J. V. Baba Abugri, CSSp

Dissertation Proposal

PhD Linguistics — AIU

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1. Title: **Nabt Morphology in the Context of Gur Language Group**
2. Purpose:

I grew up knowing my surname to be “Abugri”. And this is what everyone has known me for. A cross-section of my first cousins uses the same surname; at least, that is what I thought. It was not until I travelled to my hometown, Sakot, that I got to know the other side of the story. None of those family members uses this surname. In fact, the very first time I mentioned my name everyone asked me: “where are you from?” Apparently, “Abugri” was used by only those of us in diaspora. Every other family member uses “Bogre”. There are two noticeable differences to these two transcriptions: the “a” prefix and the “i” or “e” suffix. And a choice of either one of the above is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and political factors. In this study, I will focus on just the first, even though I will occasionally refer to the other two when it is relevant.

The focus of this study shall be to identify what is linguistically obtainable and what can be deemed appropriately as Nabt morphology. In other words, this study will demonstrate why the “a” prefix (the prosthetic vowel) should or should not be there and whether the suffix should be “e” or “i” or none.

Unfortunately, no one has ever analysed the Nabt language to identify what morphemes can or cannot be put together and what rules govern these combinations to produce a systematic grammar. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to make such an attempt at codifying the Nabt grammar in a scientific form with the help of the prior studies done in the Gur language group of which Nabt is a member.

1. Innovation of Research:

Nabt has since only been spoken. There is no official linguistic study of it. When asked: “What are the difficulties faced by a spoken language community that lacks a written language form?”, Łukasz Stokłosa answered by giving three reasons which I have evidenced in his quote.

Lack of written language form means that you have *limited opportunity to communicate in writing*. Little to no books, articles, social media posts. The community is forced to use another language. It may decrease the number of that language users given that it is more convenient to use the other language.

Lack of written form may also mean *lack of standardisation*, so the language users in one region may have different version of language than people in other regions. Language rules seem to me to be easier to enforce in writing.

The last thing would be *learning* - it becomes somehow easier to teach and learn language when the written form is available. Constructed languages like Esperanto or Klingon (if you can call the latter a constructed language) are a great example - being introduced on language learning app Duolingo, they have thousands of people learning them!

Being an oral language has subjected it to these three effects to the extent that names that are pronounced the same end up having different transcriptions, sometimes even wrongly written. The ridiculous side of it is that the wrong transcriptions sometimes become so rampant that they end up becoming the formally accepted ones (think of Nabdam, Sekoti, etc).

Hence, the innovation of this dissertation is threefold. First, this will be the first ever scientific and systematic study of the Nabt language. Second, the research will produce a basic grammar for Nabt studies. Third, this study will offer a resource of comparison for studying other Gur languages.

1. Specific Questions:

In this study I attempt to answer the following questions:

* How does one set boundaries to a Sentence, Word, Morpheme, Syllable, Character?
* What constitutes Nabt Grammar?

1. Activities and Resources:

In this study I will not only use scientific researched resources but also, and more importantly, I will rely on primary data obtained from first hand spoken discourses like speeches, proverbs, translations in manuscripts, etc.

1. Data or Information Collection:

For my primary resource materials, I will rely on data which I have generated from four different sources and conveniently named as *Nabt Corpus* 1-4 (NC1-4). NC1 is a collection of 590 Nabt Names in manuscript which I am preparing for publication. NC2 is a collection of Nabt Proverbs which I am co-editing with Fabiana Nbodsom Sapaat. NC3 is an unpublished translation of the biblical Book of the Apocalypse into Nabt by F. N. Sapaat and composed of about 11150 words. NC4 is a transcript of public speeches delivered by different people and groups in Nabt.

1. Data or Information Analysis:

I will use a Qualitative method with an emphasis on discourse analysis on the corpora.

1. Timetable:

I will organise the dissertation in three basic parts. Parts one and three will form the introduction and conclusion. In the introduction attention will be given to the Gur language group as an opening into Nabt which is a language spoken in the Nabdam district of Upper East Ghana. This will mean having a cursory look at the previous works that have been done in order to define a scope of my research. Part three will concentrate on an evaluation of the whole work giving a succinct summary of basic findings and proposing other avenues that were not touched but could serve a niche for further research. In part two which is the main focus of the study, attention will be given to morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics of Nabt divided in chapters. I anticipate finishing part two within nine months of study (October 2024 – June 2025). Then by December 2025 I should finish parts 1 and 3.

Below is a proposed plan for the whole dissertation.

Part 1: General Introduction

Introduction

* A note on nomenclature
* The Nabnam District in context
* The Gur Language Group
* Scope of Study

*Status Questionis*

* On the nomenclature: geography, people
* Question on the people and their culture
* On the language called Nabt

Orthography

Transcriptions

Corpora: Names, Nabt Apocalypse, Proverbs, Nabt Fora

Conclusion

Part 2: Nabt Grammar Sketch

Introduction

Morphology

* Noun
* Verb

Pronouns and Demonstratives

(P)articles

Predicate formation

Clausal Syntax

Passive voice

Morphophonology

* Phonemes
* Stress
* Intonation
* Reduplication

Inflection versus Derivation

* Roots
* Stems
* Reduplication
* Inflecting the Verb

Tense, Aspect and Mood Marking

* Marking Tense
* Marking Aspect
* Marking Mood

Part 3: General Conclusion

* Summary
* Prospects for a future study
* Conclusion

Indices

* Alphabets: Gurune, Kusaal, Dagbani, Mampruli, Nabt
* Verbs
* Nouns
* Proverbs

1. Bibliography:

Primary Resources – Corpora

NC1: Nabt Names

NC2: Nabt Proverbs

NC3: Nabt Apocalypse

NC4: Nabt Fora

Secondary Resources

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