



Linguistic Surrogacy With Minimal Semantics Among the Dagomba of Ghana

Fusheini Hudu^{1,2*}

¹Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, ²Department of Gur-Gonja Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ajumako, Ghana

This paper discusses critical questions on the processing of non-native surrogate languages of the Dagbamba (Dagomba) of Ghana. The Dagbamba use the fiddle, talking drum and double bell to encode speech in Hausa, Akan and other languages they do not speak. Fiddling and talking drums are integral to their festivals, funerals, the installation of chiefs and other cultural events. These instruments are used to entertain, praise, and send messages ranging from daybreak notifications to mobilizing people for war. The surrogate language they produce is a specialized language, interpreted mainly by people deeply rooted in their culture. It indicates nobility and statesmanship. While the performers and their patrons do not understand Akan or Hausa, they process and communicate with Akan and Hausa surrogate languages. The maintenance of the languages of performance is part of the practitioners' desire to preserve the cultural heritage of Dagbamba. This raises questions about the acquisition of these surrogate languages, the level of accuracy of production and comprehension, the role of music in the processing and the implications of these for linguistic theory. These questions are discussed on the basis of data from recorded interviews of talking drummers and fiddlers. The overarching goal is to highlight the gaps in our understanding of language processing that surface in the study of surrogate language, when processing takes place with a poverty of grammatical content.

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*Correspondence:

Fusheini Hudu
fahudu@ug.edu.gh

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INTRODUCTION

This brief research report concerns the processing of non-native surrogate language among the Dagbamba (Dagomba) of Ghana. Surrogate instruments of the Dagbamba are of two types. Some encode speech in Dagbani, the native language of the Dagbamba; others encode speech in non-native languages. The surrogate language encoded by both of these instruments is specialized for people deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the Dagbamba. The use of non-native surrogate language marks statesmanship and indicates nobility. While the performers and their patrons do not understand the languages encoded by the instruments, they use them to convey messages that are of critical importance to the performance of rituals and the projection of their culture, among other uses.

This raises questions about the acquisition/learning or processing of these surrogate languages by the performers and patrons. For instance, how do the fiddlers and drummers learn to play the instruments and produce the appellations of dozens of people over several decades in languages they

neither speak nor understand? How do the patrons retrieve the intended messages? How does the lack of understanding of the foreign languages affect the accuracy of production and perception of drummed and fiddled speech? How similar is the performers' processing of these languages to second language users' processing? In the processing of a surrogate language produced by some instruments such as the fiddle, music intermediates between the encoder and encoded message on the one hand, and the patrons and what they perceive on the other. The music is strictly neither the intended message produced nor the target of processing, raising further questions about the role of music in the interpretation of the message. At the heart of all these is the implication of processing for linguistic theory. While linguistic theory typically assumes that the target of language processing is its literal meaning, this cannot be the case here, as the practitioners do not necessarily know that meaning. The paper sheds light on these issues and provides a further perspective on language processing. It shows that contrary to widespread belief, there are cases of language use where semantic processing of literal meaning is not the goal.

The Centrality of Meaning in Surrogate Language

In surrogate speech, meaning is encoded directly with musical instruments playing the role of articulatory organs. The nature of the semantic encoding and the level of perfection of surrogate instruments are subject to debate. For some, surrogate instruments do exactly what the speech organs do and communicate (nearly) as much meaning as verbal articulation of speech. Nicholls (1993), for instance, recounts a description of a surrogate instrument in a 1591 publication by a Portuguese explorer named Duarte Lopez to the Kingdom of Kongo as an instrument by means of which users could communicate their thoughts in the same way others would, with words. Finnegan (2012) argues that the signals of a drum language directly represent the words themselves and can even be considered as literature. Chernoff (1980) (cited in Mukuna, 1987) also argues that drum language is not a code but the actual language of the people.

The opposite view sees the output of surrogate instruments as a mere abstraction of the meaning intended by users, and aimed at a privileged few (e.g., Nketia, 1971; Locke and Agbeli, 1981; Carter, 1984; Mukuna, 1987; Neeley, 1996). The direct acoustic output is solely prosodic, unlike speech produced by humans, which has both segmental and prosodic units of speech. Surrogate instruments also encode only some tonal melodies of tone languages, not all, as noted by Nketia (1971). The sequential order of these tonal melodies is also disrupted in instrumental encoding. Mukuna emphasises the fact that surrogate speech is often neither meant for everyday communication nor for the comprehension of the average speaker of the language. For this reason, special attention is often paid to training and preservation of the production and perception of surrogate speech, unlike conventional speech.

The viewpoints presented in these studies raise significant questions about how many of the components of the grammar of these languages are available to the speakers when the languages are encoded instrumentally. They leave no doubt regarding the difficulties and complexities speakers of a language are faced with in the learning, production and comprehension of surrogate speech. All these are within the context of the psycholinguistics of one's native speech that is encoded by surrogate instruments. The report presented in this paper relates to the learning and processing of surrogate speech by speakers who do not speak the languages of the instrument and have no access to any of the components of the grammar of the surrogate language in their mental lexicon.

Fiddling and Talking Drums of Dagbon

DjeDje (2008) lists twenty-five potential surrogate instruments the Dagbamba use, although many of them are used mainly for music, and only marginally serve the purpose of encoding speech. Notable surrogate instruments are the double-membrane hourglass drum, known as *luɲa*, the single-membrane goblet-shaped talking drum (*timpani*), the one-stringed fiddle (*goonje*), the double bell (*dawule*), and the transverse wooden flute (*kikaa*). The *luɲa* is typically drummed in an ensemble to dancers. In isolation or even in a group, it is also used to encode speech. *Luɲa* (plural = *lunsi*) also refers specifically to the person who drums the hourglass drum. Similarly, *goonje* (plural = *goonjenima*) refers both to the fiddle and the fiddler. The person who plays the *timpani* is known as the Akarima (plural = Akarimanima). The instruments of interest here are the *goonje*, *timpani*, *dawule* and *kikaa*. These are used to encode speech in Hausa, Akan, Gourmantché and other non-native languages.

The fiddle and talking drum have been part of the culture of Dagbon since the 1700s (see DjeDje 2008 on the fiddle). Oral tradition also has it that the *timpani* was introduced into Dagbon during the reign of Naa Gariba. This was confirmed by two of the drummers interviewed for this study (see *Sources of Data*). Naa Gariba assumed the throne of Dagbon as Yaa Naa in 1740 (Staniland, 1975). The use of the *timpani* and *dawule* for encoding surrogate speech was borrowed from the Asantes of southern Ghana. The names *timpani*, *dawule* and *Akarima* are all loans from Akan *atumpan*, *dawuro* *ɔkyerema* respectively. The shape, size, and other physical features of the *timpani* and *dawule* are identical to the Akan *atumpan* and *dawuro*. The use of the *timpani* by the Dagbamba mimics its use by the Asantes, with hardly any adaptations. The language encoded by the drum is Akan, the native language of the Asantes (Akans); and messages encoded by the talking drum can also be encoded by the *dawule* or trumpet, as is the case among the Akan. However, the practice in Dagbon is that, the person who bears the title Akarima only plays the *timpani* and *dawule*. The trumpet is blown by a different person, and considered below the rank of the Akarima.

The *goonje*, (from Hausa *goge*) is used to encode speech in languages (typically Hausa) that the typical fiddler of today and his patrons do not understand. DjeDje (2008) has a detailed comparison between the Dagomba *goonje* and the Hausa *goge*. The ancestors of present-day fiddlers came into Dagbon from Gurmaland, in modern day Burkina Faso. Many believe they were

Hausa who first settled in Grumaland before coming into Dagbon; others believe they were of Gurma ethnicity (see extensive discussion on the different views in DjeDje 2008: 189–196).

All these instruments along with others that are native to the Dagbamba are primarily (palace) court instruments. They play significant roles in defining the life in the palace and the culture of the Dagbamba, including festivals, the installation of chiefs, the performance of funerals and virtually every activity that is characterized by Dagbon culture.

Sources of Data

Six Akarimanimba in Yendi, (the capital of the Dagbon Kingdom and seat of the Yaa Naa, the King of Dagbon), and near-by communities were interviewed separately. They include two septuagenarians, Wumbi Dawuni, who performs at the palace of the Yaa Naa, and Wumbi Kwame, who had retired from drumming. Another retired Akarimanimba was Abdulai Yakubu, in his sixties. Two others, Natogma Neindow (the Akarimanimba of the chief of Zohe, a suburb of Yendi), and Akarimanimba Awolu (the Akarimanimba of the Paramount chief of Mien) were in their fifties. The youngest was Zakaria Alhassan in his mid-twenties, who was the Akarimanimba of Kuga, a suburb of Yendi. None of them could speak or understand any dialect of Akan, and none appeared to know of any Akarimanimba anywhere in Dagbon who could speak Akan. Except for Zakaria, the rest had practiced drumming for periods ranging from 20 to 50 years.

Most of the data on fiddling came from DjeDje (2008), a product of decades of research on fiddling in Dagbon and other ethnic groups in West Africa. I also interacted with Alhassan Sulemana, a native of Yendi and an accomplished fiddler of exceptional talent and decades of experience in fiddling. He was also among the fiddlers DjeDje interviewed extensively for her research and quoted copiously in DjeDje (2008). These sources were complemented by my intuitions as a Dagbamba who was born and raised in Yendi. I only needed expert confirmation or perspectives on some of the issues I knew and experienced.

THE ROLE OF THE FIDDLE AND TALKING DRUM IN DAGBON

The Akarimanimba and Goonje are a part of everyday life at the palace. They notify, announce events, narrate history, and send appellations on selected days, at funerals, festivals, installation of chiefs, and in the company of the chief during his royal trips. The Akarimanimba visits the palace at dusk on Sunday, Thursday, and the eve of the day of a festival to remind the chief that the next day is Monday, Friday, or a festival respectively. He returns at dawn the following day – Monday, Friday, or the day of the festival – to notify the chief that it is daybreak. He then drums the chief's praise name and those of his ancestors, dating back several centuries. He is followed by the Goonjenimba who go into the inner court of the chief to wake him up with their performance. The Goonjenimba also fiddle the chief's praises and those of his relatives and ancestors. In the case of festivals, the Akarimanimba returns after sunrise to notify the sub-chiefs, elders and

courtiers that the day has begun and that they must be at the palace. He also welcomes visitors with eulogies.

Events that the Akarimanimba announces include the exit of the chief from the palace, the enskinment of a new chief and his identity, and the death of a chief and notable personalities and their identities. The Goonjenimba are the next to take over and perform these functions. The Akarimanimba also summons the sub-chiefs, courtiers, and notable personalities to the chief's palace, especially during emergencies such as war. In the performance of all these functions, he recounts the praise names of the individuals concerned and those of their ancestors. This is preceded or followed by drumming the relevant phrases or sentences. For instance, in announcing death, the Akarimanimba repeats the Akan phrase *Damirfa due* “rest in peace” and similar ones that signal that death has occurred. He then drums the praise names of the deceased or that of their father or the youngest ancestor if the deceased has no praise name, to provide an indication of the house or clan within which the death has occurred. When summoning people to the palace, the phrase *bra ntem* “come in haste” is used and preceded or followed by the praise name of each of the individuals being summoned.

The Goonje entertains the chief and ordinary people during events and cheers on the chief and warriors during wars. According to Alhaji Sulemana, historically, the fiddle was primarily a war instrument, as the very first invitation of fiddlers into Dagbon by the reigning Yaa Naa was primarily to help him fight off an attack on the Kingdom. It has been part of war contingents over the centuries. During wars, they invoke the sense of patriotism in the chief and warriors, remind them of the bravery and exploits of their forbears, and urge them on to emulate them. Alhaji Sulemana further adds that the melodies typically had the opposite effects of mesmerizing their enemies, who were not familiar with them. Akarimanimba Abdulai notes that the Akarimanimba also performs this role in times of war. With the rarity of wars in modern times, the primary duty of the fiddlers has shifted to one of entertainment for the chief and non-royals at every event that brings the Dagbamba together.

The eulogies that are drummed or fiddled are typically proverbs and wise sayings that reflect the philosophy of the people, teach valuable lessons in life, and sometimes challenge the listener to live up to certain standards (see also Salifu 2020). The Goonje melodies are useful “in socializing and controlling the behavior of individuals in the society” (DjeDje, 2008: 214). According to Mahama, one of the fiddlers interviewed by DjeDje and cited in DjeDje (2008), when the Goonje was first introduced into Dagbon, the chiefs had a greater interest in the educational value of the messages in the songs than the melody of the instruments. For all Dagbamba, Mahama says that Goonje is a source of therapy in times of misery, it promotes chieftaincy, adds value to the customs and traditions and improves on the lives of the people with educative messages. Bokor (2014) presents a similar argument on the value of drum language in Africa in general, arguing forcefully that beyond their use for entertainment and rituals, the drums are used for rhetorical purposes to influence social behavior, generate awareness, and call on people to act in specific ways for the good of the society.

When asked whether they sometimes drum in Dagbani, Akarima Wumbei Dawuni's immediate response was "no, there is no Dagbani in it". However, when asked whether they can drum a Dagbani praise name someone chooses for himself, he responded in the affirmative, as did all the other Akarimanima. They mentioned Dagbani and Hausa as languages they often drummed in. Wumbei Dawuni's statement that they do not drum in Dagbani reflects the tradition and norm. Praise names drummed by the Akarima are in Akan, those drummed by the *lunsi* are in Dagbani. Chiefs rarely select a Dagbani phrase or a phrase in any other language beside Akan as an Akarima praise name. The choice of a Dagbani praise name for Akarima will normally be made by a non-royal, or royals who are not chiefs. From my interaction with the Akarimanima, it became apparent that drumming in any other language besides Akan is a recent innovation limited to cases where the demand is made by the one being eulogised.

Similarly, the message of the Goonje is typically in a foreign language, predominantly Hausa, and Gourmantché, although very few fiddlers of today speak any of these languages. Quoting Alhassan Sulemana, DjeDje notes that all but two praise songs honoring Dagbon Kings between 1786 and 1968 (a total of 15 out of 17) are in Hausa. As is the case of the Akarima, modern innovation has seen the incorporation of other languages, including Dagbani, Arabic and English, into the texts (see DjeDje, 2008). In some cases, words of these languages may be code-switched into the text; in others the entire song may be in any of these languages. DjeDje noted that an analysis of about 100 Goonje songs she collected between 1972 and 1974 revealed that more than half were either entirely in Hausa or mixed with Hausa.

THE COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF DAGBAMBA FIDDLED AND DRUMMED SPEECH

How do the Dagbamba, who do not understand Hausa or Akan, process Goonje and Akarima speech in these languages? This section discusses this question.

The Acquisition of Fiddled and Drummed Speech

Almost everyone in Dagbon who understands the praises of the Goonje and the Akarima learns it through explicit instruction. For the average Dagbamba, the task is perceiving the tune, knowing its meaning and the personality being praised, and being able to repeat it. For many, knowing the meaning and repeating it are of lesser importance. For Goonje praise songs, because they also double as music for entertainment, some patrons are more focused on enjoying the music and singing it than processing it for meaning. The performers' task is to learn the praise, its meaning, the person praised, as well as the art of producing it instrumentally. Learning to drum or fiddle is the least of their rather daunting tasks, which include the rote memorization of proverbs in a foreign language along with the history and genealogy of hundreds of people over several centuries. The

Goonje has an added task of verbal production, as they are required to sing what they fiddle. For these reasons, training an Akarima or Goonje typically starts at a very young age. Five of the six Akarimanima interviewed and some of the fiddlers interviewed by DjeDje indicated that they started learning before the age of 10. The training begins with explicit instruction at home on the praises of the chiefs and other nobility of Dagbon using makeshift drums and mini-sized fiddles. The young ones also accompany their fathers and observe them play their instruments. While by their sides, they are taught the meaning of the praise names that are played, and the people being praised. In addition to practising at home, they also practise on the job and their mistakes are corrected by their elder relatives.

The ultimate sources of the praise names differ for people of different categories. According to Wumbei Kwame, historically, the chiefs got their praise names from their Asante friends. In contemporary times, the chief could ask his Akarima to get him a praise name by giving him an idea of the meaning he wants or leaving it open for the Akarima to decide. The Akarima would then suggest a name after consulting people who understand Akan, for the approval of the chief. Sometimes, the Akarima of a new chief can take this step without a prompting from the chief. Five of the Akarimanima interviewed were unanimous that getting a praise name is the responsibility of the chief, who also decides whether to involve his Akarima. The same rule applies to princes and the noble men and women of Dagbon, who wish to have a name they can be praised with. Until a chief or any other personality gets a praise name for themselves, they are praised with the praise name of their father or youngest ancestor. According to Akarima Awolu, some chiefs who admire their father's praise name may choose to adopt it rather than get one for themselves.

The Production of Fiddled and Drummed Speech

During the interviews, the Akarimanima were requested to orally produce and translate praise names of some chiefs. Their articulation of some of the words was poor, not unexpected of people who do not speak Akan. Although they also knew the meanings of the praises, some of their responses were rough interpretations of these praises, not actual translations. This is not surprising because, as Akarima Awolu put it, "our understanding of the meaning is restricted to what we were told by our fathers and grandfathers". For many of the praise names of the chiefs that came centuries ago, narration of the same meaning to generations of Akarimanima over the centuries evidently led to distortion in meaning.

The most significant observation was the difficulties some of them had with the oral production of the praise names when asked to do so. Retired Wumbei Kwame gave up, saying he needed to first drum them before he could remember how to articulate them orally. He had no difficulty drumming any praise name, but he encountered difficulties verbalizing them. In their profession, their hands are more articulate than their tongues. Akarima Awolu, Abdulai and Zakaria were explicit in saying that

in the performance of their work, “it is our hands that hear and speak, not our ears or tongues”.

The Akarima are aware of the similarity between their work and the work of the Goonje. Akarima Abdulai stated, without any prompting, that “we are like the Goonje. It is our hands that hear, not our ears”. The reference to the hands as the perceiver and producer of speech is obviously limited to the drumming of praise names, some of which they do not understand. In summoning people to the palace, announcing events etc., they obviously understand what they drum. In this regard, Awolu was emphatic that “the message of the Akarima comes from the heart but articulated with the hand”.

All six drummers indicated that they could play any praise name they perceived from another Akarima, including those of foreign chiefs. They also admitted that they would not be able to orally say every praise name they drummed. All of them also indicated that they could perceive errors in drummed praise names and correct them with the drum, but they could not always perceive such errors when the praise names are uttered orally. Retired Wumbei Kwame likened his ability to correct errors in other people’s drumming to the ability of a Muslim reader of the Qur’an to correct mistakes in someone else’s recitation, even though the person correcting would not understand the meaning of what he reads. This comparison is of relevance because of the dominance of Islam in Dagbon, where the overwhelming majority practise it, and the religion was integrated into the culture since its introduction into the Kingdom by Yaa Naa Zangina in the 17th Century (Staniland 1975). While all Dagbamba Muslims read the Qur’an, only an insignificant minority who learn the Arabic language understand it. For the rest, Arabic is a liturgical language for fulfilling their spiritual needs.

Dawuni and Awolu recalled being praised by Asantes when they performed together, and the amazement of the Asantes when they got to know that their Dagbamba colleagues could play the instruments with perfection but needed a translator to communicate with them in Akan. Nevertheless, all six Akarimanima agreed that knowledge of Akan enhances the work of the Akarima. Dawuni and Wumbei referenced late Akarimanima who excelled by virtue of their knowledge of Akan.

Unlike the Akarima, the Goonje cannot concentrate solely on the instrumental production, as singing the praise name is part of his tasks. In his interview with DjeDje, Sulemana notes that both the text and melody are of interest to the Goonje and their patrons. However, the accuracy of pronunciation depends on the Goonje’s level of competence in Hausa or how meticulous he was in learning the text. The Goonje who neither understands Hausa nor takes his time to learn the text ends up mispronouncing the text during singing. The result is that, the melody is performed accurately while the meaning is lost in the song.

The Processing of Fiddled and Drummed Speech by Patrons

The patrons of drummed and fiddled speech are the chiefs, people of royal lineage and the commoners. Unlike the preceding discussion on the producers, the difficulty with comprehension

of surrogate speech by the patrons is not unique to the Dagbamba. Mukuna (1987) notes that among the Luba in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo), proverbs transmitted instrumentally are only understood by trained receivers; but the same proverbs are easily understood by all speakers when spoken. Herzog (1934) is reported by Kaminski (2008) to have noted the poor intelligibility of speech produced by the horn among the Jabo of Liberia. He described it as essentially as technical jargon that is difficult for the average speaker’s comprehension. In his study of the drummed speech by the Ewondo people of Cameroon, Neeley (1996) estimates that only five to ten percent of the 400 residents understand most of the message of the drum, except the commonly drummed phrases, which were understood by a greater percentage. The fact that the transmitted messages of the Akarima and Goonje are in foreign languages not comprehensible to the receivers implies a much poorer level of comprehension. DjeDje describes it as an irony that the importance of the message of the Goonje is not fully appreciated because most Dagbamba do not understand the literal meaning of the lyrics.

Dagbamba chiefs, court officials, people of royal lineage and people with great interest in Dagbon culture fairly understand announcements, summons and the praise names of the kings and notable chiefs who have ruled Dagbon over the centuries. Beyond these, the average Dagbamba would have to inquire the meaning of the praise name from the Akarima. From my experience, which was confirmed by the Akarimanima interviewed, it is common for an Akarima to drum the praises of someone of royal lineage and not get any response from them because they do not understand the meaning and do not even know that it is their father or grandfather who is being praised. For this reason, the Akarima also doubles as a teacher of praise names of notable people in Dagbon, as they would call such a person and teach them the praise name and the ancestor who bears it.

The Dagbamba compensate for the lack of understanding of the literal meaning of the message of Goonje by dwelling on the beauty of the lyrics, which could move them to dance. For those with interest in the message but lack enough competence in the foreign language, an alternative, noted by DjeDje, is to link the songs with a symbol or proverb that identifies the individual. DjeDje illustrates this with two praise songs called *Nantoh* (a small poisonous reptile) and *bawuna* (bush cow). They are titles of praise songs for Yaa Naa Yakuba I and Yaa Naa Abdulai I, respectively, and have come to symbolize these Kings in Goonje songs. Their mention in a Goonje song is enough to inform the listener that these Kings are being praised and suffices for the detailed semantic content they miss.

Why Surrogate Languages in a Foreign Tongue?

The low level of semantic and other grammatical content detailed here on the Goonje songs and Akarima speech raises a question on what the motivations of the Dagbamba are for sticking to these surrogates amid several alternatives, including those provided by the Lunsi, and the over a dozen other surrogates. Why are the transmitters not trained to gain enough competence in the

respective foreign languages of transmission? What accounts for the people's adherence to the tradition for three centuries? These questions apply more to the Akarima because, in addition to the foreign language content, the Akarima, unlike the Goonje, provides no entertainment to compensate for the lack of comprehension.

The answers to these questions lie in the role of history in the Dagbamba's understanding of culture and the central role of chieftaincy in the definition of history. For the Dagbamba, history is royalty. Virtually every aspect of their history revolves around royalty. The important events in Dagbon history cannot be told without the role of the chiefs, especially the Yaa Naa, either in facilitating or combatting them. This ranges from events that define the territorial boundaries and cultural practices of Dagbon such as wars, conquests, festivals, religion, and spirituality, to forces of nature like drought and famine. Thus, Dagbon culture is what the chiefs experienced, the actions they took, what they rejected, and what they endorsed over the centuries. Behind every cultural activity that defines the tradition of Dagbon, which is typically linked to a clan, there is a Yaa Naa who played a role in its integration into the everyday life of the Dagbamba. In addition to the warrior clan (*Sapashininima*) (of whom the Akarimanimas are part) and the Goonje Clan, we have clans for butchers (*Nakohinima*), blacksmiths (*Machelnima*), drummers (*Lunsi*)¹, barbers (*Wanzama*), the fetish priests (*Tindaannima*), the Islamic priests (*Afanima*) and others. These clans all got incorporated into Dagbon at different periods in its history. Some of these clans, like the Goonje and Akarima are of foreign origin. Unlike the Goonje and Akarima, the use of their heritage languages does not characterize the performance of their distinctive clan activity.

To the Dagbamba, all these clans, by their distinctive activities, are of equal significance in defining the culture and everyday life of the citizens of the Kingdom. Although the Lunsi play their instruments in Dagbani, their performances are not viewed to be of greater significance or benefit than those of the Akarima and the Goonje. As cultural activities that were licensed by a Yaa Naa centuries ago, they are part of what defines royalty, nobility, and statesmanship in Dagbon. The foreign language component contributes to their uniqueness and significance. Any royal, statesman or person of noble descent is required to accept and respect them, regardless of how much of the produced surrogate speech they understand. The maintenance of the languages of performance is part of the intense desire to preserve the cultural heritage of Dagbon.

GRAMMAR IN GOONJE AND AKARIMA PERFORMANCE

In mainstream linguistic theory, the grammar of a language includes the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics as core components. Language processing takes

¹The *Lunsi* Clan is different from the clan of the Akarimanimas, who are part of the warrior Clan, though both the Lunsi and the Akarimanimas are drummers.

place at all these levels as well as the interactions between them and at the level of discourse and pragmatics. Cultural and sociolinguistic factors also affect the processing of meaning and interpretation of linguistic units. When viewed under the lenses of these components of grammar and factors influencing language processing, the surrogate speech of the Goonje and Akarima is clearly defective. The only component that is present for all users is the phonetics. The best response supporting this conclusion comes from Akarima Zakaria, who said "...for some of the praises of the ancient kings, we only learn them from our fathers by how they sound, we do not know what they mean, neither can we articulate them".

Knowledge of the phonology and semantics might develop from frequent processing of these praises by speakers who know a lot of them. However, this can only be confirmed after a detailed study. For most users whose understanding of the praises is limited to the few that are of interest to them, the semantics is minimally restricted to the few they understand. The other core components of the grammar – morphology, syntax – can only be present for those who understand the foreign language and are able to use that understanding to parse these praises. Beyond these core components of grammar, what appears to be present is a bit of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. The processing of these praise songs is primarily for the significance it holds within their culture and tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Meaning is important in the use of surrogate speech in Dagbon. However, meaning and other core components of the grammar do not entirely define surrogate language use. The encoding of meaning and other aspects of the grammar is secondary to the preservation of cultural heritage, the definition of nobility and statesmanship and, to a lesser extent, entertainment. This conclusion partly applies to the use of surrogate instruments to encode speech in native languages. The main difference between Dagbani and these languages is the level of comprehension on the part of the producers. For the average user of these languages with little or no interest in the deeper cultural significance of these instruments, there is little difference between the Dagbamba and the Akan, Hausa etc. This challenges the potency of psycholinguistic theories of language acquisition and processing, especially those relating to second language, to the analysis of surrogate speech in a foreign language. Considering the substantial role of surrogate speech in the lives of the peoples of Africa, the application of models of second language acquisition and processing to surrogate language processing promises to enrich our understanding of language processing in general.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the author, without undue reservation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of Ghana Ethics Committee for the Humanities. The patients/participants provided their oral informed consent to participate in this study. Oral informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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