



ASPECTS OF SISAALI DIALECTOLOGY

BY

MOSES DRAMANI LURI

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COLLEGE OF LANGUAGES EDUCATION,

DEPARTMENT OF GUR-GONJA EDUCATION.

POST OFFICE BOX 72, AJUMAKO

Abstract

Studies on Sisaali dialects have received very little attention, if any in the literature. Although many people are aware that there are dialects in the language, no definite idea about the number of dialects and the dialect continuum has been professed in previous studies on the language. This paper investigates aspects of Sisaali dialectology. It discusses the linguistic features that are shared by these dialects and those that are divergent. Like most other Mabia languages (Bodomo 2020), though people are aware there are dialects or varieties of the languages there has not been any systematic attempt to study the linguistic difference. This paper seeks to identify the seven dialects of the language as Bosillu, Bɔwaali, Gelbagli, Gbieni, Kpatolie, Pasaali and Tumuluɲ. It is evident in the study that there is mutual intelligibility among the dialects based on how close or how far the dialects are from each other. Thus. Speakers of Bɔwaali and Gbieni are closer to each other, interact more and inter marry more, therefore, their understanding of each other's dialect is more than the remote dialects. The same is the case for Bɔwaali and Gbieni, Gbieni and Tumuluɲ. But not between speakers from Bosillu and Tumuluɲ who are far apart, reduces considerably up to Pasaali dialect to the extreme end. One significant motivation for this study is to present the data for the understanding of Sisaali linguistic boundary. This research has therefore, been a comprehensive study of Sisaali based on fieldwork. Dixon's (1997)'s Basic Linguistic Theory was used including seminars for debriefings and a West African Linguistic Conference (WALC) in 2019 in la Côte d'Ivoire. Primary and secondary data were the main sources of data. Based on the study Tumuluɲ, Sisaala and Pasaali as languages rather than dialects of Sisaali is not valid. The cognates for the study do not support the claims of Moran (2006, 2009) and Ethnologue base on linguistic similarities and mutual intelligibility.

This assumption of the researcher is based on the mutual intelligibility parameter. Though the author agrees that there are variations, there is a considerable degree of mutual intelligibility among these dialects.

Key words: Sisaali, Sisaala, dialects, Mabia, dialectology.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates aspects of Sisaalt dialectology, a Mabia language under the Grusi subfamily (Bodomo 2020, Bodomo et al 2020). It discusses the linguistic features that are shared by these dialects and those that are divergent. Like most other Mabia languages though there are reports of the existence of dialects or varieties of the languages there has not been any systematic study on this topic as far as this language is concerned. This paper seeks to identify the seven dialects of the language as Bosillu, Buwaalt, Gelbaglt, Gbieni, Kpatolie, Pasaalt and Tumuluŋ. The overall objective of the study is to describe more accurately Sisaalt as a linguistic code and its variants. Specifically, the linguistic terms relating to Sisaalt and its speakers will be explained. The dialects of Sisaalt and the dialect boundaries will be identified. Finally I will make an argument for Sisaalt as a single language. The following research questions form the basis for this study: (i) What are the linguistic terms, Sisaalt and its speakers? (ii) What are the dialects of Sisaalt and the dialect boundaries? And (iii) What factors support the argument for Sisaalt as a language?

Even though dialectology is relatively a vex topic, linguists (Brown & Yule, 1983; Chamber & Tudgill, 1998; Coulthard, 1977; Labov & Fanschel, 1977; Sinclair et al. 1972) have made strives to investigate some languages of the world. Through these studies, languages, dialects and accent are identified. No such known studies have been done as far as Sisaalt is concerned by linguists. Furthermore, attempts are made by scholars (Gordon, 2005; McGill et al. 1999; Moran, 2009), who have investigated some aspects of the grammar of the language, to treat the various dialects of the language as autonomous languages. Some terms assigned to the language are also misrepresented and there has not been any attempt to study the linguistic variations in the language and the boundaries of these variations. This study is the first linguistic attempt to identify the linguistic boundary of Sisaalt and its varieties.

Beyond this introduction, I review the relevant literature on dialectology in section 2 while section 3 discusses the methods and procedures of data collection. Sections 4 considers the sociolinguistics factors that influence language change and variation in language contact situations and the discussions on the language and dialects; the crux of the study are detailed in section 5. Section 6 considers the linguistic differences in the dialects while section 7 presents the summary and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

In this subsection, I review the existing literature on the topic, focusing on the definitions of language, dialect, intelligibility, and other related terms. Chamber & Trudgill (1998, P. 3) contend that dialectology “is the study of dialect and dialects”, while “a dialect is a substandard, low-status, often rustic form of a language, generally associated with the peasantry, working class, or other groups lacking in prestige”. Deviations and aberrations of a correct or standard form of language are also often erroneously viewed as dialect. They disassociated themselves from these general definitions and views of a dialect. They use variety of a language instead of a dialect. It does not make any kind of sense to suppose that any one dialect is in any way linguistically superior to any other.

Chamber & Trudgill (1998) opine that Dialects, can be regarded as subdivisions of a particular language. In this way, we may talk of the Parisian dialect of French, the Lancashire dialect of English, the Bavarian dialect of German, and so on. This distinction, however, presents us with several difficulties. In particular, we are faced with the problem of how we can distinguish between a language and a dialect, and the related problem of how we can decide what a language is. One way of looking at this has often been to say that ‘a language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects’, they conclude.

Chamber & Trudgill (1998) hold, that while the criterion of mutual intelligibility may have some relevance, it is not especially useful in helping us to decide what is and is not language. We have to recognize that, paradoxically enough, a ‘language’ is not a particularly linguistic notion at all. Linguistic features, political, geographical, historical, sociological and cultural factors also count.

They stressed that ‘Accent’ refers to the way in which a speaker pronounces, and therefore refers to a variety which is phonetically and /or phonologically different from other varieties. ‘Dialect’, on the other hand, refers to varieties which are grammatically (and perhaps lexically) as well as phonologically different from other varieties.

They opined that movement from one village to another results in identifying variations in dialect use, where village 1, 2, 3, 4.....10 understand each other based on proximity. This, they refer to as geographical dialect continua. I will later show how this apply in Sɪsaalɪ.

Dialectology is the study of lexical and structural variations in language, in the area of geographical variations in rural areas, social variation in urban areas (Britain 2002, 2009b, 2010) and is associated with non-standard varieties of language (Harrington et al. 2000, 2006; Fabricius 2002). It is often associated with more traditional approaches to studying language variation (Chamber & Trudgill, 1998).

Until mid-nineteenth century there was little coherent and systematic efforts to study dialects (Chamber & Trudgill 1998). The study of dialects largely began as atlases. Wenker’s (1881) pioneered the publication of *Sprachatlas des Deutches*. Other atlases were authored by Gillieron (1896, 1910); Ellis (1889). He states that dialect atlases were produced for most countries in Europe, the USA, and beyond subsequently (P. 127).

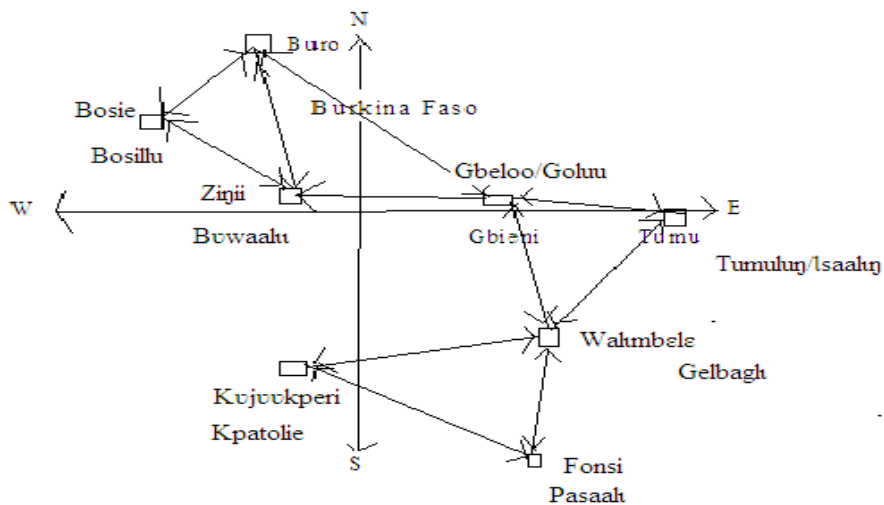
Lobov (1966) introduced ‘urban dialectology’ which included an approach and methodology applicable to anywhere and focus on language change in progress. Age, gender, ethnic and social background were all considered. The new theoretical apparatus, was change in progress: the linguistic variable, facilitating an analysis of the proportion of use of different variants; the apparent time model, enabling a simulation of diachronic across the lifespan; the speech community. The second face is the methodological change which is discussed in section 3 below.

3. Methodology

The two major areas of dialectology: traditional (rural/geographical) and urban (sociolinguistic/variationist) dialectology have distinct methodology and theories. Theoretically, I employed the Swadesh (1966)’s wordlist framework. The cognate approach is useful in determining linguistic variation at the lexical level. However, a blend of traditional methodology and sociolinguistic or variationist methods were employed cumulatively resulting in the dialect geography methodology (Britain, 2002, 2009b, 2010) dubbed geographically informed dialectology (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998, p. 131). Traditionally, I group all the communities of practice into seven dialects based on the cognates gathered using the wordlist across rural and urban areas of the native communities irrespective of internal variations such as gender, age and social factors. The Dixon Basic Linguistic Theory allows this blend of approaches. The language continuum is established based on variationist approach of intense fieldwork where some Labovian techniques are employed to validate the data on the wordlist. Social background such as historical background, clan and marriage considered for analysis.

4. Sociolinguistic Factors that influence language change and variation

I discuss the geographical, genetic, political and cultural factors in this section. These are language contact domains that influence language variation and change. Sɪsaalɪ is the second major language of the north-western parts of Ghana which extends into the Burkina Faso. The area being delineated is between latitudes 9° N and 11° N and longitudes 2° W and 3° W. This area covers the Upper-West Region of the Northern part of Ghana. The dialect continuum of varying degrees of mutual intelligibility of Sɪsaalɪ include: Bosillu, Bɔwaalɪ, Gbieni, Gelbaglɪ, Kpatolɪ, Pasaalɪ and Tumuluŋ. The dialect continuum is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Dialect Continuum of Sisaalt

(Source: Field Report)

Native speakers of Sisaalt call themselves Sisaala/lsaalaa (singular: Sisaal/lsaal). The terms "Sissala, Sisai, Issala, Hissala, Sisala Tumu, Isaalung, Isala, Nsihaa, Potule" have been used in the literature by scholars (McGill et al. 1999, Moran 2009, Gordon 2005). "But these are certainly Anglo-centric" (Bodomo 2000, P. 3). Naden (1988) classified Sisaalt as follows: Tumuluṅ, Debi and Pasaali. Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and other researchers attempt to sub-categorise Sisaalt into four languages: Sisaala, Tumuluṅ, Sisaala Western, Pasaal and Sissala (in Burkina Faso) (Gordon 2005; Moran 2006, 2009). Despite the linguistic diversities in the dialect continuum of Sisaalt, the Sisaala consider themselves as one people, one language with one voice and more importantly, there is a considerable degree of mutual intelligibility.

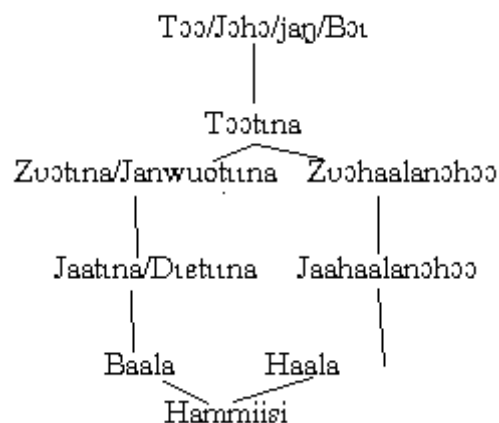
Sisaalt/lsaalt/lsaalt - the language of a Sisaal/lsaal - a person who speaks native Sisaalt whether in Ghana or Burkina Faso and any part of the world in which he or she finds him/herself. Sisaala - people whose native language are Sisaalt, a singular of Sisaal/lsaal. Sisaalt/lsaalt - the homeland or kingdom of the Sisaala.

The migration history of the Sisaala is most uncertain. It is claimed that the ancestors of the Sisaala are a splinter group from various tribes either in Ghana or Burkina Faso. Principally the Grusi comprising Sisaala, Kasina, Vagla, Tampuluma and Mo in Ghana constituted the original ethnic group (Awedoba 2009; Boahen 1966; Mahama 2009; Rottary 1932; Ward 1948, 1958; Wilks 1961, 1989). Pauls (2007:1), states "the linguistic groups and subgroups of the area are difficult to classify with certitude, but the Grusi languages make up a sub-branch of the Gur (Voltaic) branch of the Niger-Congo language family." Therefore, Sisaala origin is traceable to Berber or Taureg within the Songhai (Pauls, 2007). The names Sisaala, Kasena and Grusi all find their roots from Songhai (Pauls, 2007). The present day Sisaala claimed their origin from various tribes including Kasena, Dagomba, Dagaaba/Waala, Gonja and Mampurisi origins due to slavery and war (Read 1379). It seems however, that rather than saying that the Sisaala are a splinter group from various tribes, it is more plausible to say that the Sisaala, the Kasem, and the oti/volitic Language family of the Gur Language groups of the Niger/Congo Languages are all directly descended from a common ancestor ethnolinguistic group, the Mabilia as Bodomo (2000, 2020) proposes.

Politically, the Sisaala like Dagaaba (Bodomo, 2000) have evolved a highly decentralised traditional system of government. This, indeed, is the best system of governance as national government are now shifting to it. This has been inappropriately described as acephalous though, suggesting a weak and incohesive structure in the absence of a central authority. Unlike the highly centralised systems of government found among some ethnic groups in Ghana and other parts of Africa where a distant monarch may appoint representatives to various towns and villages and exercise control from a central headquarters (Bodomo 2000), every Sisaalt village or group of villages is virtually autonomous as far as the day-to-day administration of natural resources are concerned. The

Tootna/Johotuna/Jantuna or Boutuna(owner of the land) is the religious and political head at this level. In consultation with a council of elders, who are family or lineage heads in their own right, the Tootna promulgates and administers law and order affecting cultural, religious, economic and all forms of social practices in the area under his Jurisdiction. The decentralized political system (Figure 2) of the Sisaala is designated as follows:

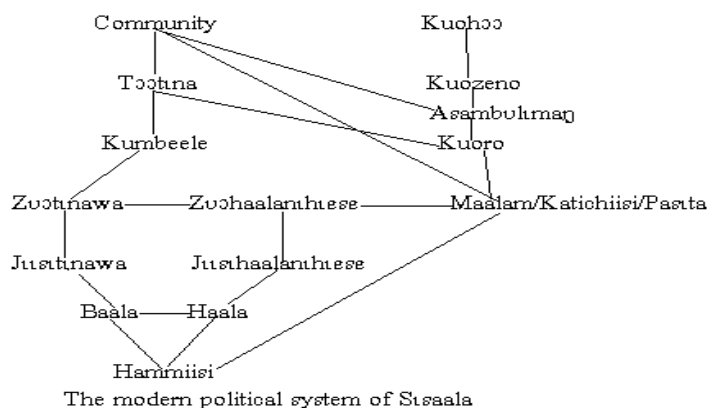
Figure 2: Traditional Political System of Sisaala



(Source: Field Report)

The British policy of Indirect Rule between 1890 and 1957 has, however, substantially altered this decentralised political system and Sisaala are now organised into various paramountcies or chiefdoms. The current political system (Figure 3) is as follows:

Figure 3: Current Political System



(Source: Field Report)

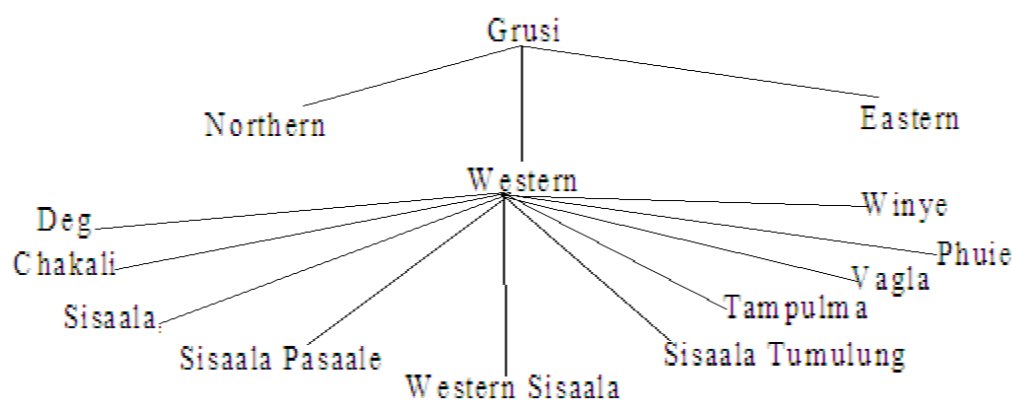
In economic terms, the Sisaal-speaking population is heavily agrarian. Practically each family deals in at least some sort of subsistence farming. Farming is so central to the economy of Sisaal that more and more people migrate southwards in search of extra income mainly after the farming season and move back to Sisaal during the farming season. While farming is the main economic activity in Sisaal, charcoal processing is the main economic activity for the immigrant Sisaal in the Southern part of the country. These economic activities affect the language due to language contact.

At the cultural level, among the most conspicuous cultural manifestations are the eating of their traditional staple food, Kùl (or T. Z., which is an abbreviation from, tuo zaafi, the Hausa name for the same food) and the drinking of their traditional alcoholic beverage Sfiɛmɔ (or pito, a borrowing from fitoo, the Hausa word for the same drink); the wearing of the smock, daasichi or Sisaalagerɔ, the playing of xylophones, zensi, and drumming and dancing, especially the tampannuɗ and Zɛnyula dance.

5.0. The Sisaalt Language and Dialects

However, one common thing that binds all these groups together is that there is at least some amount of mutual intelligibility within the group. That is why, from a purely linguistic point of view, Pasaal, Tumuluɗ, Bosillu and Sisaala (Burkina Faso) should not be viewed as separate languages as the literature implied or explicitly stated, but as variants of one language. There is also a common identity both in Ghana and Burkina Faso: every native speaker of Sisaalt identifies him/herself as a Sisaal. Moran (2006:9) for instance states this: “There are four Sisaala languages spoken in the Upper West Region of north-western Ghana and adjoining areas of Southern Burkina Faso: Western Sisaala, Sisaala Tumulung, Sisaala Pasaale, and Sissala”. Clearly, he has stated emphatically that they are languages instead of dialects. Moran (2006:21) continues: “there are 10 Western Grusi languages; seven are spoken in Ghana (Chakali [CLI], Deg[MZW], Sisaala Pasaale, Sisaala Tumulung, Western Sisaala, Tampulma[TAM], and Vagla[VAG], and three are spoken in Burkina Faso (Winye[KST], Phuie[PUG], and Sissala...” These he illustrated in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Western Grusi Languages



(Moran 2006:21)

Swadesh (1966)’s comparative method exemplified in Fig 4 below is the main framework of this study. The cognates do not support the claim of Moran (2006, 2009) base on linguistic similarities and mutual intelligibility.

Figure 4: Cognate of Sisaali dialects.

S/N	DIALECT								GLOSS
	BOSILLU	BOWAALI	GBIENI	GELBAGLI	KPATOLIE	PASAALI	TUMULUB	KASEM	
1	<i>be:</i>	<i>be:</i>	<i>beki:</i>	<i>beki:</i>	<i>be:</i>	<i>be:</i>	<i>be:</i>	<i>be</i>	What
2	<i>muri</i>	<i>mu:ri</i>	<i>mu:ri</i>	<i>Muro</i>	<i>Muro</i>	<i>Muro</i>	<i>mu:ro</i>	<i>balana</i>	Small
3	<i>halla</i>	<i>haal</i>	<i>haalv</i>	<i>ha:rv</i>	<i>Haŋ</i>	<i>Haŋ</i>	<i>ha:la</i>	<i>ka:ni</i>	Woman
4	<i>balla</i>	<i>baal</i>	<i>baalv</i>	<i>ba:rv</i>	<i>ba:l</i>	<i>ba:l</i>	<i>ba:la</i>	<i>ba:rv</i>	Man
5	<i>nennɔ</i>	<i>nɛŋ</i>	<i>naraŋ</i>	<i>nɔ:</i>	<i>Nal</i>	<i>Nal</i>	<i>nv:</i>	<i>nɔ:nv</i>	Person
6	<i>va:</i>	<i>va:</i>	<i>vaha</i>	<i>Vaha</i>	<i>Vaha</i>	<i>Vaha</i>	<i>Vaha</i>	<i>kukura</i>	Dog
7	<i>tu:wo</i>	<i>tɛ</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>da:ŋ</i>	<i>tɪya</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>tieo</i>	Tree
8	<i>bi:</i>	<i>bi:/du</i> <i>o</i>	<i>bi:/do</i> <i>ho</i>	<i>bi:</i>	<i>bi:</i>	<i>Biye</i>	<i>bi:ŋ/do</i> <i>ho</i>	<i>tieobu</i>	Seed
9	<i>duo</i>	<i>doŋ</i>	<i>Doŋ</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>do:</i>	<i>do:</i>	<i>Doŋ</i>	<i>dɔ:</i>	Sleep
10	<i>svwe</i>	<i>svwe</i>	<i>sv:</i>	<i>svwa</i>	<i>svba</i>	<i>svba</i>	<i>sv:</i>	<i>ti:</i>	Die

(Source: Field Report)

Using the comparative method, one can notice that most of the cognates have almost the same initial sound or its variant. For instance, *muri* “small” has an onset bilabial nasal throughout with a bisyllabic structure. In cases where differences exist, it is either an insertion or an elision of /a/ sound. For instance, *va:/vaha* and *baala/baal*. Furthermore, Moran’s claim is not supported in the sense that he equates any of the dialects of Sisaali to any of the sister Grusi languages. From the cognates above Kasem, the immediate sister Grusi language to the East of Sisaali has manifested significant difference even though there are traces of some similarities to show that they once belong to the same proto-language genetically. For instance, “dog” has the same initial sound in all the dialects of Sisaali with a heavy syllable while Kasem chooses a different sound with /a/ different syllable structure.

The Language consultants or key informants(14) were purposively chosen for data elicitation for all the proposed dialects(7) who were mostly bilingual in Sisaali and English/French for Ghanaian and Burkina Faso communities respectively. These are people who were either literacy facilitators, translators or writers and have some reasonable level of knowledge in the grammar of the language. All the Sisaala in the natural environment constituted the target population (179,704 (GSS, 2010/Ethnologue) census night in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Field visit was then made to the major communities in these areas where the landlords, elders, chiefs, women, youth were met separately and individually for further data elicitation, using the appropriate sociolinguistic and comparative linguistic approaches.

Finally focus group discussions, plenary discussions, music/dance and cultural displays were performed in some communities to enable further interaction and participant observations. Tape recording and note taking were done. These were transcribed and compared later. The researcher's own knowledge and experience as a native speaker coupled with studies in language and linguistics with vested interest in this study since 2003 has played a significant role in the study. Drafts of the major findings were deserrminated in local newsletters entitled 'Timpaning' and 'Yarifialaa'. Seminars involving most stakeholders: Sisaala elders, chiefs, youth networks, Sisaala union congresses were organized for debriefings and validations. Academic seminars presentations included a faculty of languages seminar, University of Education, Winneba in 2009, Ghana Institute of Linguistic, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) 2011 Serminar Week and the final draft was presented at WALC conference in 2019 in Abidjan. Feedback was also taken from social media.

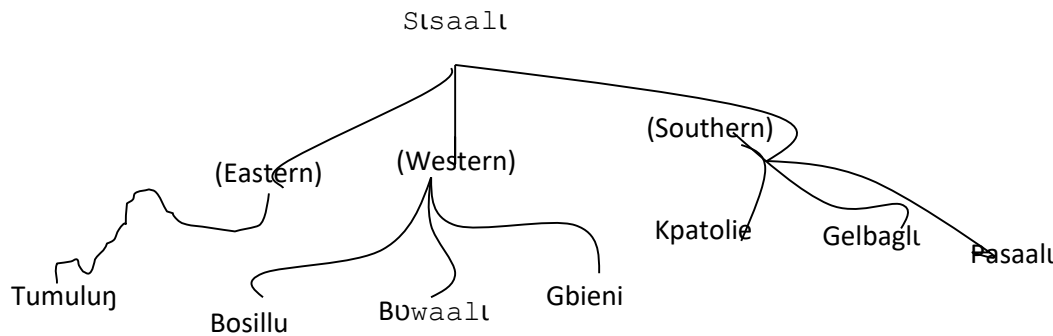
How then does one demarcate this continuum into discrete dialect areas? A way of approaching the problem is to apply one theory of linguistic variation which claims that certain (prestige) settlements (in our case the major towns of the area) are centres from which linguistic innovations spread to their individual areas of influence and may overlap each other. Using the major towns in the research area as the centres of linguistic innovations or focal points, seven sub dialects may be set up. Further, taking into consideration prominent phonological, lexical and grammatical variations fit the seven main dialects as well. The dialects include Bosillu with 42,151 speakers, Gbieni with 39,419 speakers, Gelbagl with 31,075 speakers and Pasaal with 14,197 according to the 2020 projected population census report. The rest are Tumuluḡ with 24,247 speakers, Bvwaal with 9,714 and Kpatolie with 10,205 speakers (GSS, 2020). The comparism for 2000, 2010 population and the projected population for 2020 is presented in FUG 5.

FIGURE 5: Dialect Summary

DIALECT SUMMARY			PROJECTED	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	
S/N	DIALECT	POPULATION		2020	2010	2000
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL
1	PASAAL ₁	7,254	6,943	14,197	20,475	17,075
2	KPATOLIE	5,185	5,020	10,205	8,228	6,794
3	GELBAGL ₁	15,260	15,815	31,075	25,044	20,574
4	TUMULUḡ	11,746	12,501	24,247	19,807	15,823
5	GBIENI	19,726	19,693	39,419	31,778	26,147
6	BvWAAL ₁	4,870	4,844	9,714	7,270	5,911
7	BOSILLU	20,624	21,527	42,151	36,102	29,101
TOTAL		84,665	86,343	171,008	148,704	121,425

(Source: GSS 2020/2010/2000)

These figures are based on only those people who were presented on census nights in Sisaala communities. Those Sisaala outside these localities and those non-native speakers, who were in these communities on the Census nights cannot be distinguished, as usual of Population and Housing Census reports. The 2020 population figures are projected based on the 2010 population reports by GSS pending the report of the 2021 population and Housing Census Report. The proposed dialects which are confirmed and validated for Sisaal with some minor issues of clans crossing and variations resisted are illustrated in Fig 6 below.

Figure 6: Sisaali Dialects.

(Source: Luri, 2011)

The detail discussion on each of these dialects is considered below.

5.1 Bosillu

Bosillu in the narrow sense is the dialect of the natives of Bosie (Lambussie) like each community is identified by a name for their dialect. It is, for the purposes of academic classification being generalised to include various communities around Bosie, which share greater and or similar linguistic features. These mainly include men, ele and e speaking communities. Ethnologue terms this dialect as Sisaala, Western Sisaala and has coined the following terms to represent it. Busillu Sisala, Sisai, Issala, Hissala. I do not consider them very appropriate; it is however a good start. Specifically, chuŋ, sukke, dundɛɛ, Buo, Wiuro, Puzene up to Hamli, extending into Burkina Faso is termed Bosillu in this context. About 32 communities are involved in Ghana and 11 in Burkina Faso. The Ghanaian communities include Bulɔɔ, Baŋmɔɔ, Hapaa, Dahli, Bɔɔ, Nabaala, Kaŋɔɔ, Piina, Samɔɔ, Sukke, Chuŋ, Sinaa, Dundɛɛ, Kɔŋŋɔ, Naawɛ, Zɔŋŋo(Hamile), Dundapurko, Kadulligɔ, Bulli, Koroo, Kucha, Tapɔmmɔ, Gbuŋgbala, Kɔbuŋ, Kogsi, Nyubulo and Bosie all in the Lambussie District in the Upper West region of Ghana. The rest are Numɔɔ, Kaa, Buo, Wiuro and Puzene in Sissala West District of Ghana. The communities in Burkina Faso are Hamli, Kieri, Hɛla, Bɔɔɔ, Kedun, Bɔɔɔɔ, Pensɛka, Buro, Puzenkaalɔ, Tii, and Fognie

5.2. Gbieni

Gbieni is also spoken primarily by the natives of Goluu/Gbeloo (Gwollu). It is used here as a cover term to include far and near communities that share common linguistic features with slight variations. They are *nya* speaking communities. Right from Gbal to Derme (Dasima) to the western poles down to Daŋu and Kɔɔɔluma to the eastern poles with all the communities within, are mutually intelligible. They include 27 communities in Ghana and 21 in Burkina Faso. The Ghanaian communities are Goluu/Gbeloo, Kɔɔla, Gbal, Kunni, Paana, Nyimeti, Bullu, Jefiisi, Kuntulo, Derme, Timmie, Duwie, Kandɛ, Kɔnkɔɔ, Kɔsaali, Lipilime, Jitɔŋ, Jawia, Botii, Sɔɔɔɔɔ, Sulɔɔɔ, Pɔluma, Daŋu, Kɔŋ, Kɔɔɔluma, Gbarma and Luŋmɛɛ in Ghana. In Burkina Faso, Laŋ, Garjɔɔ/Gaarɔɔɔ, Wotul, Butol, Nyentɔɔ, Yoli, Balaka, Kɛ No1&2, Daŋu, Gumo, Burukɔŋ, Bɔyake, Zamune, Bɔfɛn, Saamɔŋ, Lunse, Kala, Nyipirime, Piina, Var and Hila are the communities that speak the variety of Sisaali closer to Gbieni, and I consider them under this generalised name, Gbieni. Gaarɔɔɔ and Nyentɔɔ are however discovered to be taken over by Kasem, reducing the number of communities in Burkina Faso to 19. This dialect is central in the continuum of Sisaali dialects, and it enjoys a considerable degree of intelligibility from speakers of all the other dialects of Sisaali.

5.3. Gelbagl

Gelbagl is traditionally a variety of Sisaalt spoken by the native Gelbagla (the people of Gelbaga, and Gelbaga is the land or kingdom of Gelbagla), consisting of four communities as a clan. Clans are the most viable social units of Sisaala. Even though Sisaala communities are misconceived to be acephalous, dialectal affiliation goes beyond a community. Probably due to proximity, sister clans around Gelbagla share common linguistic characteristics with Gelbagl. They are *mɛɛ rɛ/bɔɪ/yie*. For lack of a common terminology, representative enough to include all of them, I generalise Gelbagl to include all of them. These sister clans are Bɔndɪɛla, Kpɛvɛrayala and Hanvɛra.

The generalised Gelbagl communities are Walumbɛɛ, Bugubɛɛ, Tasɔɔ, Kulɜuo as the original Gelbagla. The rest are Jijen, Sentie, Bandede, Tumbaga, Sakalɜ as Kpɛvɛrayala, while Sakal Nakpawie, Lulɜgse, Nahadakui, Bakvɔla and Bichumbɔɪ are the Hanvɛra clan. Linguistically Bakvɔla and Chalɜ share very closed features, but Chalɜ is not Hanvɛra clan, Chalɜ therefore stands without identifiable clan of the generalised Gelbagl. Danɜ and Korɜ which share linguistic features with Gbieni (Debii) are among the Hanvɛra tradition. The final clan under this generalised Gelbagl dialect is Bɔndɪɛla composing of Puɜ, Dmandɔɔɔ, and Vambɔɪ. It is important to note that linguistic classification, based on mutual intelligibility has nothing to do with traditional classification and affiliations. Therefore, the classification does not take away the traditional identities.

5.4. Pasaalt

Pasaalt is said to consist of two communities- Yaala and Kulun. This has however been generalised already to refer to all Sisaala in the southern part of Sɪsɔɔ/lsanɜ. Early linguistic researchers have over generalised Pasaalt to include Gelbagl and the associate communities until this proposal. Admittedly, due to the principle of language continuum, Pasaalt and Gelbagl are to a large extent mutually intelligible. The Ethnologue again terms this dialect as Paasaal and has assigned Pasaale, Funsile, Southern Sisaala, Pasaale Sisaala as alternative terms with a status of a language having Gilbagala and Pasaali as dialects. Again, I do not entirely agree with that because mutual intelligibility is not the only determiner for dialects of a language: sound changes and ethnicity are among others considered and all the Sisaala dialects classified as languages consider themselves as one people with the same ethnicity, despite the linguistic diversity. This present classification considers the following communities: Fonsi, Kundugu, Jumo, Tunɛbe, Sawubee, Kɜnyabun, Bɜftama, Yaala No 1, Yaala no 2, Kulun, Yayuombe. Duu East, Koma, Suombiisi, Halumbajupie, Chawɜlɜ, Balɛ, Mumɛ-asɛm, Balkpɔɜ, Mampiabee and Jabaga in the Wa east district of the upper west region. The rest are Bawusɛbe, Jande (Du east), and Nabulo in the Sisaala east district of the upper west region of Ghana. They are *yaa* speaking communities. I do not have enough information about their traditional affiliations.

5.5. Tumuluɜ

Tumuluɜ has taken over the term lsaaluɜ in the literature available or used as a synonym. Actually, Tumuluɜ was used as the dialect of native speakers of Tumu people, linguistic research has however generalised the usage to cover all the communities traditionally known as lsanɜ. They are *mina/...ŋ* speaking communities. Ethnologue has over generalised Tumuluɜ to include the entire Sisaala District (now Sissala East and West Districts) which actually consists of four major Sisaalt dialects: Bɜwaalt, Gbieni, Gelbagl and Tumuluɜ. Sisaala, Tumuluɜ is the term assigned by Ethnologue to this dialect with these associate coinages: Sisai, Issala, Hissala, Sisala Tumu, Isaalung. *Dialects*: Isala, Gil Bagale (Galebagla), Nsihaa, Potule (Gordon 2005). The communities under Tumuluɜ include Bujan, Chunchanɜ, Dumajan no 1 & 2, Dolimbɔɔɔ, Gbenabisi, Guosi, Kalagɜst, Kowie, Nabugubɛɛ, Nanchala, Navariwie, Santjanɜ, Sumboru, Taftasi, and Tumu all in the Sisaala East district of the upper west region of Ghana. Tumu is traditionally the most prominent town of Sisaala. It has therefore enjoyed political power both traditionally and modern-day politics. All the chiefs of the Sisaala were under the Tumu Kuoro (chief) and the capital town of the Sisaala district was Tumu. Probably because of this, most of the linguists who have worked on Sisaalt in Ghana like Ron and Rowland (1965), Haudenschild (1968) and Blass (1975) have based their analyses on it. It is the version of Sisaalt used for publishing church literature, educational material and, lately, broadcast

over the Upper West Radio because of its political status. It is relatively less intelligibility with the other dialects. The current Sisaalt orthography is in Tumuluṅ and it is the adopted language for literacy and education in Ghana.

5.6. Bɔwaali

Bɔwaali is a clan which traces her origin to Wa traditional area. There is not a community that is fully made up of natives of Bɔwaala. It is however claimed that Bɔwaala were the first settlers in Nɛtɔɔ, Zɛjii, Fachɔɔ, Duu and Lulo even though oral tradition has it that they came to meet Sisaala people in the locality. The term Bɔwaa has however been used as a cover term to cover about 30 communities in the western part of Sisaala West with a traditional council status. Currently, under the local government demarcation, 2 area councils were established in 1988 (PNDC Law 207 & Act 452(1993) in Bɔwaa, centred in Zɛjii and Fɛlmɔɔ. Under this dialectal classification, the generalisation is reduced to 14 communities, considering mutual intelligibility. These include Lulo, Wɛsɛɛ, Duu, Gumo, Pepirimi, Nɛtɔɔ, Hɛl, Dakɔma, Saṅgbaka, Nyentie, Fachɔɔ, Tuwu, Nyivil and Zɛjii. They are *meɲ* speaking communities. The other traditional communities that are under Bɔwaa share linguistic features mainly closed to Bosillu, I have therefore considered them under Bosillu dialect. All the rest are Dagara communities reported to have been driven by war from Burkina Faso. These communities include Fɛmɔɔ, Chetuu, Bɔkpal, Liero, Kankandɔɔlɛ, Gaapart, Folteɲ and Kɔɔnchuuri. Buo population is overwhelmed by these settlers too. A similar scenario is almost created in Hɛl and Dakɔma.

5.7. Kpatolie

Kpatolie is almost unique like original Gelbagla as the subjects claimed they share almost everything in common. They belong to the same clan with the crocodile as their totem. They are a small group of people comprising 8-cluster of communities. These are Kajukperi, Banɔmbɔ, Jolimbɔ, Namɔɔɔɔ (Dɔɔɔɔ), Challa, Kenkelen, Kpari (Jumpeɔ), and Vɛtɔɔ. Gbele was found to share similar linguistic features with this cluster in the study and it was confirmed that they were originally settled in Kajukperi but moved northward later to their present settlement. Gbele is therefore added to this cluster, making the total number of communities 9. They are *yaa/bahe/diivuo* speaking communities. One interesting revelation discovered is, the influence of Dagaare on Kpatolie dialect. For instance, the name of the landlord is Tundaana instead of Tanhatuna while a brother is biere instead of maana. Most of their songs for daily entertainment are in Dagaare, almost everybody in Kajukperi and surrounding communities is a bilingual most especially the Sisaala, in Sisaalt and Dagaare with Dagaare dominating.

6. Linguistic differences

Phonologically, Sisaalt is a tonal language and prominent among the functions of tone in Sisaalt is the fact that it brings about dialectal difference (example 2 &3) below:

Example 2: data from Tumuluṅ dialect

- (2) a. *bà:rà, bá:rá* “roam, roamed”
- b. *bá:ré, bà:rá* “go behind, went behind”
- c. *bégí, begí* “make way, made way”
- d. *hiesé, hiesá* “age, aged”

Example 3: Bɔwaali dialect

- (3) a. *bá:rɛ, bá:rá* “roam, roamed”
- b. *bá:rɛ, bá:rá* “go behind, went behind”
- c. *begi, begɔ* “make way, made way”

The tone is also found to bring about grammatical difference: mark possession, mark number (example 4), mark tense (example 5) and indicate the type of sentence (statement or interrogative). Lexically, there exist a considerable difference among the lexical items of the dialects depending on the principle of language continuum: proximity with closer dialects in the continuum sharing similar lexical items and greater mutual intelligibility as indicated in example 1 above.

Example 4

/i/	ì	you (s)	ì kó rí	Have you come? (s)
	í	you (pl)	í ko rí	Have you come? (pl)

Example 5.

híesé, híesá “age, aged”

Example 4

d. *hiése, híesó* “age, aged”

7. Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide basic information about Sisaali, the geographical location of Sisaali, its genetic relationship and its sociolinguistic profile. I am very aware of the behaviours associated with language. We only know that there are linguistic differences but classifying the language according to the differences has not yet received serious attention. Language development begins with a clear understanding of the language under study. No language can develop or can be standardised unless these peripheral but serious issues are tackled, and this is a move towards that. The proposal is opened to all and sundry, to make constructive criticisms and let us have the task accomplished. This is the beginning

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