘double-edged hour-glass drum’ |
| e. | <i>dawul-e</i> | <i>dawul-lɔyɔ</i> | <i>dawul-nyan</i> / <i>dawul-bila</i> | ‘double bell’ |

4.3. Diachronic change in diminutive marker

In Section 2.2, it was shown that the suffix *-fu* marks diminution. However, the use of this suffix to diminutivise nouns is not productive. Indeed, words ending in *fu* in Dagbani are generally rare. This rarity appears to be due to a diachronic change that debuccalized the sound [f] in such words into [h] (see Hudu 2018 for further discussion on debuccalisation in Dagbani). This analysis is based on a comparison with Mampruli, a genetically close relative of Dagbani (considered by many speakers of both languages as a dialect of Dagbani) in which many cognate words with final [-*fu*] end in [-*hu*] in Dagbani. Such words are shown in (19) with the Dagbani forms in parenthesis. The fact that words such as those in (19) end in *-fu* suggests that unlike Dagbani, the diminutivising function of this suffix may be weaker or non-existent in Mampruli.

(19) Mampruli words that take the suffix *-fu*.

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|--------------|
| a. | <i>naafu</i> (<i>nahu</i>) | ‘cow/bovine’ |
| b. | <i>sufu</i> (<i>suhu</i>) | ‘heart’ |
| c. | <i>yoofu</i> (<i>wahu</i>) | ‘horse’ |
| d. | <i>waafu</i> (<i>wahu</i>) | ‘snake’ |
| e. | <i>kaafu</i> (<i>kahu</i>) | ‘a grain’ |

The context of this debuccalisation is intervocalic position where the syllable *fu* follows a short vowel, as is the case in Dagbani synchronic grammar (Hudu and Nindow 2020; Hudu 2022). For words in both languages in which *fu* is not preceded by a short vowel, [f] maintains its place of articulation, as shown in (20).

(20) Dagbani and Mampruli words with *fu*.

- | | | |
|----|------------------|---------------|
| a. | <i>lay-fu</i> | ‘a cowrie’ |
| b. | <i>nyel-fu</i> | ‘guinea worm’ |
| c. | <i>difu/dufu</i> | ‘chaff, bran’ |
| d. | <i>baafu</i> | ‘flick-knife’ |

In spite of this diachronic explanation, these words also are inherently diminutive. They add weight to the clearly synchronically diminutive use of the suffix *-fu* shown in (5), and repeated in (21). This raises the possibility that the rarity of words demonstrating

the diminutive use of *-fu* is due to this diachronic change. A further investigation into this in future research will be worthwhile.

(21) Synchronic diminutivisation with suffix *-fu*.

reg. sg.	dim. sg.	pl.	
a. <i>biel-a</i>	<i>biel-fu</i>	<i>biel-a</i>	‘small (in quantity)’
b. <i>bil-a</i>	<i>bil-fu</i>	<i>bih-i</i>	‘small (in size)/tiny’
c. <i>chɔyɪŋ-gu</i>	<i>chɔy-fu</i>	<i>chɔy-ma</i>	‘weak/timid’
d. <i>lay-ri</i> ‘money’	<i>lay-fu</i>		‘a cowrie’

5. Concluding remarks

The goal of this paper has been to describe the encoding of diminution in Dagbani and to specifically show that this emerges within the pragmatics. While it is significant for being the first such study on the language to the best of my knowledge, and perhaps among genetic relatives in Ghana, it is by no means exhaustive, and was not intended to be. In this concluding section, a summary is presented on the role of pragmatics, socio- and ethno-linguistics in understanding Dagbani diminution. This is followed by remarks on directions for future research to advance our understanding of diminution in Dagbani.

5.1. Summing up the arguments on the pragmatic analysis

The main argument that the encoding of diminution and the value of various diminutive morphemes goes beyond their basic semantics can be summed up as follows. First, the diminutive *bini* lacks ‘smallness’ as part of its semantic content. It acquires it only in a restricted morphological context of the first lexeme in a noun-noun compound with its referent as the severed body part of an animal. Second, the literal evaluative meanings encoded by some markers are contradictory in different contexts. The marker *bila* literally encodes relative youngness, defined as the more recent to come into existence. But when used to modify the name of the months of the year, it refers to the month that comes earlier.

Third, the diminutive encoding of some of these morphemes is non-existent when the semantic content alone is relied upon. In the partitive use of *bila* and *bia*, the literal meaning derived by combining the semantic content of the morphemes in the compounds is non-existent. In the individuating function, the addition of *bila* to the name of a clan or group does not imply that the person referred to is small. Fourth, the literal meaning, even if existent, may be wrong. The actual meanings can only be derived using the socio- and ethno-linguistic context. The markers *bila*, and *-pira*, when used as an address term for a relative, does not necessarily indicate that the person addressed is younger or smaller. Finally, the differences in the distribution and diminutivising functions of semantically related words *bila* and *biela* shows that encoding attenuation semantically does not suffice to predict the form or extent of diminution of a morpheme. While *bila* is very productive as a diminutive marker and does so morphologically, *biela* is less productive and only marks diminution lexically as a post-nominal quantifier.

5.2. Future research

The present study has not investigated phonological means of encoding diminution, though intonation has been found to play a role in Dagbani semantics and pragmatics (Hudu 2012). Cahill (2015) in particular, has shown that the major component of the

grammar responsible for diminutive construction in Kɔnni is tone. For this reason, the role of tone in Dagbani diminutive marking cannot be ruled out. Indeed, a preliminary observation on the individuating function of *bila* suggest that in some cases, it carries a different tone from other contexts where it merely modifies a noun. For instance, in the Eastern Dialect the English-Dagbani loanword for *school* is *fikúru*. The word for *student/pupil*, *fikuru-bila* carries the following tone: *fikúru-bilá*. However, in a non-individuating use of the term *bila* in the same compound, which produces the meaning *a small school* the second and third vowels in the word *fikúru* carry a down stepped high tone: *fik!úr!ú-bilá*. It is thus plausible that compound forms that contain diminutives show unique tonal patterns or intonational contours in some of the dialects of Dagbani. It will also be worth investigating whether a diminutive marker like *bini*, which does not encode diminution until it appears in a compound carries a unique tone as a diminutive in any of the dialects. All these and other possibilities deserve attention, in light of Cahill's finding on Kɔnni and the Dagbani example just cited.

The discussion on the interaction between gender marking and diminution also unavoidably touched on the use of male gender marker as an augmentative. Like diminutives, there has been no known study on this nor any other evaluative marker in Dagbani. Indeed, the observation regarding the paucity of research on these evaluative markers and evaluative morphology in general applies to most languages in Ghana. Very few studies have been conducted on evaluative markers in Ghanaian languages. The only studies on diminution that came up during a search were on Akan, Ewe, Selee, and Kɔnni (see also Agbetsoamedo Di Garbo (2015) for analysis of Selee diminutives). The analyses presented here, I hope, will trigger further interest in research into the encoding of diminution and other evaluative forms in Ghanaian languages. I also hope that the findings make a useful input into theoretical studies of diminution and evaluative morphology in general.

References

- Agbetsoamedo, Yvonne. 2011: The Selee Diminutives: Origins, Forms and Functions. Paper presented at the 12th International Pragmatics Conference, Manchester, July 2011.
- Agbetsoamedo, Yvonne, and Francesca Di Garbo. 2015. Sɛlɛɛ. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology* pp 487–495. Edinburgh University Press.
- Agbetsoamedo, Yvonne, and Paul K. Agbedor. 2015. Ewe. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology*. pp. 472–479. Edinburgh University Press.
- Appah, Clement Kwamena I., and Nana Aba Appiah Amfo. 2011. The Morphopragmatics of the Diminutive Morpheme (-ba/-wa) in Akan *Lexis: Journal in English Lexicology* 6: 85-103. DOI : 10.4000/lexis.437
- Cahill, Michael. 2015. Kɔnni. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology*. pp. 480–486. Edinburgh University Press.
- Dressler, Wolfgang U., and Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi. 1994. *Morphopragmatics: Diminutives and intensifiers in Italian, German, and other languages*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ettinger, Stefan. 1974. *Form und Funktion in der Wortbildung: Die Diminutiv- und Augmentativmodifiaktion im Lateinischen, Deutschen und Romanischen. Ein kritischer Forschungsbericht 1900-1970*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Gibson, Hannah, Rozenn Guérois, and Lutz Marten. 2017. Patterns and developments in the marking of diminutives in Bantu. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. 26(4), 344-383. <https://doi.org/10.53228/njas.v26i4.80>
- Grandi, Nicola. 2015a. Evaluative Morphology and Number/Gender. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology* pp. 91–107. Edinburgh University Press.
- Grandi, Nicola. 2015b. Berber. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (Eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology* (pp. 453–460). Edinburgh University Press.
- Grandi, Nicola, and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.). (2015). *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Gregová, R. 2015. Slovak. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology* pp 296–305. Edinburgh University Press.
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2005. *Number marking in Dagbani*. Msc. thesis, University of Alberta.
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2010. *Dagbani tongue-root harmony: A formal account with ultra sound investigation*. PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia. <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0071197>
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2012. Dagbani focus particles, a descriptive study. *Journal of West African Languages*. 39(1). 97–129.
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2014. What is the phonological word in Dagbani? A positional faithfulness account. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 3(1). 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gil.v3i1.1>
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2018. Asymmetries in the phonological behaviour of Dagbani place features: Implications for markedness. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 29(2) 197-240. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v29i2.8>

- Hudu, Fusheini. 2021. The utility of orthographic design for different users: The case of the approved Dagbani orthography. *Language Documentation and Conservation*, 15: 358–374. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/74652>
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2022. Defining the prosodic word with segmental processes in Dagbani. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, 69(3) 271–300. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2062.2021.00437>
- Hudu, Fusheini. 2023. The narrative discourse of a bilingual talking drum: The case of the Dagomba *timpani*. *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 34(2) DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v34i2.3>
- Hudu, Fusheini and Abdallah Iddrisu. 2023. The morphological and syntactic functions of Dagbani nominal suffixes. *Topics in Linguistics*. 24(2): 30-50. <https://doi.org/10.2478/topling-2023-0010>
- Hudu, Fusheini. and Mohammed Osman Nindow. 2020. Nasality in Dagbani prosody. *Folia Linguistica*, 54(3) 527–550. <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin-2020-2039>
- Issah, Samuel Alhassan. 2013. The structure of the Dagbani simple noun phrase. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 33(2) 203–212.
- Jurafsky, Daniel. 1996. Universal tendencies in the semantics of the diminutive. *Language*, 72(3) 533-578. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/416278>
- King, Kenda, and Gigliana Melzi. 2004. Intimacy, imitation and language learning: Spanish diminutives in mother-child conversation. *First language*, 24(2), 241-261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723704044139>
- Merlini Barbaresi, Lavinia. 2015. Evaluative Morphology and Pragmatics. In Nicola Grandi and Livia Körtvélyessy (eds.), *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative Morphology*. pp 32–42. Edinburgh University Press.
- Naden, Tony. 2014. Dagbani dictionary. Tamale: Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation.
- Olawsky, Knut J. 1999. *Aspects of Dagbani grammar: With special emphasis on phonology and morphology*. Lincom Europa.
- Olawsky K.J., 2004. What is a noun? What is an adjective? Problems of Classification in Dagbani. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, 25(2) 127–148. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jall.2004.25.2.127>
- Ponsonnet, M. 2018. A preliminary typology of emotional connotations in morphological diminutives and augmentatives. *Studies in Language*, 42(1) 17-50. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.00002.pon>
- Prieto, Victor Moises. 2005. Spanish evaluative morphology: Pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and semantic issues. PhD dissertation. University of Florida.
- Savickienė, Ineta. 2007. Form and Meaning of Diminutives in Lithuanian Child Language. In Ineta Savickienė and Wolfgang U. Dressler (eds.), *The Acquisition of Diminutives: A Cross-linguistic Perspective* 43. Amsterdam: John Benjamins 13-41.
- Schneider, Klaus P. 2003. *Diminutives in English*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Schneider, Klaus P. 2013. The truth about diminutives, and how we can find it: Some theoretical and methodological considerations. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 10(1) 137-151.
- Sifianou, Maria. 1992. The use of diminutives in expressing politeness: Modern Greek versus English. *Journal of Pragmatics* 155-173. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(92\)90038-D](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(92)90038-D)
- Spasovski, Lupco. 2012. Morphology and Pragmatics of the Diminutive: Evidence from Macedonian. PhD dissertation. Arizona State University.

- Staverman, Werner H. 1953. Diminutivitis neerlandica. *De Gids* 116(7) 407-19.
- Travis, Catherine E. 2004. The ethnopragmatics of the diminutive in conversational Colombian Spanish. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 1(2) 249-274.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2004.1.2.249>
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 1992. *Semantics, culture, and cognition: Universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.