

THE GRUSI SUB-GROUP OF THE GUR LANGUAGES

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Westermann and Bryan¹ list Grusi as a subdivision of the Gur languages, describing it as a dialect cluster. They list three dialects as belonging to this cluster, Kasena, Tamprusi and Kanjaga, and add that five other dialects apparently belong to the cluster, namely Mo (Degha),² Siti, Kurumba, Sisala and Buguli. In addition Westermann and Bryan list Nunumba as a closely related dialect of Kasena, and Lele as another Kasena dialect, and Vagala as a dialect practically identical with Tamprusi.

The purpose of this paper is to re-state the position of those Grusi dialects which are spoken in Ghana.³ The basis for this re-statement is field work undertaken by my colleagues⁴ of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Kasena, Vagala, Sisala, Tamprusi, Mo (Degha), and Chakali. The Swadesh 200 list has been obtained in all six of these languages, and a longer list of 230 nouns and 220 verbs in Kasena, Vagala, Sisala and Tamprusi.

VAGALA

Westermann and Bryan state that 'the dialect spoken by the Vagala (sometimes erroneously referred to as Gonja)⁵ a small tribe west of the Dagomba, appears to be practically identical with Tamprusi'. This statement is not substantiated by our field work. Comparing Vagala and Tamprusi on the basis of the Swadesh first hundred, the number of look-alikes is 58. This is out of about 95 comparable items. A more extended comparison of 210 verbs and 229 nouns gives a percentage of 38.7 (separate figures for the verbs being 37.6% and nouns 39.7%).

When Vagala is compared with the other Grusi languages the following look-alikes on the Swadesh first hundred are found: Kasena 37, Sisala 43, Mo 62, Chakali 68.

With the more extended lists the percentages between Vagala and Kasena are 10.5% and with Sisala 23.5%.

KANJAGA

Westermann and Bryan's Kanjaga, as may be inferred from their notes, is best named Buli. Kanjaga is just one place in the area inhabited by the Builsa people. Those who

¹ D. Westermann, and M. A. Bryan, *Handbook of African Languages, Pt. II. THE LANGUAGES OF WEST AFRICA*, International African Institute, 1952, pp. 61-3.

² Since the term Degha is used to refer to two different groups in Ghana, and as the more commonly found term for this group in Ghana is Mo, the latter designation seems preferable.

³ It has not yet been possible to obtain materials in Siti, though it is hoped to do so later.

⁴ The material in Chakali and Sisala was collected by Mr. E. R. Rowland, in Kasena by Dr. J. C. Callow, in Mo by Mr. T. Edmondson, in Tamprusi by Mr. R. K. Bergman, and in Vagala by Miss M. Crouch and Miss N. Smiles.

⁵ The Vagala are not the only people who have been confused with their overlords, the Gonjas. Much the same has occurred with the Hanga people who are also under the rule of the Gonjas, but whose affinities and language are clearly with the Mole-Dagbani peoples. On the Swadesh list Hanga has 84 look-alikes with Dagbani. Mara, sometimes listed separately, is clearly a Hanga dialect with 92 look-alikes with Hanga, and of these 70 are identical forms. Similarly Safalaba-speaking people are usually called Gonja, though their language is clearly related to Mole-Dagbani, showing 68 look-alikes when compared with Wali, the nearest member of the Mole-Dagbani group.

have written about the Gur languages have expressed various opinions⁶ with regard to the placing of Buli in the Grusi sub-group. Westermann himself, in his chapter in Ratteray's book *BEHIND THE ASHANTI HINTERLAND*, published in 1932, comments 'Only in the case of Buli one might doubt whether it should be placed here (i.e. with the Mole-Dagbani group) or in the Grusi sub-group.' Köhler⁷ and Zwernemann⁸ favour grouping Buli with the rest of the Grusi languages. Greenberg⁹ also lists the Kanjaga (Bulea) as a member of the Grusi group.

The lexical evidence does not seem to support this classification. Though the Buli people are largely surrounded by other Grusi-speaking peoples, with the Kasena to the north and north-east, the Sisala to the north-west, and the Tamprusi on their south, it seems that their language is related more closely to the Mole-Dagbani group than to the Grusi.

The Swadesh list (for which I am indebted to Mr. André Wilson) shows only 29 look-alikes between Buli and Kasena. This compares with 57 look-alikes with Dagbani. Furthermore, of the 29 look-alikes with Kasena, no fewer than 23 of these are also common to Dagbani. When Buli is compared with Sisala 20 related forms are found, and of these 14 are common to Dagbani.

Since the lexical evidence does not seem to be contradicted by any other evidence, it seems hard to resist the conclusion that Buli belongs to the Mole-Dagbani rather than to the Grusi sub-group.

CHAKALI

Another distinct dialect belonging to the Grusi group is that of the Chakali people. The Chakali are situated to the east of Wa, and have as their neighbours to the north the Sisala, to the east the Tamprusi, to the south the Vagala, and to the west the Wali.

On the Swadesh first hundred Chakali is found to be closest to Vagala with 68 look-alikes. The figures with other Grusi languages are as follows: Tamprusi 62, Mo 61, Sisala 47 and Kasena 39.

When Chakali is compared with Wali, the nearest member of the Mole-Dagbani group, the figure on the Swadesh first hundred is 17.

SISALA

Westermann and Bryan list Sisala as 'apparently belonging to the Grusi cluster'. Our material certainly substantiates this. On Swadesh's list, the figures when compared with other Grusi languages are as follows: Kasena 45, Vagala 43, Tamprusi 51, Chakali 47, and Mo 40. The more extended lists of just over 400 nouns and verbs give a percentage of 21.4% when compared with Kasena, 23.5% when compared with Vagala, and 29.4% when compared with Tamprusi.

The Sisala group are divided into three major dialects, Isala, Gilbagale and N Si Haa. There is considerable divergence between these dialects, and it might be questioned whether Sisala is, in fact, a separate language or just a cover term for a number of divergent dialects. When these three main dialects are compared with each other it is found that there are around 80% of similar words. This would seem to justify grouping them as Sisala.

⁶ See, for instance, the discussion by G. Manessy in 'Rapport sur les Langues Voltaïques' in *ACTES DUE SECOND COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL DE LINGUISTIQUE NEGRO-AFRICAINE*, Dakar, 1963, p. 259.

⁷ O. Köhler, Review of Westermann and Bryan in *AFRIKA U. ÜBERSEE* 37, 1952, pp. 187-90.

⁸ J. Zwernemann, 'Shall we use the word Gurensi?', *AFRICA* 28, No. 2, 1958, p. 123.

⁹ J. H. Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*, part II, *I.J.A.L.*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1963, p. 8.

THE GRUSI SUB-GROUP OF THE GUR LANGUAGES

MO (DEGHA)

This group is surrounded by people speaking non-Gur languages, namely Guang and Twi. The nearest Grusi-speaking people to the Mo are the Vagala. It is interesting to find this reflected in the Swadesh list. The figures are as follows: with Vagala there are 62 look-alikes, with Chakali 61, with Tamprusi 55, with Sisala 40, and with Kasena 33.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE GRUSI CLUSTER

The relationships between the languages of the Grusi cluster seem to parallel closely the present day geographical distribution. Kasena, for instance, at the north being closest both geographically and linguistically to Sisala. Chakali, Tamprusi and Vagala are close to each other, both linguistically and geographically. Mo is more closely related to its nearest neighbours, Vagala and Chakali.

It would seem plausible to set up three sub-groups within the Grusi cluster. Tamprusi, Chakali, Vagala and Mo have 48 look-alikes in common. They might be considered as one sub-group. It would be possible to sub-divide them still further since Tamprusi, Chakali and Vagala have 55 words in common, but this is hardly significant. To the north Kasena clearly stands on its own. There are, in fact, only 24 words in common between Kasem and all the other five languages. Sisala does not appear to fall into either group and can perhaps be best considered as a third sub-group on its own.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE GRUSI CLUSTER AND THE MOLE-DAGBANI GROUP

It is noticeable that the members of the Grusi cluster are considerably further apart from one another than are, for instance, the members of the Gurma group or the Mole-Dagbani group. Indeed, some members of the Gurma group are closer to members of the Mole-Dagbani group than are many of the Grusi languages to each other. With a list of 407 nouns and verbs, Kusal (Mole-Dagbani) and Bimoba (Gurma) have 109 look-alikes. With a similar list Sisala and Vagala have 100 and Kasena and Sisala only 91. The figure for Kasena and Vagala drops to 46. When Bimoba (Gurma) is compared with Dagaari (Mole-Dagbani) which might be considered one of the members of the Mole-Dagbani group which is furthest both linguistically and geographically from Bimoba, 100 similar words are found with the same list.

Members of the Mole-Dagbani group and of the Gurma group show much greater lexical similarities, both within each group and between the groups than do the members of the Grusi cluster to one another. The cleavage between the Grusi and the Mole-Dagbani-Gurma groups seems considerable. When the six Grusi languages are compared with Dagbani on the Swadesh list only 15 look-alikes are found.

These comparisons serve to show the validity of the Grusi cluster both in the way in which the members of this group differ from the members of the Mole-Dagbani-Gurma groups, and in the way relationships between the members of the Grusi cluster are substantiated. It is clear, however, that the Grusi group lacks the cohesion lexically that some of the other sub-groups within the Gur family seem to have. When grammatical and phonological structures are compared, however, the Grusi cluster are found to share many similar or identical features. A grammatical and phonological questionnaire showed many similarities between all the members of the Grusi cluster.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE ILLUSTRATING THE LEXICAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE GRUSI CLUSTER ON THE BASIS OF THE SWADESH FIRST HUNDRED

	Kasena	Sisala	Tamprusi	Chakali	Vagala
Kasena	X				
Sisala	45	X			
Tamprusi	40	51	X		
Chakali	39	47	62	X	
Vagala	37	43	58	68	X
Mo	33	40	55	61	62

APPENDIX 2

SWADESH LIST FOR KASENA, SISALA, TAMPRUSI, CHAKALI, VAGALA, MO, BULI AND DAGBANI¹⁰

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Kasena	I	thou	we	this	that	who	what	not	all	many
Sisala	àmò	mò	dí	-ńtò	-ńtò	wò	bě	bā wò	māmā	dìdè
Tamprusi	mìná	ńná	lánà	déj	déj	wúón nées	béé kòj	yí	kálà	zánzám
Chakali	mən	hɛn	ya	nɔnɔ	ti	ati	baɲ	bi	amaga	kíj kèj
Vagala	mɛj	hej	yaa	haɲ	onla	aɲ	boaj	mənɪ	amun	kənken
Mo	mɛ	hɛj	ya	onii	onɔ	anɛ	bɛɛ	wa	amaa	kana
Buli ¹¹	mi	fi	iyán	onɔɲ	onɔ	ume	bakwal		bua	okpɔb
Dagbani	mani	ɲini	(ka)tama	ɲawa	la	(ka)wana	kabwa		miena	waʔa
			tə-nəma	ɲo	ɲo	ɲuni	bo		zaa	zua
										zoo-i (vb.)

¹⁰ The transcription used is a phonetic one except for Kasena and Dagbani. As considerable linguistic work has been undertaken by my colleagues in Kasena, Sisala, Tamprusi, Vagala and Dagbani, the lists in these languages have a degree of accuracy which may not have been attained in the lists in Chakali and Mo, since these were obtained in the course of very brief periods in the areas concerned.

¹¹ I am indebted to Mr. André Wilson for the lists in Buli and Dagbani.

THE GRUSI SUB-GROUP OF THE GUR LANGUAGES

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Kasena	one dìdǎǎ kàlǎ	two lè	big kēmūnu	long dùdòdo	small bálǎŋa	woman kāanu	man bāadǎ	person nōonu	fish yóni	bird zúnǎ
Sisala	(counting) kòbálá	bálǎ	kòbálǎŋ	dùòmó	mǎ	háala	báala	nìhòòbífínè	tǎŋfǎlǎŋ	dǎbiè
Tamprusi	dike	ale	kəzun	kəzəŋi	kui	han	bal	nar	ɲuni	zumibi
Chakali	digi-	alie	zeŋ	zɲii	wie	haaŋ	baal	nibolǎŋ	ɲinee	zunbie
Vagala	kpekpaŋ	(a)ne	okano	odzan	odjiko	haaŋ	baal	newe	ɲuŋ	zombee
Mo	begɔŋ	ane	dʒun	dzaŋene	dʒega	ha	ba	ne	peŋi	dʒombie
Buli	ɲi	-ye	kpiŋ	wɔŋ	fiik	nipok	nidɔa	nur	dʒum	nuem
Dagbani	yim	n-yi	{ teta-	wog-	bel-a	pag-a	do-o	nir-a	zeŋ-a	nooŋ-ga
	yin-i	a-yi	{ kar-	wog-			(pl. dab-ba)	(pl. zahem)		
			{ bar-(vb.)							
			{ gal-(vb.)							
			(kpeen-							
			strong)							
Kasena	21 dog	22 louse	23 tree	24 seed	25 leaf	26 root	27 bark	28 skin	29 flesh	30 blood
Sisala	kúkǔde	yueŋ	tǎ	bǔ	vǎ	ɲǎŋ	tǎno	tǎno	nǎnu	dʒāna
Tamprusi	váhà	hòróŋ	tǎ	bǔŋ	pépaèŋ	nàpòlǎŋ	hàréŋ	yará	námǎ	tǎlǎŋ
Chakali	va-ha	hoŋa	bogel	bi	kpatsak	lur	peŋe	bara	nampun	tsal
Vagala	vaa		daa	kundǎlii	paatʒaga	luti	petii	tǎŋ	nampǎtʒii	tsal
Mo	noahuŋ	kpibi	da	bii	paŋwǎ	daloni	daheŋ	hǎŋ	ol	tǎl
Buli	majnao	nuhal	da	upi	papo	dɛlu	tape	bɔton	olle	tǎl
Dagbani	biak	tǎkpebi	tiip	biri	viaku (va-)	naŋ	pak	gbaj	lam	zim
	ba-a	dʒabob-ga	ti-a tree	bel-li	va-gu	wul-li	po-gu	gbaj	nem-di	zi-m
		da-gu stick								

THE GRUSI SUB-GROUP OF THE GUR LANGUAGES

51	breast(s)	52	heart	53	liver	54	drink	55	eat	56	bite	57	see	58	hear	59	know	60	sleep
Kasena	yũl	bítfádakáli	tʃwɛ	bítfádakáli	tʃwɛ	ɲòga	dí	dí	dònu	nā/nē/nā	nā	nā	nā	nā	nā	nā	nā	dò	dòŋ
Sisala	yúlà	tʃúbáləŋ	tʃóuŋ	tʃúbáləŋ	tʃóuŋ	ɲóà	dí	dí	dɪŋ	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	tsɔdo	tsɔdo
Tamprusi	hul	buguləŋ	bɛge	buguləŋ	bɛge	ɲɔ	di	di	dəm	na	dəm	na	na	na	na	na	na	doo	doo
Chakali	ula	gboɔ	pɔl	gboɔ	pɔl	ɲua	di	di	dəm	na	dəm	na	na	na	na	na	na	dɔ	dɔ
Vagala	ula	toon	hiā	toon	hiā	ɲɔɔ	di	di	dəm	na	dəm	na	na	na	na	na	na	tʃɔɔ	tʃɔɔ
Mo	ul	bəmɬe	foga	bəmɬe	foga	ɲɔ	di	di	dɔmɛ	na	dɔmɛ	na	na	na	na	na	na	tʃɔ	tʃɔ
Buli	biisiri	zukyok	pai	zukyok	pai	ɲu	de	de	dəm	na	dəm	na	na	na	na	na	na	gwa	gwa
Dagbani	bih-li	suh-u	sab-li	suh-u	sab-li	ɲu	di	di	dəm	na	dəm	na	na	na	na	na	na	gbihi	gbihi
																		(cf. 67)	(cf. 67)
61	die	62	kill	63	swim	64	fly	65	walk	66	come	67	lie	68	sit	69	stand	70	give
Kasena	tùga	gō	kpò	pūgɛ	pūŋɔ	dʒàanu	vè	vèŋ	bà	bà	pèni	pèni	pèni	dʒèni	dʒèni	zàŋɛ	zàŋɛ	pia/pe/pā	pā
Sisala	sò	kpò	kpò	pūŋɔ	pūŋɔ	fɪl	vèŋ	vèŋ	kò	kò	pəŋ	pəŋ	pəŋ	həŋ	həŋ	tʃɪŋ	tʃɪŋ	pá	pá
Tamprusi	səɔ	kpo	kpo	poŋi	poŋi	za	val	val	wa	wa	tso	tso	tso	kani	kani	tsɔŋi	tsɔŋi	ɲɛ	ɲɛ
Chakali	suwa	kpɔ	kpɔ	tʃɛlsi	tʃɛlsi	zaa	vala	vala	waa	waa	tʃɔɔ	tʃɔɔ	tʃɔɔ	sana	sana	tʃɪŋa	tʃɪŋa	tia	tia
Vagala	siu	kpɔ	kpɔ	sɔŋɛ	sɔŋɛ	zāā	vol	vol	ba	ba	tʃɔɔ	tʃɔɔ	tʃɔɔ	so	so	tsi	tsi	tɛ	tɛ
Mo	siuwɛ	po	po	wa	wa	gan	vale	vale	ba	ba	tʃonale	tʃonale	tʃonale	sohaɾɛ	sohaɾɛ	tʃi	tʃi	tɛ	tɛ
Buli	kpi			puŋ	puŋ	yiti	tʃaŋ	tʃaŋ	dzam	dzam	duak	duak	duak	sohaɾɛ	sohaɾɛ	zaani	zaani	te	te
Dagbani	kpi	ku	ku	dug-i	dug-i	yeg-i	tʃaŋ	tʃaŋ	ka (+na)	ka (+na)	do-n-i	do-n-i	do-n-i	kali	kali	za-n-i	za-n-i	ti,tə	ti,tə

THE GRUSI SUB-GROUP OF THE GUR LANGUAGES

91	black	92	night	93	hot	94	cold	95	full	96	new	97	good	98	round	99	dry	100	name
Kasena	nāzòno	tītī	lōna	zúde	sú	nā̀dòŋə	lāna	kúkúlu	kòga	kòdu	hílà	yírəŋ	gúlògúlò	kə̀rulum	goye	obato	gugulu	gigiluk	kpəl-
Sisala	kòbúnè	títàŋəŋ	kòlèməŋ	fìléləŋ	súò	kùféləŋ	zòmó	wérəŋ	well	weyři	wəŋe	oweto	kerede	naləm	sum-	vel-			
Tamprusi	kə̀blim	də̀sem	kə̀həm	sonson	suli	kofali													
Chakali	bumma	tebinee	numa	sə̀ne	sə̀	fə̀lii													
Vagala	-biŋu	hamuŋa	owemo	osə̀nə	osuo	ofale													
Mo	khə̀ŋbini	dwana	kuwə̀robi	sonə̀	lsu	kə̀nfale													
Buli ¹⁰	sə̀bluk	ywək	tul-əm	ŋoota	suere	paalək													
Dagbani	sab-	yə̀ŋ	tul-	ma-	pal-	pal-li													
			bi-	get hot															