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Alternative Pronunciations in Dagbanli

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Abstract

This paper describes alternative pronunciations in Dagbanli based on the model for describing dialectal differences. The paper shows vowel segments as source of alternative pronunciations in the language, a finding that answers the research question, "Which segments accounts for the observed difference in Dagbanli dialects?" The analysis is based on the primary data collected. The major findings provide evidence to show that the voiced coronal stop /d/ becomes [t], [ʧ] and [k] as forms of alternative pronunciations in Dagbanli. Finally, the paper shows that the alternation of the vowel segments in stems is random but not rule governed.

Keywords: Dagbanli, Alternative, Model, Dialect, Ethnography

Introduction

"Tomosili (western dialect (WD)), Nayahili (eastern dialect (ED)) and Nanunli (southern dialect (SD)) are the main dialects of Dagbanli" and each dialect has an alternative form (Inusah 2024a, 2024b; Inusah 2021; Mahama & Inusah 2023), which are varieties arising from local peculiarities of pronunciation. Inusah (2021) describes alternative forms as sub-dialects and labelled them as Gbanjonsili (Tomosili), Zundusili (Nayahili) and Jimansili (Nanunli). Dagbanli has thirty-three (33) consonant segments as seen in Table (1) and fourteen (14) vowels sounds in Table (2).

Table 1: Dagbanli Consonants (Inusah 2021, p.52)

p	b			t	d[ɾ]				k	g	kp[tp]	gb[db]		[ʔ]
	m			n		ɲ				ŋ	ŋm[nm]			
		f	v	s	z		ʃ	ʒ	[x]	[ɣ]				[h]
							ʧ	ʤ						
				l										
						j							w[ʊ]	

Table 2: Dagbanli Vowels (Inusah 2021, p.26)

Class I				Class II	
i	i:	u	u:	ɨ	ʊ
e	e:	o	o:		ɔ
		ɛ			
		a	a:		

This paper explores alternative pronunciations in Dagbanli, which is a product of the difference in pronunciation triggered by sound correspondence. The alternative pronunciations provide evidence of the existence of dialectal differences in the language and social identity of the speakers. I argue that the observed occurrences of the front and back vowels are selectional (random) but not distributional (rule-governed).

Methodology

"Ethnography is a method, which studies peoples' style of living by way of life, beliefs, language, formal and informal relationships and ideologies as well as many other dimensions of a particular culture or speech community" (Botha 2011:52). The data were collected in Tolon, Kariga and Wulensi. The ethnographic observations were unstructured as note-taking was used to record the conversations. The ethnographic method was employed because it described frequent life style of members of a speech community by using conceptual constructions to make events observable and understandable. The secondary data were collected from the existing works on Dagbanli phonology (Inusah 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021; Olawsky 1999; Purvis 2008).

Alternative Pronunciations

Hawkins (1992) observes that in addition to vocabulary and pronunciation variants, there are differences of grammar as illustrated in Dagbanli below:

1. Tomosili dialect		Nanunli dialect (cf. Inusah 2021, p.8)
kàminá kà tí ʧâŋ	→	dóŋ-nà kà tí wɛ́
come and we go		come and we go
'Come and let us go'		'Come and let us go'

The construction in (1) show structural difference in utterance in which the one on the right in Nanunli dialect is derived from the agreed standard dialect Tomosili. The differences can also be noticed in the vocabulary as demonstrated below:

2.

Gbanjonsili	**Jimansili**	**Zundusili**	**Gloss**
kòlɨ	tàpáɾŋá	ɲàŋà	'hoe'
ʧâŋ	wɛ́	ʧâŋ	'walk'
kɔ́bá	kánlɨ́	tá:já	'car tyre'
dòn̄ɔ́lɨ	dòndɔ́lɨ	zàŋgáɾɨ́	'door'
ɲìná	ŋàbɾà	ɲìná	'teeth'

(cf. Inusah 2021, p.9)

The data in (2) present evidence of vocabulary variation in words across dialects. Note that the words are pronounced locally with no exact equivalent in the others. Alternative pronunciations often involve differences of grammar and vocabulary as seen in (1) and (2). Phonologically, alternative pronunciations in words in Dagbanli show variation due to the pronunciation differences of vowels as illustrated in the data below:

3. **Tomosili dialect**		**Nayahili dialect** (cf. Inusah, 2021)
báɾ-gí	→	bɔ́ɾ-gí 'lost'
láɾ-gá	→	lɔ́ɾ-gá 'corner'
láɾ-gí	→	lɔ́ɾ-gí 'untie'
dáb-lɨ́m	→	dɔ́b-lɨ́m 'bravery'
záb-ɾí	→	zɔ́b-ɾí 'hair'

The data in (3) show the differences in the pronunciation of the front vowel /a/ and back vowel [ɔ]. This variation can also be expressed by realization rule below where # is a consonant:

4. /a/ → [ɔ] / — #

/ɔ/ in some words becomes [a] in other dialects ass seen below:

5.

Tomosili		**Nayahili**	
bɔ́ɣɨ́m	→	báɣɨ́m	'learn'
vɔ́ɣɔ́	→	váɣɔ́	'leaf'
dɔ́ɣɔ́	→	dáɣɔ́	'stick'

(5) present alternative pronunciation in the major dialects. It is clear here that Tomosili prefers /ɔ/ before the glottal fricative /ɣ/ while Nayhili prefer /a/ in the same environment. Since Tomosili is considered the standard dialect, /ɔ/ in this context is due to the rounding feature of the vowel form. This variation can be expressed by a realization rule as:

6. /ɔ/ → [a] / — #

The realization rule only explains the data above. /a/ in Tomosili surfaces as [o] due to the rounding feature in Nayahili and Nanunli in some words. For example:

7.

Tomosili		**Nayahili**	
dàb-lɨ́m	→	dòb-lɨ́m	'bravery'
sàkól-ô	→	sòkól-ô	'fufu'
gáɾ-ó	→	góɾ-ó	'bed'
zàb-ɾí	→	zòb-ɾí	'hair'

Again, (8) is due to the rounding feature in Nayahili,

8.

Tomosili		**Nayahili**	
líhí	→	jólɨ	'look'
zípɨ́l-gó	→	zópɨ́l-gó	'cup'
tɨ́ɾ-gá	→	tóɾ-gá	'pestle'
dɨ́nɨ́	→	dónɨ́	'knee'

The data in (8) show that in a linguistic environment, /i/ becomes /u/, thus, /i/ is the underlying form and [u] as the surface as illustrated below where # is [i] or [n] or [m].

9. /i / → [u] / — #

Notice that the data presented above show that the simplest type of variation in pronunciation between the dialects. Realization rules (6) and (9) can be generalized using segmental features as in (10) where # is a consonant.

10. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{- back} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{+ back} \end{bmatrix} / \_\_ \#$

The data presented above in this section reflect the pronunciation of the speakers of Dagbanli cross dialectally. The issue here is that there are few instances in which some pair of consonants show alternative pronunciations among the major dialects that are unique to the sub-dialects. Note that /z/ in Tomosil and Nayahili corresponds to /ʤ/ in Nanunli. The segments /s, z, ɲ / is preferred in Tomosili while [ʃ, ʒ, n] are heard in Nayahili. See the data below:

11.

	Tomosili		**Nanunli**	
/z/→[ʤ]	zɔ̀ŋ	→	ʤɔ̀ŋ	‘bats’
	zɔ̀n-á	→	ʤɔ̀n-á	‘bats’
	zòm	→	ʤòm	‘blind’
	zò	→	ʤò	‘friend’
/s/→[ʃ]	sí-á	→	ʃí-á	‘mockery’
	sɛ́ʔʊ′	→	ʃɛ́ɣʊ′	‘rainy season’
	sɛ́ɾ-gá	→	ʃɛ́ɾ-gá	‘needle’
	sìkìɾì	→	ʃɨkɨɾɨ	‘sugar’
/z/ →[ʒ]	zé-ɣʊ′	→	ʒéɣʊ′	‘storm’
	zɛ́ɾ-ɣʊ′	→	ʒéɣʊ′	‘attacker’
	zì-lì	→	ʒì-lí	‘load’
/ɲ/ → [n]	ɲɛ́vìlì	→	nɛ́vɨlɨ	‘soul’
	ɲìná	→	nɨnà	‘teeth’
	ɲé:	→	né:	‘nose’

The data in (11) present the alternative pronunciations of the segments /z, s, ɲ/ in Tomosili realized as [ʤ, ʒ, ʃ, n]. Phonologically, these differences can be accounted for by using the processes of devoicing and spirantisation, thus, /d/ surfaces as [k, t, ʧ]. In Jimansili, a sub-dialect of Nanunli, the coronal /d/ becomes a dorsal [k] before [u].

12.	d/→[k]	díná	→	kúná	‘that’
		díní	→	kúní	‘knee’
		dɨnɔ́lí	→	kúdɔ́lɨ	‘door’
		dìvɛ́lá	→	kúvɛ́là	‘good’

(12) present shift from voiced to voiceless. Similarly, in Zundusili, a sub dialect of Nanunli, the voiced stop /d/ becomes alveolar stop [t] before the front vowel /i/ in word-initial as shown below:

13.	d/→[t]	dínà	→	tínà	‘that’
		díní	→	tíní	‘knee’
		dínɔ́lí	→	tídɔ́lí	‘door’
		dìvɛ́lá	→	tɨvɛ́là	‘good’

In (13), the voiced stop /d/ manifests into voiceless stop [t] showing devoicing process of /d/ to [t].

Spirantisation is used to account for the changes that manifest in Gbanjonsili, a sub-dialect of Tomosili as illustrated below:

14.	/d/→[ʤ]	díní	→	ʤɨní	‘knee’
		dé:	→	ʤé:	‘antelope’
		dìkánì	→	ʤɨkánɨ	‘not there’
		dɨɾ-gó	→	ʤɨɾ-gó	‘spoon’

Model Explanation of Segment Alternation

“There are four different recognized ways in which segment alternation can differ from each other” according to Hawkins (1992) model of dialectal differentiations. This model accounts for “relisational differences, “systemic differences, selectional differences and distributional differences” Hawkins (1992).

Realisational Differences

“A realisation alternation between two dialects calls for precise pronunciation of a particular segment or set of segments” (Inusah 2021:79). The data in (15) illustrates /ɛ/ realized as [ɛ], [ʲa] or [e].

15. /ɛ/ realizations in Dagbanli dialects

Nayahili	**Nanunli**	**Tomosili**	
ʃɛ́lí	ʃélí	ʃálɨ́	'some'
zɛ̀màní	ʤɛ̀màní	zʲàmànɨ́	'generation-nom'
bɛ̀lì	bèlɨ̀	bʲàlɨ̀	'accompany'
lɛ̀bì	lébɨ̀	lʲàbɨ̀	'change/become'
pɛ̂m	pém	pʲám	'arrow'

The alternation of the vowel can be represented in a realization rule as:

16. /ɛ/ → [e] /_____#
[a] /#ʲ _____
[ɛ] /_____

As seen in the data and the realization rule, /ɛ/ becomes [e, a ɛ] in different environments.

Selectional Differences

"A selectional difference arises where two dialects have the same set of phonemes but particular words select different phonemes" (Hawkins 1992). Tomosili, for example, has a phonemic contrast between /a/ and /ɔ/ in words. Vowel alternations among the dialects are classed as selectional in Dagbanli as presented in the data below:

17. [a]~ [ɔ]	**WD**	**ED**	**SD**	**Gloss**
	záb-rí	zɔ́b-rɨ́	ʤɔ́b-rɨ́	'hair'
	sáb-lí	sɔ́b-lɨ́	sɔ́b-lɨ́	'rat'
	wálí	wɔ́lɨ́	wɔ́lɨ́	'bear fruit'
	kálí`	kɔ́lɨ́	kɔ́lɨ́	'sweep'
	tálím	tɔ́lɨ́m	tɔ́lɨ́m	'message'
	dám-gí	dɔ́b-gɨ́	dɔ́b-gɨ́	'squat'

(17) present alternation /a/ in WD with [ɔ] in ED as well as SD in contrast to (18)

(18) [ɔ]~[a]	**WD**	**ED**	**SD**	**Gloss**
	vɔ́ɣɔ́	váɣɔ́	váɣɔ́	‘learn’
	dɔ́ɣɔ́	dáɣɔ́	dáɣɔ́	‘leaf’
	wɔ́ɣɔ́	wáɣɔ́	wáɣɔ́	‘stick’
	kɔ̀ɣɔ́	káɣɔ́	káɣɔ́	‘snake

Another example which can vary in this way is the sound /a/ in WD in some words surfacing as [o] in ED and SD. For example:

(19) [a]~[o]	**WD**	**ED**	**SD**	**Gloss**
	sàkól-ô	sòkól-ô	sòkól-ô	‘fufu’
	gáɾ-ó	góɾ-ó	góɾ-ó	‘bed’
	pàl-ó	pòl-ó	pòl-ó	‘plot’
	sál-ô	sól-ô	sól-ô	‘crowd’
	kạ́ló	kól-ô	kól-ô	‘enamel ware’

The selectional difference depend on the way [i] in WD alternate with /u/ in ED and SD.

20. [i]~[u]	**WD**	**ED**	**SD**	**Gloss**
	líhí	jólɨ́	jólɨ́	see’
	díní	dónɨ́	dónɨ́	‘knee’
	dínɔ́lí	dónɔ́lɨ́	dónɔ́lɨ́	‘door’
	dɨ́ɾ-gɔ́	dɔ́ɾ-gɔ́	dɔ́ɾ-gɔ́	‘headache’
	tímó	tʊmó	tʊ́mó	‘messenger’

The issue about selectional contradicts with distributional for distribution maybe generalized. For instance, in WD, the labial nasal /m/ at the coda position of CVC stem is alternatively realized as labial stop /b/ in the same environment in ED and SD as seen the data in (21) but behaves differently at the onset.

21.				
	zɨ̀b-sɨ́m	→	zɨ̀m-sɨ́m	‘darkness’
	tɨ́b-sɨ́m	→	tɨ́m-sɨ́m	‘heaviness’
	kʊ́b-sɨ́m	→	kʊ́m-sɨ́m	‘cry.nom’
	dáb-lɨ́m	→	dám-lɨ́m	‘bravery’

Systemic Difference

"Systemic difference is rare in Dagbanli because all the dialects use the same sound system and there is no evidence of Western dialect (WD), Eastern dialect (ED) and Southern dialect (SD) exhibiting different number of phonemes and a situation of a phonemic contrast which is made in one dialect is not made in the other" (Inusah 2021:p83). An example is the distribution of /z/ where in the southern dialect /z/ is pronounced as [ʤ] before vowels in both word-initial and word-medial.

22. Disttrinution of /z/ inNanunli

Tomosili		**Nanunli**	
zɔ̀ŋ	→	ʤɔ̀ŋ	'bat'
zòm	→	ʤòm	'blind'
zò	→	ʤò	'friend'
zógó	→	ʤóhó	'head'
zònzó-lí	→	ʤòndʒó-lí	'maggot'

Distributional Differences

Distributional difference between Tomosili and Nayahili involves [b] frequent in Nayahili in some words at the coda of a CVb stem, /b/ is replaced by the labial nasal /m/ in similar words in Tomosili as shown in below.

23. /b/ → [m] in CVb stem in Tomosili

zɪ̀b-sɪ́m	→	zɪ̀m-sɪ́m	'darkness'
tɪ́b-sɪ́m	→	tɪ́m-sɪ́m	'heaviness'
kób-sɪ́m	→	kóm-sɪ́m	'cry.nom'
dáb-lɪ́m	→	dám-lɪ́m	'bravery'

Another common distributional difference is thevoiced stop /d/ in word-initial which becomesvoiceless affricate [ʧ] in a sub-dialect of Tomosili,voiceless stop /k/ in a sub-dialect of Nanunli and a voiceless stop [t] in a sub-dialect of nayahili in some words as seen below:

24.

/d/→[ʧ]	/díní/	→	[ʧɪ̃nɪ́]	'knee'
/d/→[k]	/díní/	→	[kónɪ́]	'knee'
/d/→[t]	/díní/	→	[tɪ́nɪ́]	'knee'

The four categories of Hawkins model which is used to explain the differences in

the alternation of the segments in Dagbanli are summarized below:

Table 3: [2] model of segment alternation differences

1.Realisational			
	WD	**SD**	**ED**
/ɛ/	[ʲa]	[e]	[ɛ]
2.Systemic			
	WD	**SD**	**ED**
/z/	[z]	[ʤ]	[z]
3.Selectional			
	WD	**SD**	**ED**
/a/	[a]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	[a]	[a]
/i/	[i]	[u]	[u]
/a/	[a]	[o]	[o]
4. distributional			
	WD	**SD**	**ED**
/b/	[m]	[b]	[m]
/d/	[ɣ]	[k]	[t]

Conclusion

The paper described alternative pronunciations in Dagbanli which are based on difference in segmental realisations. The paper showed that segmental variations bring about alternative pronunciations where consonants in the language show differences but their role is generally much smaller compared to that of the vowel quality. The alternation of the vowel segments [a~ɔ], [ɔ~a], [a~o] or [i~u] across dialects is found in only a few words; which cannot be explained on the basis of distribution. The alternation of the vowels is, therefore, classified as selectional.

What has been done so far in this paper is to establish a model for comparing Dagbanli dialects and suggests that comparison of dialects should be done with some level of language familiarity. The major finding is that the difference across dialects resides in the vowels and some few consonants. The paper provided response to the question whether the difference is predictable by a general environment (distributional) or whether it applies only to the words and few others in which case it would be selectional.

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