

LITERATURE

- Becker (1989) *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the cultures of Disciplines*. Great Britain. The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Bligh, D. et al. (1982) *Professionalism and Flexibility in Learning*. The Council for Research into Higher Education. England.
- CEPES (1986) *Foreign Students in the Countries of the Europe Region: Basic Statistical Data in Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. XI. No. 1.
- Copeland, W. et al. (1983) *Finnish-American Academic and Professional Exchanges: Analysis and Reminiscences*. Espoo. Weilin & Göös.
- Efana, L.U.B. (1993) *Internationalisation of Academic and Scientific Contacts: aspects of Finnish Scholarly Exchanges*. *Science and Public Policy Journal*. Vol. 20, No. 5. England. pp. 351-359.
- Garry, A. et al. (1981) *Learning Across Culture*. *Intellectual Communication and International Educational Exchange (NAFSA) USA*.
- Gilbert and Mulkey (1982) *Social Studies of Science. An International Review in the Social Dimension of Science and Technology*. Vol. 12. No. 3 (SAGE) - London.
- Lazar Ulasceanu (1987) *Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. XII, No. 1. Pages 40-47.
- Minerva (1983) "The Demise of Interuniversity Council" in Edward Shils, et al "A Review of Science, Learning and Policy." Vol XXI, No. 1. Pages 36-79.
- Spacy, J. et al. (1971) 'Science for development' An Essay on the origin and organisation of national science policy. Paris.
- Unesco (1974) *National Science Policies in Africa. Situational and Future Outlook*. Paris.
- Unesco (1981) *Interuniversity Co-operation In the Europe Region*. CEPES. Bucharest.
- Unesco (1982) *World Guide to Higher Education*. 2nd ed. Paris.
- Unesco (1989) *World of Learning*. Paris.
- Unesco (1990) *World of Learning*. Paris.
- Wilshire (1989) *The Moral Collapse of the university. Professionalism, Purity and Alienation*. New York State University Press.

**LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND CULTURE
IN NORTHERN GHANA: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
MABIA LINGUISTIC GROUP***
ADAMS BODOMO
University of Trondheim, Norway

INTRODUCTION

This paper offers an introduction to the geographical, historical and cultural environments in which a group of African languages find themselves. We first provide a geographical description of the area where these languages are spoken and show how the languages are distributed in it. Next, we give a linguistic classification and description of the languages of the region, both in terms of their genetic and typological features. The area under consideration is Northern Ghana and its adjoining regions of Burkina Faso, Togo and the Ivory Coast. There exist four main groups of languages in this area: the Mabia¹, the Grusi, the Gurma and the Guang languages. While making quite regular reference to the other groups, the concentration here will be on the Mabia languages; it is this group which is the most widespread in the region and as much as 80% of the population of Northern Ghana speak the Mabia languages. Following this classification and description, some historical and cultural affinities that exist between these people are discussed, making occasional comparisons with other groups of people at the national level. Finally, we give some sociolinguistic information pertaining to the area and especially to the major individual languages.

1.0 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The Mabia languages are spoken in an area which covers the greater part of Northern Ghana and almost the whole of the Republic of Burkina Faso. They

¹ The term 'Mabia' or any of its variants denotes a sibling relationship in languages such as Dagbane, Mampruli, Dagaare and Kusaal. It is built out of lexical items such as 'ma' = mother and 'bia', 'bie' or 'biiga' = child. It was first used in Bodomo (1993) as an indigenous classificatory term for these languages. It is meant to replace terms such as Western Oti-Volta which have also been used to refer to these languages. The use of the term is further explained in section 2.2.

can also be found in the adjoining areas of Togo and the Ivory Coast. This area of Africa is bordered to the south by the Forest belt and to the north by the Sahara Desert. The area has often been referred to as the Savannah belt of the West African region. The northern Ghanaian part of the region is located approximately between latitudes 8 and 11 degrees N of the equator and longitudes 1 and 3 degrees W. The geographical locations of the indigenous languages of Northern Ghana are shown in Map 1.

There are two main seasons, one wet and one dry, the former from April to October and the latter the rest of the year. Temperatures rarely fall below 20 degrees C and can sometimes exceed 40 degrees, except during the cold, dry harmattan winds between November and February, when the nights can be relatively cold. This area, midway between the forest and the desert area of West Africa, is comparatively less well-known by the outside world because, as Naden (1989) puts it, it '...was cut off from direct contact with the early European traders by the forest belt and its peoples, was separated from the Saharan trade routes by the Fulani-Mali-Songhai states...the area where Gur languages are spoken is still somewhat of a backwater.'

On the other hand, the region constitutes a unique climatic and social environment in West Africa which could be of great interest for linguistic and cultural studies. Barker (1986) in a 'preliminary report' has shown both the diversities and uniqueness of peoples, languages and religions in this part of Ghana. This was preceded by anthropological works such as Goody (1967 and 1972) and Drukner (1975) which, true to the anthropological method of participant observation, concentrated only on individual communities and not the whole region.

Not only is it a unique climatic, linguistic and cultural zone, it has also been historically regarded as a unique political and administrative zone. As Bening (1990) documents, separate administrative and especially educational policies were sometimes made for the Northern Territories, as the region was known then. It became known as Northern Ghana at independence of the whole country in 1957 and since then it has continued to be seen more or less as a composite administrative area in the country. Today, Northern Ghana comprises three of the country's ten administrative regions, Northern Region with administrative seat at Tamale, the Upper East Region, with its seat at Bolgatanga and the Upper West Region with its seat at Wa.

2.0 LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION OF NORTHERN GHANA

In classifying languages, two main methods are often used. One is genetic or historical and the other is typological. Here, a brief classification and

description of the Mabia languages is given using both methods. But before doing this, the nomenclature for classifying African languages and then the term 'Mabia' are explained.

2.1 THE NOMENCLATURE FOR CLASSIFYING AFRICAN LANGUAGES

In the classification of African languages, efforts have been made over the years to give appropriate cover names for groups of languages. Earlier researchers have taken a number of approaches to this linguistic nomenclature.

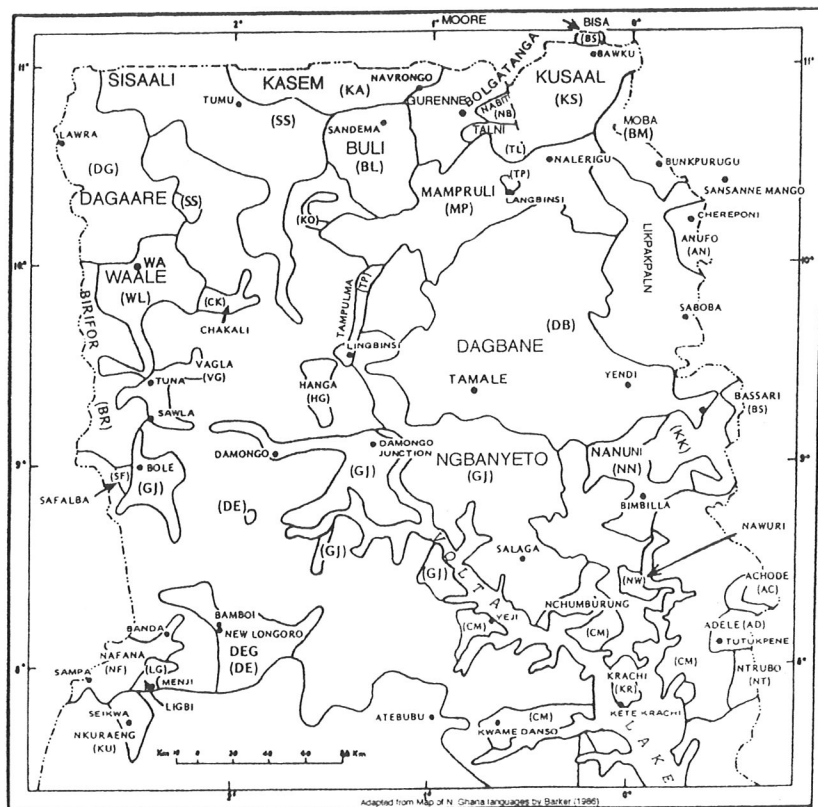
One method is to name groups of languages after the physical geographical features around which they are located. This is especially the case with river names. Hence the largest language family in Africa is termed Niger-Congo. By calling groups of languages Niger-Congo or Oti-Volta one is indicating that all these occur between the Niger and Congo rivers or between the Oti and Volta rivers or within their basins. Besides rivers, groups of languages are also named after mountain and desert names etc. Hence, we have Nilo-Saharan and Adamawa languages.

Another is the use of specific language names or features as cover names for groups of languages. Languages may be named after some sound and syllable regularities. For instance, the terms 'Kwa' and 'Gur' are used to refer to branches of the Niger-Congo family because the syllables 'kwa' and 'gur' are thought to occur quite frequently in these languages. As an example, many personal names begin with 'kwa' in languages such as Twi and Ewe. And some language names such as 'Gurma', 'Gurenne' and 'Grusi' begin with syllables resembling 'Gur'. So they are termed as such. Sometimes too, some prominent language names are chosen to represent a whole group. Thus we have Moore-Gurma, Moore-Dagbani or Aja-Fon.

Cardinal points are often used in conjunction with these two main methods to designate groups of languages. Hence, we may have Western Oti-Volta, Eastern Kwa, etc.

In recent times, however, as the linguistic picture has become clearer, and people have become more and more aware of the cultural and political affinities between groups of people who speak the same languages, language planning activities include refining this nomenclature and giving more meaningful cover names to some of these languages. Terms such as Bantu, Akan, Gbe and Guang which are a mixture of ethnographic and linguistic designations are used to describe groups of languages in East and West Africa. The term 'Akan', for instance, was used to describe a group of Kwa languages only since the 1950's (Dolphyn 1988). 'Gbe' has also been proposed (e.g. Capo 1978) for languages such as Ewe and Fon. With this quite later development of the nomenclature of classifying African languages in mind, we now explain the term Mabia.

Map 1. Language Map of Northern Ghana



Adapted from Map of N. Ghana languages by Barker (1986).

2.2 THE MEANING OF MABIA

'Mabia' is a term that is in frequent use among speakers of most, if not all, of the languages under consideration in this paper. It is used to designate a sibling relationship and, by extension, also a fraternal relationship between two interlocutors. It is composed of two lexical items: 'ma' = mother and 'bia' (bie or biiga) = child. In the genetic classification of languages, sibling relationship

is an important criterion for classifying languages into families and groups. Languages descending from a common (hypothetical) ancestor are said to be in sisterhood relationship. The languages under study are 'sisters'; they are more closely related to each other than to any other group of languages in the world. This has been indicated in a number of comparative historical linguistic analyses (e.g. Swadesh et al. 1966; Bendor-Samuel 1971; Manessy 1977). They therefore belong to a common (hypothetical) ancestor. I have found it necessary to look for authentic terminology that is more or less common to all these languages which captures this theoretical point of view in the field of diachronic linguistics. The term Mabia is, in my view, more authentic and more appropriate than the term Western Oti-Volta which has been used to describe these languages (see Figure 1). It is also more inclusive than the other alternative, Moore-(Mole-) Dagomba, which is a bit confusing and which has already even been dropped in some more recent classifications (Manessy 1977, 1981).

2.3 GENETIC RELATIONSHIP

With this explanation of the term 'Mabia', we can now use the diagram in Figure 1 to explain the genetic relationship between these languages and between them and other African languages. This classification is partly based on Naden (1988) and some of the earlier studies on this language family such as Manessy (1979). In particular, the nomenclature, Mabia and its subdivisions are my own additions.

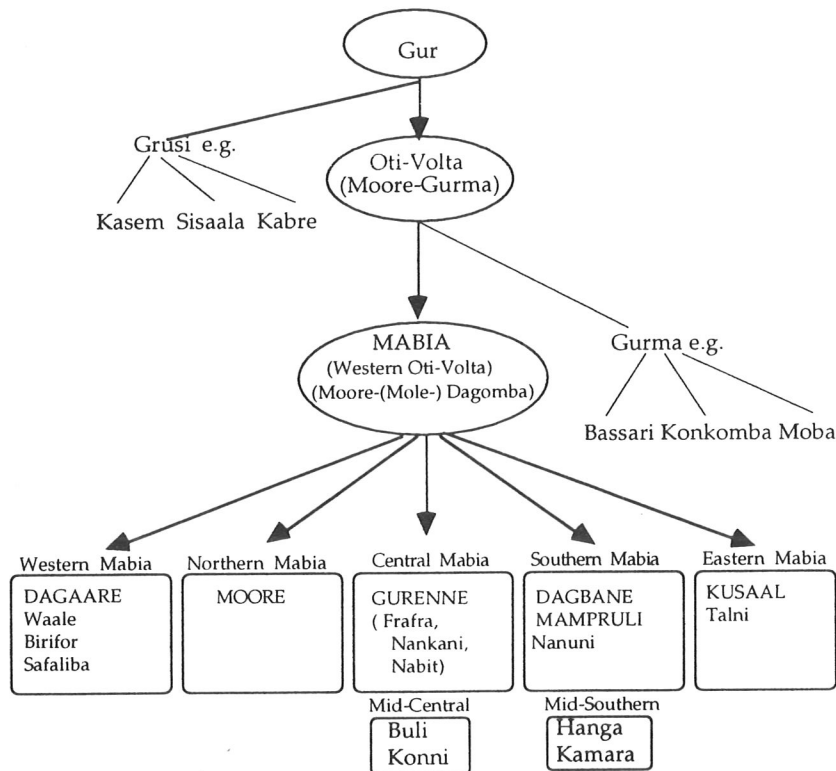
As the figure shows, the Mabia languages belong to the Gur language family. Gur, in its turn, is composed of subgroups such as Oti-Volta and Grusi. Most of the languages in Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso belong to these two subgroups within Gur, which is sometimes called Voltaic, especially by French speaking scholars (e.g. Manessy 1978, 1979, 1981). Prominent languages within the Grusi subgroup include Kasem, Sisaali and Kabre. There are two important subgroups within Oti-Volta. The Gurma subgroup includes languages such as Bassari, Konkomba and Moba. The other subgroup, the Western Oti-Volta or Moore-(Mole-) Dagomba, is the one that concerns us in this paper. This is the group that we rename as Mabia.

2.4 THE CLASSIFICATION OF MABIA LANGUAGES

The Mabia languages can be divided into five main groups; the languages within most of these groups are more or less mutually intelligible. Major languages within each group are written in capitals. Western Mabia, which includes Dagaare, Waale, Birifor and Safaliba, is located to the western parts

of Northern Ghana and adjoining parts of Burkina Faso (see Map 1). Northern Mabilia, which includes just Moore and its dialectal forms, is found mostly in Burkina Faso. Central Mabilia is located approximately in the middle of the area. There is one cover name for this group, Gurenne, which includes Frafra, Nankani and Nabit. This group has a subdivision which is Mid-Central Mabilia. The two languages in this subgroup, Buli and Konni, though geographically close to Gurenne, are linguistically a bit distinct from Gurenne and some other Mabilia languages. Indeed, there is some amount of controversy as to whether this group belongs to the Mabilia group or the Grusi group. I will include it in the Mabilia group because it has more lexical similarities with Mabilia than with Grusi, a position that seems to have been confirmed by the lexicostatistics of Swadesh et al. (1966). Southern Mabilia, comprising Dagbane, Mampruli and

Figure 1.



Nanuni, is geographically located to the south of the research area. As with the previous group, Southern Mabilia has a subdivision, Mid-Southern Mabilia (Hanga-Kamara). Hanga and Kamara, though also occurring to the south, are quite linguistically different from, say, Dagbane. Eastern Mabilia, which is the fifth group, is composed of Kusaal and Talni.

This attempt at classifying the Mabilia languages does not suggest in any way that there are clear boundaries. Most of these languages do, in fact, form a continuum and speech variation is rather gradual. For instance, it is sometimes difficult to say whether Mampruli is more related to Dagbane or to Kusaal. Moving from Dagbane through Mampruli to Kusaal, we observe more of a continuum than discrete variation. A similar situation has been observed for Birifor, Waale and Dagaare in Bodomo (1989).

The following are the major languages of the area: DAGAARE, DAGBANE, GURENNE, KUSAAL, MAMPRULI and MOORE. They also represent the major subgroups of Mabilia languages. More, sociolinguistic information for these and other languages is provided in section 4.

2.5 TYPOLOGICAL RELATION

This section provides some information on the main features of these languages from a typological perspective. Within the area of typological studies, linguists try to outline a number of regular types of phonological, morphological and syntactic features in natural languages and then see how a particular language or group of languages may be grouped according to these types of grammatical features. Naden (1989) provides an excellent summary of the grammatical features of Gur languages. This follows Manessy (e.g. 1975, 1979, 1981). Most of what will be said about these languages also reflects general African language features.

Phonologically, these languages are marked by a preponderance of consonants and a scarcity of vowel phonemes when compared to Indo-European languages like English, French and Norwegian. One typological phonological feature is the double articulation of some consonants. These include labio-velar stops. Such features are rare in Indo-European languages. But again, this is a common African language feature, even though it is conspicuously absent in languages such as Akan. According to Naden (1980) the labio-velar and velar obstruents are partially complementary as in the alternate causative/non-causative forms of the verbs die 'kv'/'kpi' in Dagaare and Mampruli. Regular allophones often involve /d/ and /t/, /g/ and /ɣ/ across the various languages.²

² γ = velar fricative consonant

There may also be limited cases of free variation between /h/ and /z/ as in the Dagaare word for 'all', 'haa'/'zaa'.

With respect to vowels, there is the typological feature of vowel harmony. This feature does not only distinguish between some of these languages and Indo-European languages, it also divides these languages into harmonizing and non-harmonizing languages. For instance, one difference between Western Mabia languages like Dagaare and Waale and the rest of the group is that these exhibit the system of vowel harmony based on advanced tongue root (Bodomo 1986) while the other members of the group do not seem to do this. It may, however, be possible to abstract a proto-form of vowel harmony for all these languages.

Front rounded vowels, found in French and Norwegian, and back unrounded vowels are absent in these languages, except when phonetically realized in some environments.

Syllabic nasality is a typological feature in these languages. These are usually realized as pronouns and particles. This is the case in the Dagaare third person pronoun /N/ as in 'm ba' (my father), 'n zu' (my head) and in the Dagaare particle, '- ', which is a cliticised form of the polarity marker, 'la'.

Mabia languages are typologically tone languages. They primarily have two tonal systems with cases of downstep in some of the languages. These tones serve to express both lexical and grammatical oppositions as in the Dagaare verbs, dá/dà, meaning: push (many things)/ buy, and as in the declarative and hortative readings of pronouns e.g. O kul la yiri/ O kul yiri - He went home/ He should go home.

In terms of syllable structure, Mabia languages usually manifest open syllables. Naden (1989) mentions that both CV and CVC syllables can be reconstructed, but I think that, in cases of closed syllables, it is usually possible to insert a final syllable. Thus, the Dagaare verb 'to leave', may be realized either as 'bar' or 'bari'. There are indeed dialectal differences with respect to these two forms.

There are also some typologically interesting morphological and syntactic characteristics of these languages. An important typological feature for these languages is the system of noun classes. Noun class manifestation is a common feature for Niger-Congo languages but, while most of these languages use a prefixal pattern, Mabia and some other Gur languages use a system of class suffixes. These are typically based on singular/plural alternations. Most nouns exist in three forms: the root, the singular and the plural. An example is the Dagaare word for woman/wife: 'pog-' (root), 'poga' (singular), 'pogba'

(plural).³ In this case the singular/plural affixes are '-a'/'-ba'. All words which behave like this would be categorised into one class.

Another important typological difference within this group of languages is verb morphology. In most of these languages there is a regular form of marking perfect and imperfective aspect by suffixes on the verbs. These suffixes regularly respond to the vowel harmony feature for languages that have this.

The most prominent syntactic typological feature is the SVO parameter which these languages exhibit. Another prominent syntactic typological characteristic includes verb serialisation, a syntactic construction in which two or more lexical verbs may share arguments without intervening connectors.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL AFFINITIES OF SPEAKERS

The above presentation has touched on theoretical issues within genetic and typological studies to show that these languages are quite closely related. But are there any cultural and historical affinities between the people who speak these languages?

Manessy (1979), Dakubu (1985) and Naden (1988) have all used linguistic methods to shed light on the historical and cultural affinities existing between the speakers of the Mabia languages and also between these people and their neighbours. As Naden (1988) has indicated, there is an almost lack of written documentation of the history of this region and 'the primary source for the history of these peoples is therefore the living oral language data obtainable in this century.' (Naden 1988: 205). Linguistics may therefore be one of the most important areas of study that can establish the historical and cultural relationships between the speakers of Mabia languages. The study of migration patterns can often establish a historical link within a group or between groups of people. Linguistics can help here in two ways.

The first way is the use of linguistic methods to throw light on the areas of origin of the people who speak a group of languages. Based on the geographical distribution of these languages and on the analysis of living oral language, linguists have suggested two possible areas of origins for these people.

Dakubu (1985: 3) suggests that the cradle of present-day Gur speaking people is centred west of Northern Ghana around present-day Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso. This is based '...on the general principle that the area of maximum linguistic differentiation is likely to be the area of oldest settlement,

³ o = open-mid back vowel

and adding to this the general principle that most people don't move further than they have to.' This is what I refer to as the 'western' hypothesis, according to which present-day Mabia language speakers would have originated in the west of Northern Ghana. This hypothesis seems to be supported even by present-day migratory trends. The Birifors and other groups are still crossing the international boundary with Burkina Faso and moving into Northern Ghana in search of better farm lands, etc. Fulanis are also crossing the boundary and moving as far as north-eastern Ghana.

Naden (1988), however, suggests that the Mabia speaking populations originate from the east of Northern Ghana. This argument is based on the fact that the most closely related groups of the Niger-Congo family, Gur, Kwa and Benue-Congo meet in the general area of central Nigeria. This 'eastern' hypothesis seems to be supported by current oral history in Northern Ghana according to which most of the centralised states (Mamprusi, Dagomba and Mossi) recognize a common ancestor, Naa Gbewaa. Naa Gbewaa is supposed to have moved from an area in the north-east of Ghana (probably, Fada N'gourma) 'into North-East Ghana (Pusiga) and thence southwards and westwards (Gambaga - Nalerigu, Old Yendi - near Diare north of Tamale, Bimbilla) and finally northwards (the Mossi empire having roots in Nalerigu) (Naden 1988: 227).'

The geographic separation of people speaking related languages and the juxtaposition of those speaking dissimilar languages is a good argument for some significant group movement. The main assumption here is that a language cannot move without its speakers. This seems to be very important for explaining the relationship between speakers of Western Mabia, Northern Mabia and those in the centre, east and south of the research area. For instance, the geographical neighbours of Dagaare and Waale are not their closest linguistic neighbours. These Mabia languages are separated from other Mabia languages to the east such as Gurenne, Mamprusi and Dagbane by Grusi languages such as Sisaali, Kasem, Tampulma and Vagla. Likewise, Sisaali and Kasem separate Dagaare from Moore. One interpretation for this distribution is that some kind of movement has taken place involving Western and Northern Mabia speakers. They may have moved away from other Mabia speakers and then crossed the Grusi speaking areas to settle in their present homeland. The other interpretation is that the Grusi speakers may have pushed into a homogenous Mabia speaking area. The possibility of Mabia movement from their relatives in the north eastern part of the research area seems to be the more plausible alternative and this is supported by works such as St. John-Parsons (1959), Tuurey (1987) and Herbert (1985), some of which are recorded oral histories of migration.

A second way in which linguistics can help in establishing historical links between groups of people is to give indications of the periods of time these

migrations took place. Based on the glottochronology of Swadesh et al. (1966), Dakubu (1985) has suggested that the ancestors of present-day Mabia and other central Gur speakers separated from each other about 7 centuries ago. Based on the same study, we also suggest here that Dagaare separated from Moore, Gurenne, Mampruli, Kusaal and Dagbane about 5, 6, 7, 7 and 8 centuries ago in that order. Moore separated from Mampruli, Kusaal, Gurenne and Dagbane about 5, 6, 6 and 6 centuries ago respectively. By contrast, a language like Mampruli separated from Dagbane and Kusaal only 2 centuries ago. Based on the assumption that a language cannot move without its speakers, we may say that these are also approximate dates the people separated from each other and that before that they were living together in a common linguistic and cultural environment. These linguistic deductions are supported by oral historical evidences of separation due to chieftaincy disputes, family quarrels, the search for better farmland, etc.⁴

Are there also cultural affinities among these people and between them and their neighbours? Despite the fact that there may be more or less synchronic cultural differences (due to factors such as foreign religious influences and local ecological variation) between groups of the Mabia speakers, once a historical relationship of some sort has been established between any groups of people, it is also plausible and even possible to establish normative and material cultural relationships between these groups of people. A vast amount of information about the systems of inheritance, traditional political organisations and belief systems can be extracted from oral language texts such as legends, stories, (praise)-songs and the general periodical and everyday activities of the people of Northern Ghana. This, in itself, constitutes an important research agenda, as indicated by Naden (*ibid.*: 237).⁵

Based on the system of inheritance, for instance, most, if not all, the Mabia peoples are essentially patrilineal. In addition to observing this pattern in present day life, it can be deduced from the oral language texts as discussed above. This is one main difference between the populations of Northern Ghana and the largest ethnic group in Ghana, the Akan. There are, however, other groups in the South, such as the Ga-Dangbe- and Ewe-speaking populations which also have a patrilineal system of inheritance.

There are a number of similarities and differences between the populations of Northern Ghana and that of the South with respect to traditional political

⁴ C.f. the 'Zirli ku Kufogo' evidence as stated in John-Parsons (1958) and how most of these groups of peoples trace to a common ancestor Naa Gbewaa.

⁵ This paper is written partly with the aim of presenting the area to potential researchers, and in that sense constitutes an open invitation.

organisation. Both parts of the country experienced the creation of centralised states between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries. These include the kingdoms of the Mamprusi, Mossi and Dagomba, all of which are Mabia speakers, and later the Gonja and Ashanti kingdoms.

One interesting difference within Mabia itself is that, of the six main languages, speakers of three of these mentioned above have a history of centralised states while speakers of the other three, Dagaare, Gurenne and Kusaal do not seem to have this and are often referred to as being traditionally 'acephalous' (e.g. Goody 1967). If these people have a common origin, why then the difference in this cultural political system? This is a question that merits further investigation. But for now, the following observation can be made: Oral histories of migration often show that the 'acephalous' Mabia mostly refer to the 'centralised' Mabia locations as the origin of their migration. The reasons for most of these migrations are often due to chieftaincy disputes, family quarrels and other forms of dissent. It would seem to me that the 'acephalous' Mabia were indeed part of these centralised political systems but had to move away because of dissidence of some sort. With this dissidence in mind at their new locations, these populations may have reorganised themselves in favour of a more decentralised political system. The political functions of chiefs was very much reduced or scraped altogether. They, however, maintained the common Mabia cultural institution of 'Tindana', literally, owner of the land.⁶ Because each group may have arrived at slightly different stages, each major settlement has a 'Tindana' who has delegates in nearby clan settlements. The functions of the 'Tindana' are limited to cultural and religious performances, with the political functions invariably curtailed from community to community. The 'Tindana' cannot normally make major political decisions like taking in new settlers without a meeting of delegates and elders. While each major settlement may have its 'Tindana', because the clan system within this culture transcends settlements, there are tight political relations between most, if not all, of the settlements in, for example, Dagaal (home of the Dagaaba) and in times of outside intervention, most settlements quickly rally to the aid of their kin. There is political and cultural cohesion.

From this description, it is therefore misleading, in my opinion, to refer to such communities as 'acephalous' or even 'stateless'. I would therefore suggest

⁶ While agreeing that the 'acephalous' and the centralised groups of Mabia clearly refer to a common origin, Dr. Assibi Amidu (personal communication) suggests that they must have moved after the centralised states were formed. He claims that the 'Tindanadoms' within groups such as the Builsas are indications of acephalous precentralised states. These 'Tindanadoms' are now incorporated into Paramountcies. This of course needs further investigation.

here that, rather than being acephalous, before the advent of colonialism which re-instituted chieftaincy of some sort to facilitate uniform indirect rule, these communities were already practising early versions of what is known today as political decentralisation. Political decentralisation is now a national developmental goal for most governments in present-day Africa.

However, this cultural parametric difference between these groups of people in Northern Ghana is becoming less and less pertinent as most communities are now organised into Paramountcies, with each of these being headed by a Paramount Chief.

One interesting difference between Northern and Southern Ghanaian chieftaincy is the designation of the title of a chief. While that of the North is called a skin, that of the South is a stool.

Another interesting difference between North and South is the traditional costume. While Northern Ghanaian traditional dress is a smock, that of the South is a cloth, usually worn around the shoulder and under the arm. It is a woven fabric called 'kente'. However, this difference too is narrowing as these two costumes are now becoming more and more national and people from different parts of the country may be seen wearing them.

The above is only a sketch of some of the cultural and historical affinities existing among Mabia speakers and between these and other groups in Northern and Southern Ghana. We hope, however, that this will provide a global cultural picture of the area.

4.0 SOCIOLINGUISTIC INFORMATION

In this section, we list the major languages and show the areas of use for each of them in the region. Most of the data on these languages, especially the number of native speakers, are rough extrapolations I have made based mainly on the 1960 population census of Ghana as contained in works such as Barker (1986) and Dakubu (1988). Other facts about language use and policies are based on my own field research. The indigenous languages in the region may be divided into four main groups:

4.1 THE GRUSI GROUP

The Grusi group includes languages such as Kasem, Sisaali, Chakali, Tampulma, Vagla and Mo. Kasem and Sisaali are the most prominent in the group in terms of the number of native speakers and general language planning policies.

Kasem is spoken around towns such as Navrongo, Chana, Paga and into Burkina Faso. In 1984 it was spoken by about 120,000 native speakers (Barker 1986). *Kasem* is one of the first literary languages of Northern Ghana, having benefitted from early missionary activities. It is one of the languages selected and supported by the government for educational purposes and is already being taught at the Ajumako School of Ghanaian Languages, now part of the University College of Winneba. Most Nankane speakers in the Kassena-Nankane district also speak *Kasem*.

Sissali is spoken around the towns of Tumu, Gwellu and Lambussie, all in the Upper West Region. It is spoken by about 100,000 people.

4.2 THE GUANG GROUP

Members of the Guang group include Gonja, Achode, Nchumburu, Krachi and Nawuri. These languages are sparsely distributed around areas in the Northern Region and in parts of the Brong-Ahafo and Volta Regions which are adjacent to Northern Ghana.

Gonja, also known as Ngbanyeto, is the most prominent in this group, concentrating in towns such as Bole and Salaga and with native speakers numbering up to 150,000 in 1984. *Gonja* is also one of the languages being promoted by the government for educational purposes. Most people in the Guang group in Northern Ghana use *Gonja* as a second language.

4.3 THE GURMA GROUP

The Gurma group includes Konkomba, Moba and Bassari, found at the north-eastern border with Togo i.e. the eastern sides of the Upper-East and Northern Regions.

Konkomba, also called Likpakpalnli, is more prominent in this group with speakers numbering up to 250,000. Barker (1986) reports that up to 50% of *Konkomba* speak *Dagbane* as a second language in their homeland around Saboba and Zabzugu. The language is taught in primary schools and there are many literacy programmes involving *Konkomba*.

4.4 THE MABIA GROUP

The Mabia group has been the focus of this paper. It includes *Dagbane*, *Dagaare*, *Gurenne*, *Kusaal*, *Mampruli*, *Buli*, *Konni*, *Talni*, *Hanga* and *Kamara*. This group, extrapolating from 1960 figures, constitutes approximately 80% of the population of Northern Ghana and approximately 15% of the national population. *Dagbane*, *Dagaare* and *Gurenne* are prominent languages, each of

them numbering approximately half a million speakers. The largest language of the group is *Moore*, spoken mostly in Burkina Faso by about 5 million people.

Dagbane, including *Nanuni*, has a large number of native speakers, numbering more than 500,000 and many second language speakers. Indeed, it is a trade language in and around Tamale. In terms of official language policies, *Dagbane* is the most important language in the region, especially since it is the language of Tamale, the fourth largest town in Ghana and the largest in this part of the country. So far, *Dagbane* is the only Northern Ghanaian language used for broadcast from the national radio and television network in Accra, the Capital of Ghana. At one time in the history of the region, 'Dagbani was adopted as the literary language of the Northern Territories in 1930... (Bening 1990: 60)', but by 1933, this idea was abandoned because of a number of sociolinguistic problems. Today it is a major language of education and literacy in *Dagbon*, home of the *Dagomba*. It is taught in various undergraduate programmes at the University of Ghana and now at the University College of Winneba.

Dagaare, including *Waale* and *Birifor*, is spoken in north-western Ghana around towns like *Wa*, *Tuna*, *Jirapa*, *Lawra* and *Nandom*. Native speakers of *Dagaare* number up to a million (including Burkina Faso speakers of the language). Like *Kasem*, it benefitted from early missionary activities and is one of the most literary languages in the region. It is taught in primary and secondary schools in *Dagao*, home of the *Dagaaba*, and even in some schools in the Northern Region. Like *Dagbane*, it is taught at undergraduate programmes in the University of Ghana and now at the University College of Winneba. It is one of the six languages that is being used for broadcasts over the GBC FM radio station at *Bolgatanga*, a very powerful and influential station for the people of this part of the country.

Gurenne (*Frafra*, *Nankanne* and *Nabit*) also has a large number of native speakers, numbering about 450,000. It is the language of *Bolgatanga*, one of the cosmopolitan towns in Northern Ghana. *Gurenne* is used for broadcasts over the GBC FM station at *Bolgatanga*.

Other languages of the group used as important literacy languages covering large numbers of people are *Kusaal*, spoken by about 250,000 people around *Bawku* and *Mampruli*, spoken by about 100,000 people around towns such as *Gambaga* and *Nalerigu*. *Waale* (about 100,000 native speakers) is also an important trade language in the Upper West Region and parts of Northern Region. *Buli*, with about 65,000 speakers in and around *Sandema*, also has some literacy programmes running in it.

To sum up, most of these languages are being used for educational purposes in the communities. Some of them serve wider communities than their

traditional areas. There are some mass communication programmes in seven of these languages at present; Dagbane, on national radio and television, Dagaare, Gurenne, Kusaal, Kasem, Sisaali and Buli on local FM radio in the area.

Hausa is often erroneously thought by many people in Ghana to be an effective lingua franca in the area but this is not entirely true. It may have been some time ago but now, in the face of serious attempts at functional literacy and mass communication in all these indigenous languages, awareness is being raised about the importance of the mother tongue. In addition, some of the indigenous languages like Dagbane, Gurenne and Dagaare-Waale are beginning to replace Hausa as a lingua franca in their respective areas. Furthermore, a non-indigenous language which is widely used in the area is English, the official language of Ghana.

5.0 RESEARCH CENTRES IN NORTHERN GHANA

Since the above survey is an attempt to provide basic data and information about Northern Ghana for the general public and especially for potential researchers knowing little about Ghana, before I conclude I should like to mention some resident research centres and organisations in this part of Ghana. In the area of linguistics and literacy, the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and (Bible) Translation (GILLBT), which is a branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), is an important contact organisation in Northern Ghana. Its headquarters is at Tamale. Basic information about the languages and cultures of the region can be found in their library. They also run literacy programmes in many languages. The Tamale Institute of Cross Cultural Studies (TICCS) should be of special interest to anthropologically-oriented research. The Catholic Diocesan printing houses and bookshops in the various regional capitals may also be important places to get information from. The recent opening of Ghana's fourth university, the University of Development Studies (UDS), with its main campus at Tamale, marks an important milestone for research activities in Northern Ghana.

6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have, in this paper, offered an introduction to the Mabilia languages. The main languages of this group, including Dagbane, Dagaare, Gurenne, Kusaal, Mampruli and Moore, are located in the Savannah belt, the grassland zone of West Africa, mid-way between the Sahara Desert to the north and the Forest belt to the south. The close genetic and typological relationships between these

languages have been outlined. There is a considerable amount of mutual intelligibility between most of them. Speakers of these languages, as it has been shown, also seem to have strong historical and cultural affinities, the details of which still await further research. Sociolinguistically, despite the pervasive presence of some non-indigenous languages, the Mabilia languages serve as important means of communication in the region; some of them are even rising in status as lingua francas. They are actively used in the media and serve as important languages of literacy and other forms of development education. But above all, they are irreplaceable media through which the rich culture of Northern Ghana is manifested.

Given the above conclusions about the importance of these and other languages of this part of Africa, it is desirable that linguists, anthropologists, educators and other social scientists interested in the socio-cultural development of the area document these indigenous languages and actively promote their use. This linguistically-oriented approach to development is in line with some current paradigms of third world development studies (e.g. Bamgose 1991; Prah 1993a, 1993b). It is hoped that this paper has drawn attention to an exciting research area within Africa.

REFERENCES

- Bamgose, A. 1991.
Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.
- Barker, P. 1986.
Peoples, Languages and Religion in Northern Ghana. Ghana Accra: Evangelical Committee.
- Bendor-Samuel, T. 1971.
Niger Congo, Gur. In: *Current Trends in Linguistics* Vol. 7, Sebeok et al. (ed.). Mouton.
- Bening, R.B. 1990.
A History of Education in Northern Ghana: 1907 - 1976. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Bodomo, A. 1986.
Vowel Harmony in Dagaare. Unpublished Paper. Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Accra.
- 1989 A Study of Dialect Variation in Dagaare. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Accra.

- 1993 Complex Predicates and Event Structure: A Study of Verb Serialisation in the Mbia Languages of West Africa. M. Phil. thesis. Department of Linguistics, University of Trondheim, Norway.
- Capo, H. 1978.
Please, call me MIDOGBE. Unpublished manuscript. Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Accra.
- Dakubu, M.E.K. 1985.
The Peopling of North-Western Ghana. Unpublished manuscript. University of Ghana, Accra.
- Dolphyne, F.A. and Kropp-Dakubu, M.E. 1988.
The Volta-Comoe Languages. In: *The Languages of Ghana*, M.E. Kropp-Dakubu (ed.).
- Drukner, B.S. 1975.
Ritual Aspect of Mamprusi Kingship. Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum, Cambridge: African Studies Centre.
- Goody, J. 1967.
The Social Organisation of the LoWiili. IAS, London.
- 1972 *The Myth of the Bagre*. OLAS, Oxford.
- Herbert, J. 1985.
Esquisse d'une Monographie Historique du Pays Dagara. Unpublished monograph. Diebougou, Burkina Faso.
- St. John-Parsons, D. 1958.
Legends for Northern Ghana. London: Longmans, Accra: SPC.
- Manessy, G. 1975.
Les Langues Oti/Volta. Paris: SELAF.
- 1977 Linguistique historique et traditions ethniques: Les peuples voltaïques dans l'est de la boucle du Niger. In: *Zur Sprachgeschichte und Ethnohistorie in Afrika*, Mohlig et al. (ed.). Berlin.
- 1978 *Le kirma, le tyurama, et les langues voltaïques centrales*. *AuÜ* 61: 82-119.
- 1979 *Contribution a la classification des geneologique des langues voltaïques (le groupe proto-central)*. Paris: SELAF.
- 1981 Les langues voltaïques. In: *Les langues dans le monde ancien et moderne*, Jean Perrot (ed.). Paris: CNRS.
- Naden, A. 1980.
Review of Manessy 1975. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* (2)2: 156-159.
- 1988 *Language, History, and Legend in Northern Ghana*. *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 9: 205-246.
- 1989 Gur. In: *Niger-Congo*, Bendor-Samuel (ed.). Lanham, MD.: Universities Press of America.

- Prah, K. 1993a.
African languages, the key to African development: A critique of ideas in development thinking. In: *Changing Paradigms in Development - South, East and West: A Meeting of Minds in Africa*, M. von Troil (ed.). The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala.
- 1993b *Mother-Tongue for Scientific and Technological Development in Africa*. German Foundation for International Development.
- Swadesh et al. 1966.
A Preliminary Glottochronology of the Gur Languages. *Journal of West African languages* 3(2).
- Tuurey, G. 1987.
Introduction to the Mole-speaking Community. Wa: Catholic Press.

* This paper originates from research that has been financed by the Norwegian Research Council (NFR) under its programme of International Studies in the Humanities. I thank the NFR for making it possible for me to undertake six months of fieldwork in Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso in 1992 and for continuing to sponsor my work through a doctoral research fellowship.

I thank Dr. Assibi Amidu for his critical comments and suggestions on aspects of the paper. I also thank Dr. Dawn Behne for putting her native English speaker's intuitions at my disposal by reading through the paper. I am, of course, responsible for any inaccuracies. Finally, I am grateful to Sjur Moshagen for assisting me to illustrate the text with map(s).