

NOTES

NOTES ON TAG ANSWERS IN DAGBANI

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In Dagbani,¹ Yes/No questions may be simply answered with **iin** [iɪ] indicating agreement, or **aayi** indicating disagreement. However, in normal polite conversation these items are followed by a tag answer echoing the question, but paring the information down to its barest minimum, even to deletion of inanimate pronouns in non-subject function.

In Yes/No questions, the interrogative marker consists both of an extreme lowering of the last tonal terrace, whether high or low and of a lengthening of the last segmental phoneme. This is adequately indicated by use of a question mark, as in the official orthography. Though **iin** and **aayi** respectively indicate agreement and non-agreement, they are usually rendered in English as 'yes' and 'no', respectively, so that they seem at cross purposes with English usage in answering negative questions. It is not unusual to hear an answer such as 'Yes, he didn't come' when English is spoken.

In a one-verb answer in the non-future tense, an affirmative verb will frequently have the suffix **-ya** which may be glossed as 'non-future absolute (NFABS)'. This **-ya** is used only in the absence of any complement or emphatic particle, or of a clause initial conjunction other than the quotation marking **ni**. It can be followed by a time reference such as **zugo** 'today'.

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| (1) | a da chi maa
you bought corn DET
Have you bought the corn? Yes, I have. | iin n da-ya
yes I bought-NFABS |
| (2) | a nya loori maa / a nya li
you saw car DET / you saw it
Have you seen the car / it? Yes, I have. | iin n nya-ya
yes I saw-NFABS |
| (3) | a nya doo maa / a nya o
you saw man DET / you saw him
Have you seen the man / him? Yes, I have. | iin n nya o
yes I saw him |
| (4) | o chaŋ Tamali / o chaŋ ni
he went place^name / he went there
Has he gone to Tamale / there? Yes, he has. | iin o chaŋ-ya
yes he went-NFABS |

In (3) the object is animate, and the answer shows an object pronoun. In (1) and (2) the object is inanimate, and in (4) there is a locative complement; in each case the pronoun is deleted from the tag answer. The verbs, being in the non-future, then take the suffix **-ya**, as explained earlier.

When the question involves a sequence of verbs, either or both may be retained, depending on the semantic relationship of the verbs, and on the main thrust of the question.

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|-----|--|---|
| (5) | a ni tooi chaŋ
you FUT be^able go
Can you go? Yes, I can. | iin n ni tooi
yes I FUT be^able |
| (6) | a ni zaŋ li chaŋ
you FUT take it go
Will you take it with you? Yes, I will. | iin n ni zaŋ chaŋ
yes I FUT take go |

¹ Gur group, Northern Ghana, 300,000 speakers

