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## A grammar of Tafi

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a descriptive grammar of Tafi, a hitherto undescribed Ghana-Togo-Mountain (hereafter GTM) language. It is an outcome of a programme of Tafi language and culture documentation. The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in Tafi during two field trips over a period of fifteen months. This chapter presents an introduction to the Tafi people, their language, geographical location and sociolinguistic situation, the genetic classification of the language and the linguistic typological profile of the language. It also describes the fieldwork setting and methodology and the kinds of data upon which the grammar is based.

### 1.1 The language and its speakers

Tafi is the name used by other people to refer to the place, language and the people. This name which the Tafis claim was given to them by the neighbouring Ewe groups means ‘thieves of (human) heads’. They refer to themselves as **Baagbo** (sg. **Agbo**) and their language as **Tigbo**. The people live in four communities, namely, Agome, Abui<sup>1</sup>, Madɔ and Atome located in the Hohoe District of the Volta Region in the south-eastern part of Ghana. The names of these communities are sometimes used in combination with the area name Tafi, hence the names Tafi Agome, Tafi Abui, Tafi Madɔ and Tafi Atome in Map 2. The 2010 Population and Housing Census figures give the population of Tafi as 16,700 distributed as follows: Madɔ: 3,500; Atome: 6,000; Abui<sup>1</sup>: 4,200; and Agome: 3,000 (see Map 2 for their geographical location). It must, however, be noted that these figures represent the number of residents during the census period. It does not represent only the speakers of Tafi. Ethnologue (2009) gives 4,400 as the number of speakers of Tafi based on 2003 estimates. This figure possibly excludes Tafi speakers in the diaspora.

#### 1.1.1 Migration history

According to oral tradition, the Tafi people migrated from Assini which some claim is in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. Apparently, they were living together with other ethnic groups but as a result of conflicts, they lost two units of their ethnic group who left earlier, one after the other. The remaining group also migrated from Assini crossing the Kwawu mountains in present day Eastern Region of Ghana. After they left Assini, they regarded that place as a place of bitter memories and a forbidden place so anytime people disagree with what

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<sup>1</sup> **Abui<sup>1</sup>** is the Ewe appellation for this community. The **Tigbo** name is Ofi. **Abui<sup>1</sup>** means Abui’s home, **afé** ‘home’ has been borrowed from Ewe and attached to the name Abui. It appears that the first person who settled in that village is called Abui.

someone is saying or if they want to express disbelief at what the person is saying it is said that '**asírí y'áásí**'<sup>2</sup> it means that 's/he is telling lies'. Then they came to a place called Asrabi Gabi. Funke (1909) and Heine (1968) cited in Dakubu (2009) mention "Srabi Gabi"<sup>3</sup>. Again due to conflicts, from Asrabi Gabi they moved on and they met the Volta River. The Tafis refer to the Volta River as **Kilɛ** meaning 'air/wind' because their leader and king would not let his subjects live near the river since they do not know how to swim. As such, he did not want them to get drowned and get lost in thin air. He, therefore, led them to cross the river by rafts. After that, they continued their journey until they got to the Dayĩ River. Here unfortunately, there were no materials readily available for building rafts. The people became distressed. However the next morning, they saw a large and a long log across the river which they used to cross it. According to one account, before the last person could cross the river, there was a loud shout of distress and they realised that what they thought was a log was indeed a very big **kítsɔpĩ** 'python' and it had swallowed the last person. Another account also has it that all the people crossed the river successfully. It was later revealed that the python was a messenger of the god(dess) **Abõ Dayĩ** which helped them to cross the Dayĩ river. The crossing of the river is now commemorated in the festival called **Dayĩ tsótsókĩ** 'crossing of the Dayĩ River'. All this while, the Tafis were led by Tɔgbe Afari. In the course of their migration, the people of Tafi came across some stones (ore) which they smelted and used in making farm implements and weapons. They claim some of their people remained in present day Santrokofi and they form the Bátisyoná clan. It is reported that a language known as Setafi, whose speakers seem to have been integrated into the Santrokofi people following the destruction of their town has totally vanished (see Dakubu 2009). It is possible that the language of the Bátisyoná is what has been claimed to be Setafi even though the autonym of the language has never been Tafi. The **se-** prefix is the reflex of the language prefix in some GTM languages such as Sɛlɛɛ, the language of the Santrokofi people or Sɛkpele, the language of the Likpe people. So, it is possible that the language those Tafi people who remained in present day Santrokofi spoke was referred to as Setafi in the area.

The Tafis claim that they finally settled at Anatu. The name Anatu, according to them, is derived from the statement **ítíbaná 'útú ní 'úwū (ítíbaná butú ní buwū)** 'I can no more climb the mountain.' This statement was made by Tɔgbe Afari, their leader who was then old and weak. So he decided to live at the foot of the mountain. It was from here that the people started spreading out and Madɔ, Atome,

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear how **assini** became [**asírí**]. I was informed that the people of Nyagbo still use [**asini**] whereas the Avatimes use [**asíá**].

<sup>3</sup> Some hints that this place is west of the Volta are offered by Dakubu (2009) who reports that Gabi is another name for Nkami, a Guang language closely related to Nkonya, spoken west of the Volta and a related name Asabi is said to be the name for the old Kwawu capital.

and Abuiŋe were established in that order. Those who remained in Anatu are the people of Agɔme today. After some time, the people of Agɔme moved from Anatu and got settled at their present location, Bediaxwé, where the present Agɔme is. The Tafi people were then many and they were in nine divisions. However, due to fighting of wars, five divisions perished leaving only four.

As part of the oral history, the Tafis claim that they were living at their present location before the Avatimes and Ewes arrived. The Tafis stated that they fought the Ewes because they did not want them to take their land from them. So at night, their warriors who were also hunters will go and clandestinely kill the Ewes by beheading them and since the Ewes did not know those who had been committing those heinous acts they asked “**mewoe ke le tã fi tsõ le amewó nu lɛ?**” ‘who were the people secretly beheading people and taking the heads away?’ Thus, anytime people were beheaded and their heads taken away the Ewes said “The ‘**tãfilawo**’ ‘head thieves’ have struck again’. It was later when the Ewes sent their people to scout around that they identified the Tafis as the people who had been committing the crime. This is how the Ewes gave them the ethnonym Tafi. According to the Tafis, some Ewe groups like the Vakpos decided to make peace with them. Later on, the Tafi spies discovered another group of people who were climbing the hills and spreading over the valleys. With time they got to know that these people are speaking a form of their language. They started referring to them as ‘bééhū’ meaning ‘they are speaking [a similar language]’. These are the people referred to as the Avatimes by the Ewes. The Bééhū, the Tafis are speculating, could be one of the groups that left them earlier on before the migration of the whole ethnic group to their present location. After the arrival of the Bééhū, the Batrugbu (Nyagbos) also came to join the Baazē (the people of Emlī) who were already at their present location.

According to the people of Tafi, the Baagbo and Baazē had been living in their present settlement long before the arrival of the Ewes from Notsie. It is important to note that when a chief is being installed in Emlī, it is the Agɔme chief that administers the oath of office. Some cultural practices observed by both the Baagbo and Baazē, such as marriage and funeral rites, are the same. The Tafis observe Monday as a sacred day or Sabbath day because it is believed that it was on a Monday that the mysterious crossing of the Dayĩ River took place. In Tafi, it is a taboo for a person to die on Monday. If it happens so, “it is believed the person may have wronged the gods of the land. There should be some form of purification with a ram before the soil is dug on Monday for burial.”

### 1.1.2 Geographical location

Tafi is situated within the Hohoe district in the Volta Region of South-eastern Ghana. South of the Tafi area live the Nyagbo people. To the east of Tafi are the Avatime and Logba people (refer to Map 2). As stated earlier, the people of Tafi

live in four (4) communities, namely, Agome, Madɔ, Abuiɛ and Atome. Agome and Madɔ are along the Accra-Hohoe trunk road while Abuiɛ and Atome are in the interior, several kilometres from the main road.

The people of Tafi are peasant farmers and the crops they cultivate include maize, yams, groundnuts, and vegetables. Cotton used to be one of the crops cultivated. In those days, the cotton was spinned and woven into cloths and used to make clothings such as hunter's attire, shorts and towels. There are two farms in Abuiɛ where pineapple and mango are grown for commercial purposes and which provide employment opportunities for the youth in Tafi and surrounding towns. Also Abuiɛ is a kente<sup>4</sup>-weaving community where kente is woven in commercial quantities.

Atome has a monkey sanctuary with Mona monkeys in a tropical forest surrounding the community (refer to picture on cover page). According to oral tradition, the Tafi people did not migrate together with the monkeys and neither were they living together with the monkeys before migrating to that place. The claim is that during the migration, the Kágbóém̄ clan carried along a fetish of their forefathers. When they got settled in Atome, at a point in time, for a period, the fetish possessed someone and made the people look for a cool place in the bush for it. They found a swampy place and within a short period, all of a sudden, monkeys came to occupy the trees in the swampy place. Nobody knew the place where they came from. Another account claims that even though they did not migrate with the monkeys they were living with them at Assini and that when they arrived at their present location then the monkeys appeared. The Tafi people believe that the monkeys are messengers of the gods. When the monkeys came into contact with people they did not run away. This was surprising. So the chief who was ruling at that time made a law that since the animals do not run away whenever they see human beings, anytime the monkeys enter anybody's dwelling place or they are on trees nobody should shoot them. The chief also gave orders that during the dry season or the harmattan season before fire will be set to bushes, fire belts should be made around that swampy area such that (after a long time,) it became a very thick forest around the town. The monkey sanctuary has become a tourist attraction site where tourists from all over the world come to visit. In the evenings, there is entertainment which includes drumming, dancing or story telling around a bonfire. Revenue from tourism has brought electricity to the village, as well as improvements to the school and a community clinic.

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<sup>4</sup> Kente is a locally woven cloth mostly used on ceremonial occasions. It is made from thin strips woven on narrow looms. The strips are interlaced to form a fabric. The fabric is used to create different kinds of garments.

### 1.1.3 Some religious and cultural practices

Christianity is practised in Tafi and churches that are in Tafi include Evangelical Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Global Evangelical and Pentecost. There are traditional religion practitioners also. The Tafi people have two fetishes which they worship. One is Ogolokwe which is their god of war. It protects and guides them during wars. It is based in Atome and it is the god that controls the monkeys. The other one is Abodayĩ which is the god(dess) of the river Dayĩ. It was this god(dess), they believe, that helped them to cross river Dayĩ. As a result, the **dayĩ tsótsóki** ‘crossing of the Dayĩ River’ festival was instituted to commemorate the crossing of the river. This festival used to be celebrated yearly, however, now it is celebrated once in so many years. The most recent was in February 2012. During the celebration of the festival, a goat is sacrificed to Abõ Dayĩ. There are also certain cultural practices and beliefs in which the people participate. Some of the cultural practices and customary rites include birth, death, marriage, and puberty rites. Libation is poured during most of these ceremonies.

Puberty rites consist of a number of events. The rites are referred to as either **ehuí kpíkpi** or **kipotí kókó** meaning ‘putting on beads’ or ‘giving of cloth’ respectively. This ceremony is performed to initiate young girls into womanhood. The ritual is usually performed for the girls by elderly women in the community, specifically, the girls’ paternal aunts. During the ceremony, the girls are taught the culture and tradition of their people and the art of playing the expected roles of both wife and mother when they get married. It is expected that all girls participating in the puberty rites are virgins. The ceremony begins on Saturday and ends on Monday.<sup>5</sup> On Saturday evening, the ritual begins with a prayer. Formerly, libation is poured but these days, prayers are said by an elderly woman from the clan. Then **kídó tsítsá** ‘tying of beads’ (lit.: tying thing’) begins in the house of the girl’s paternal uncle. All the beads are tied around various parts of her body including her neck, wrist, and ankles by her paternal aunt. In the evening, after being bedecked with beads, the girl is outdoored and her friends and family will accompany her to go from house to house to invite friends and relatives to accompany her to church on Sunday for thanksgiving. The ritual has thus become syncretised with aspects of traditional lore and Christian practice. After the church service, there is drumming and dancing during which time food and drinks are served to members of the community at large. The ceremony itself is performed on Monday. The climax of the ceremony is on Monday when very early in the morning, a specific cloth, **kíwaló (k)ipotí** ‘Monday cloth’, is wrapped around the girl’s waist by her paternal aunt among other things done on this day. It is only then that the girls can be said to have passed out. She is again accompanied by friends and family to go round the community till the afternoon when the ceremony comes to an end.

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<sup>5</sup> According to another account, the ceremony starts on Friday evening.

## 1.2 Language

Tafi has, hitherto, been one of the least described Ghana-Togo-Mountain (GTM) languages (Ring 1995) spoken in Ghana. The GTM languages are spoken in Ghana, Togo and Benin. Earlier works on these languages referred to them, in German, as “Togorestsprachen” (Struck 1912) or, in English, as “Togo Remnant Languages”. They have also been referred to as “Central-Togo languages” (Kropp Dakubu & Ford 1988).

### 1.2.1 Genetic classification

The genetic affiliation of these languages within Niger-Congo has been much contested. Westermann and Bryan (1952:96) considered them as constituting an isolate group and observed that they have some similarity to the Kwa languages in terms of vocabulary while their noun class system is reminiscent of Bantu languages. Greenberg (1966) puts them in Kwa. Heine (1968a) surveyed the languages, reconstructed a Proto-GTM and sub-classified the group into two: NA and KA based on the root for ‘meat’. These two groups, now called NA-Togo and KA-Togo, are presumed to branch out from Proto-Kwa (Williamson and Blench 2000; Blench 2009). Tafi belongs to the KA-Togo group. Other members of the group are Animere, Kebu, Tuwuli, Igo, Ikposo, Nyagbo (Tutrugbu), and Avatime (Siya). The closely related Nyagbo has together with Tafi, sometimes, been thought of as constituting one group and they show a certain degree of mutual intelligibility. Unlike the other geographically contiguous southern GTM languages – Avatime, Nyagbo and Tafi - Logba stands out as belonging to the NA-Togo group, it is thus genetically not so closely related to them.

### 1.2.2 Previous studies on the language

Prior to this work, Tafi has been one of the least studied languages, not only among the GTM languages but also in Ghana (Ring 2000). The only available studies exclusively on the language are Funke (1910) which is a short grammatical sketch in German and Casali (2005) which is a concise description of Tafi phonology based on elicitation from one speaker of the 1700 word SIL Comparative African Wordlist (Snider and Roberts 2004). Tafi also receives some attention in Heine (1968a), Ford (1973a) and Dakubu & Ford (1988) where it is treated as a sister dialect to Nyagbo. One of the consequences is that Tafi has been presumed to have a seven vowel system like Nyagbo. The current study reveals that Tafi has a nine vowel system. Ford (1973b) also collected some comparative wordlists, e.g. of verbs which he made available to us. Currently, Nyagbo (Tutrugbu) is being documented by Essegbey and some of the works done on it have been referred to in this book, e.g. Essegbey 2009, 2010a, b, Essegbey et al. 2011, 2012.



### 1.2.3 Sociolinguistic situation

The Tafi language is endangered and not documented up till now. Speakers are highly multilingual and every Tafi speaker is bilingual in at least Tafi and Ewe (the dominant regional language). Ewe is the language of communication with their immediate neighbours and in commercial transactions in the market. Some speakers also have Akan and English in their repertoire. Tafi is also threatened by the official language policy in the sense that it is not recognised for official use in the classroom. Tafi is also not used in mass media, e.g. radio or television. UNESCO red book rates it as vulnerable. There are five primary schools, one of which is private, and four Junior High Schools in Tafi and there are also kindergartens in all the Tafi communities. English is the official language and Ewe is taught as a school subject and is the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary school and in the kindergartens. In addition, though Tafi is spoken at home, most children speak Ewe in school and this is because they have to interact with other children who are not Tafi speakers. Having come in contact with these languages has had an effect on the language itself and linguistic practices. Speakers tend to code-mix a lot such that Tafi has a lot of borrowings from Ewe, Akan, English and Ga (see § 2.6 and also Heine (1968b) and Bobuafor (2007)). Moreover, the chief of Tafi, Tɔgbe Afari who led his subjects to their present settlement was a noble leader and he won several appellations to his honour. These appellations are in Akan and they stemmed from his bravery and courage which made him lead them to fight many wars. Some of the appellations include Afari “**Okukurubo**” where he was being likened to a beetle which could lift a stone and yet fly with it easily. Another appellation is “**adikese firi suro bebɔɔ akɔkyideɛ akɔkyi ɛyɛ ɔkɔtɔ anka apae**” meaning ‘a heavy object fell from above and hit the back of a tortoise, if it were a crab it would have got broken into pieces’. Furthermore, some dirges used at funerals are in Akan or Ewe.

Speakers of Tafi also speak and understand Nyagbo since both languages are mutually intelligible. Also some speakers understand and communicate in Avatime as a result of slight similarities between Tafi and Avatime; schooling in the Avatime area where schools were located in the early days; and inter-marriages. Nyagbo, Tafi and Avatime have sometimes been considered a language cluster (Dakubu 2009). Even though Logba is a geographical neighbour and a commercial centre, speakers of Tafi do not speak the Logba language. Knowledge of other GTM languages is virtually non-existent.

With the establishment of the monkey sanctuary in Atome, there is a possibility of many people becoming more competent in English because of the tourists visiting the monkey sanctuary. However, the establishment of the monkey sanctuary has also led to the revival of cultural practices such as story telling by the fireside in the evenings.

Dialect differentiation in Tafi seems to be minimal. One difference I have noticed so far is in the use of the postposition **kumi** ‘in(side)’. In Agome and Abuifé, the **ku-**prefix is totally elided while in Mado and Atome, it is only the initial consonant **k** that is elided. In this study, where the example text is taken from a recording from Agome or Abuifé, and the difference is obvious it is pointed out. Also comparing my data with that of a Swadesh GTM Wordlist, collected by Casali (n.d.) in Ring et. al. (n.d.), based on the speech of one speaker from Agome, one notices a correspondence between **u/u** and **i/i** vowels which may be attributed to dialect differences. Thus in my data gathered mainly from Mado the words for ‘child’, ‘sea’ and ‘rain’ are **anuvɔ**, **afu** and **subha** respectively whereas they are **anuvɔ**, **axwi** and **sibva**<sup>6</sup> in Casali’s data. More systematic investigation is needed to verify the extent of the variation.

### 1.3 Brief outline of the language

Tafi has five syllable types. These are V/N which is a vowel or nasal; VC, made up of a vowel and a consonant; CV, made up of a consonant and a vowel; CVV which consists of a consonant and a long vowel; CCV which is made up of two consonants and a vowel, the second consonant may be a liquid or a glide. Tafi has consonant phonemes made at these places of articulation: bilabial, labio-dental, alveolar, post-alveolar, palatal, velar and glottal. The consonants include **/bh/** and **/f/**. **/bh/** is an aspirated voiced labial stop. It has no voiceless counterpart in the language and occurs in some words including **kábhā** ‘top’ and **bhulí** ‘small’. **/f/** is a voiceless labial fricative which has no voiced counterpart in the language. It appears that this sound was introduced into the language as a result of borrowing from Ewe. It only occurs in two words which are **afu** ‘sea’ and **Abuifé** ‘the name of one of the Tafi communities’. Tafi has double articulated labial velar stops **/kp/** and **/gb/** as well as alveolar and palatal affricates **/ts/**, **/dz/** and **/tʃ/**, **/dʒ/**<sup>7</sup> respectively. Tafi has a nine vowel system. All these vowels except **/o/** have nasalised counterparts. The vowels participate in ATR vowel harmony. Thus, they are divided into two sets, [+ATR] - **/i, e, o, u/** and [-ATR] - **/ɪ, ɛ, ɔ, ʊ/** as shown in Table 2.2 below. The **/a/** vowel occurs with vowels from both sets. ATR vowel harmony in Tafi is stem-controlled, in the sense that the vowel of prefixes harmonises with the vowel of the first syllable of the stem. Thus, depending on the [ATR] value of the initial vowel in the root, the prefix may have varied forms. In connected speech, Tafi displays both level and contour tones. It has three level tonemes: High, Mid and Low. In addition to the three levels, there are two gliding tones: Falling and Rising which are phonetically realised on the peak of one

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<sup>6</sup> The sound I represent as **[bh]** is represented as **[bv]** by Casali.

<sup>7</sup> The orthographic representation of the IPA symbols **/tʃ/** and **/dʒ/** are ‘tsy’ and ‘dzy’ respectively.

syllable.<sup>8</sup> There are three falling tones: High-Mid, High-Low and Mid-Low and two rising tones: Low-Mid and Low-High. The contour tones can be lexical or they can be generated in context. Tones are used for lexical contrast and to express grammatical functions. The notational conventions used for marking tones in this book are as follows: a High tone is marked (´); a Low tone is unmarked or marked (˘) on nasals; a Mid tone is marked (ˉ); the rising tones are marked (ˊ) and (ˋ) representing Low-High and Low-Mid respectively and the falling tones are marked (ˆ), (ˆ), (ˆ) representing High-Mid, High-Low and Mid-Low tones respectively.

Tafi is an active noun class language and nouns are classified into ten classes comprising five singular classes, one non-count class and four plural classes. Tafi is a language whose basic constituent order is SV/AVO/AVDO. Subjects (S/A) are cross-referenced on the verb with markers that agree with the class of the subject NP except for the two **bu-** classes. The classes with prefixes containing the vowel /i/, namely **i-**, **ki-** and **ti-** classes, are either cross-referenced with the corresponding subject markers or zero. Some modifiers show agreement with the head noun while others, like the adjective and the ordinal, maintain no concord relationship with the head noun. As regards the cardinal numerals, it is one to nine that show agreement with the head noun. Some modifiers can be nominalised through the addition of nominal prefixes and the pronominal forms of the various noun classes. In double-object (AVDO) constructions, the Goal or Dative precedes the Theme. In locative constructions, the Theme occurs before the Locative. Moreover, adjuncts may occur after the core arguments in the clause.

Tafi has a marked kinship possessive grammar. Singular kinship possession is marked with the 3SG independent pronoun **yí** referring to the possessor placed between the possessor and the kinship term. Plural kinship possession is expressed by juxtaposition (see Chapter 4 on Noun phrases).

Tafi has two bona fide prepositions and others that have verbal sources, some of which are undergoing grammaticalisation and one that has completely grammaticalised. Spatial regions and parts are specified by about a dozen or so postpositions in the language. These postpositions are spatial nominals or body-part nouns which are at different stages in the process of grammaticalisation.

There are about eight question words which are used to ask content questions. Two of which are interrogative modifiers (**djúwē** ‘which’ and **-shī̄** ‘how many/much’) so they occur after the head noun. Two of the question words (**-shī̄** ‘how many/much’ and **-nī̄** ‘who’) show concord with the head noun. When some of the question

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<sup>8</sup> The tone system of Tafi still presents several analytic challenges which require further investigation. For example, the utterance final pitch or intonation in vocatives needs further investigation.

words are in focus, they are followed by the relative marker **gi** ‘REL’ or the connector **pi** ‘CONN’.

Tafi is a verb serialising language. In serial verb constructions, two or more verbs occur without any overt marker of coordination or subordination. The verbs share at least one argument and same tense and mood which is marked only once on the first verb. The verbs cannot be independently negated. The verbs can be independently focused or questioned. Tense, aspect and mood are mainly marked by preverbs in Tafi and there are about a dozen preverbal markers. Depending on the number of arguments they take, verbs in Tafi are classified as one-place, two-place and three-place predicates and they occur in various argument structure constructions such as one-place, two-place and three-place constructions respectively. Tafi has very few non-derived adjectives. However, derived adjectives are formed through reduplication of property verbs. Relativisation, and the use of nominal property words as complements of predicators, medio-passive constructions as well as the use of other qualifiers are other strategies for expressing adjectival meanings.

Like many other languages in the area, Tafi has ideophonic words – marked words that depict sensory images (Dingemanse 2011). Syntactically, they function as nominal modifiers or verbal modifiers.

Topic is marked by a form **ni** which is also the form of the definiteness marker. In topic constructions, a noun phrase or a postpositional phrase may be fronted to the left periphery as an external argument of the clause, that is, to sentence initial position. An out-of-focus part of focus utterances, especially those where the highlighted elements are marked by intensifiers like **ko** ‘just’, are marked by another marker **ani** ‘TOP’. This form is the same as the proximal demonstrative. Relative clauses are optionally marked off by the topic marker **ni** signalling that they convey background information with respect to the head nominal. Thus, the head noun of the relative clause occurs on the left periphery of the clause and is followed by the relative clause introduced by the marker **gi**. Focus is not marked by a particle but a subject argument in focus is referred to by an independent pronoun. If the argument focused is not the subject then there is a gap left in its position after it has been fronted (Schachter 1973). Verbs are focused by nominalising the verb with the class prefix **bu/bu-** of the **bu<sup>1</sup>**- class and then placing them before the subject NP of the clause. If the subject NP is a pronoun then it is the dependent form of the pronoun that is used.

#### 1.4 Data collection

The data for this study was collected during two field trips to Tafi amounting to fifteen months in total between 2007 and 2009. I was based in Tafi Madɔ while visiting the other communities regularly. I tried to observe speakers’ behaviour and

also learn to speak the language to help enhance my understanding of it. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I elicited data using the Ibadan 400 wordlist as well as the SIL comparative African wordlist which comprises about 1700 words (Snider and Roberts 2004). The data collected using these questionnaires allowed for a preliminary analysis of the phonology and the identification of loan words as well as the nominal class prefixes.

Direct lexical elicitation has an important role in language documentation, however, it also has its limitations (see e.g. Hellwig 2011). Thus, I also recorded spontaneous spoken texts of different genres in the field including folktales, conversations, proverbs, riddles, some procedural discourses etc. in the language. These were supplemented by a Frog Story (FS) narrative description elicited using the wordless picture book *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer 1969) and various standardised picture and video stimuli designed and developed by the Language and Cognition Group at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics for the investigation of topological relations and the semantics of positional verbs and for semantics of categories, e.g. ‘Cut and Break’ (Bohnmeyer et al. 2001), ‘Put and Take’ (Bowerman et al. 2004) etc. (see [fieldmanuals.mpi.nl](http://fieldmanuals.mpi.nl)). Data elicited with these picture and video stimuli are marked as TRPS (Topological Relations Picture Series) (Bowerman & Pederson (1993); PSPV (Picture Series for Positional Verbs) (Ameke et al. 1999) and C&B (‘Cut and Break’) (Bohnmeyer et al. 2001) etc. Supplementary information was obtained from direct elicitation based on questionnaires for linguistic and cultural fieldwork derived from manuals (e.g. Bouquiaux and Thomas 1992, Comrie and Smith 1977, McKinney 2000, Payne 1997, Shopen 2007 volumes, and other questionnaires available at <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources.php>). Informal or structured interviews were also conducted. The data were recorded using a solid state digital audio (Roland Edirol R-09) and video transferred to computer platform for transcription, translation, annotation and interlinearisation. Some phrases, clauses and even full sentences in this grammar have been lifted from the narrative texts as well as from the elicitations.

My principal consultants and assistants in the field were Beatrice Amoadza, Nelson Agbley and Emmanuel Amoadza, all from Tafi Madɔ. Beatrice Amoadza, a retired basic school teacher and Emmanuel Amoadza, an active community member and a farmer, are resident in Tafi Madɔ while Nelson Agbley, a retired secondary school French teacher, is resident in Accra and periodically comes to Tafi Madɔ. Other consultants are Manfred Ocrah, Juliana Ocrah, Johnson Kasu, Wilhemina Sonkro, Michael Agbesi, Tɔgbe Afari VIII and Patricia Amoadza. Apart from my consultants, I also recorded information from children, youth and older people, both men and women. These are people of different statuses, chiefs and elders of the community as well as ordinary members. All these people have different educational backgrounds and different levels of exposure to English and Ewe. Some speak Akan and few, Avatime.

I elicited information from some children using stimuli and I also recorded a frog story narrative discourse from a youth after which these recordings were played to some adults for comments and the comments I received included “if you want to be working with children this is what you get” and “don’t work with the children, they are destroying the language”. In addition, there is variation among adult speakers. Some speakers tend to simplify the phonological and grammatical processes. This is reflected in the recordings I made of different speakers. It is evident that the noun class system is in the process of decaying in the sense that the agreement system is being simplified, thus for example, it is the subject-verb agreement markers of the **a<sup>1</sup>/ba(a)-** classes that are used to cross-reference all subject NPs on the verb, irrespective of their classes. Similarly, the agreement on modifiers within the noun phrase are also being generalised to the **a<sup>1</sup>/ba(a)-** classes, for instance the agreement form of the indefiniteness marker modifying a noun of the **o-** class such as **ɔ-kɔ** ‘place’ should be **tolí**, however, some speakers use **telí**, the agreement form of the **a<sup>1</sup>/ba(a)-** classes. I also realised that the phonological process of **v/i-** insertion after the deletion of the initial **k** of the **ka/ke-** prefix (see § 2.5.3) is gradually getting lost from the speech of children so you hear **kplǎábhā** instead of **kplǎíábhā** (**kplǎ kábhā** (table top)) ‘on a table’. Moreover, some youth could not enumerate the numerals without mixing them with some Ewe numerals. As regards the adult speakers, most of them condemn the speech of those who make extensive use of Ewe vocabulary however unconsciously some of them indulge in the same practice.

## 1.5 Methodology and theoretical framework

The methodology adopted in this grammar is a field work based approach to the study of linguistic structures and their use in socio-cultural contexts. I try to describe the Tafi language in its own terms or ‘from the inside’, rather than imposing on the language concepts whose primary motivation comes from other languages.

The grammatical description is cast in basic linguistic theory which is a cumulative framework in which most descriptive grammars are written and which is informed by structural, functional, formal and typological insights (Dixon 1997, 2010, Dryer 2006). Emphasis will be placed on rigorous descriptive analysis rather than formal implementation. Therefore, every aspect of the language will be analysed and described in as much detail as possible based on how it is used in context. Explanations for phenomena will be sought in contact history and/or cultural practices and the structures cast in cross-linguistic typological perspective. There is a lot of variation in the speech of the speakers due in part to change in progress in the Tafi language. I have endeavoured to give a flavour of this variation by refraining from making too many categorical statements about Tafi grammatical processes. Thus in this grammar, I will attempt to make use of expressions and abbreviations which in my opinion will not be beyond the understanding of

linguists as well as the interested reader to explain each grammatical phenomenon that will be examined or talked about.

## 1.6 Outline of the grammar and presentation of data

This book is organised as follows: Chapter 2 examines the phonological system of the language. The discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to nominals. In Chapter 3, I describe the noun class system of the language whereas in Chapter 4, I look at the various types of noun phrases and the structure of the noun phrase. Chapter 5 focuses on adpositions and adpositional phrases while Chapter 6 examines clause structure and clause types. In Chapter 7, I give a description of verbs and verbal modifiers. Sentence types are presented in Chapter 8 and various clause combinations are described in Chapter 9. In Chapter 10, I discuss Serial Verb Constructions. Routine expressions and formulae used in social interactions are presented in Chapter 11. Three types of words: ideophones, interjections and particles, are discussed in Chapter 12. The final chapter contains a transcription and translation of selected texts in Tafi. Table 1.1 lists the various texts in my corpus showing the ones included or not included in Chapter 13. I have indicated the texts from which various examples are taken against them in the grammar whether they are included in Chapter 13 or not.

Table 1.1: Texts in the corpus

Genre	Included in Chapter 13	Not included in Chapter13
Folk tales	Kásālā ‘tortoise’	Gbaxálĩ ‘striped mouse’
		Sáhwĩ ‘spider’
Proverbs	Proverbs	
Riddles	Riddles	
Songs		Songs
Procedural discourse	Palm oil preparation ‘Budzo tuto’	Local soap making
	Preparation of red rice balls ‘kumukó gige’	Yam cultivation
Historical narrative		(History of) the monkeys (Butsé)
		History of kente weaving
		History of the migration of the Tafi.
Descriptions of customs		Saxwĩ ‘funeral rites for parent-in-law’
		Puberty rites
		Marriage custom
		Butsíugũ ‘funeral rites’
Stimulated narrative		Frog Story (FS)

In the grammar, the texts and their translations are presented in four lines as illustrated below:

1. Kásālā adawōsō'iesí.  
**ká-sālā**      **a-da-wōsō**      **ke.sí**  
 CM-tortoise SM-ITIVE-lie down  
 'Tortoise went and lay down.' (Kásālā)

The Tafi data is presented on the first line showing word divisions. The apostrophe sign (') is used to indicate deletions. The data is shown in bold with hyphens (-) representing morpheme breaks in the second line. The morphs in the first line are fully spelt out as morphemes in the second line such that initial consonants and syllables deleted are presented in their recoverable forms. The interlinear English gloss and a free English translation given in single quotes are presented in the third and fourth lines respectively. The source of the example if available in the texts is given in brackets. In the above example, the sentence comes from the folk tale of **Kasālā** 'tortoise', hence the name in brackets after the free translation.

Class-markers that are fossilised with grammaticalised nominals are separated from the nominal stems by a full stop indicating the form has a single meaning and to distinguish it from the nominals, e.g., **ke.sí** 'under, beneath' and **ke-sí** 'bottom, down part'.

The object forms of pronouns are the same as the independent forms of the pronouns. In the glosses on the third line, however, the object forms are not glossed as IND partly because the initial consonants on the object forms tend to be elided.

The following IPA representations /b<sup>h</sup>/, /ɸ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /tʃw/, /ɕ/, /h/, /j/ and /ɲ/ are written as 'bh', 'f', 'sh', 'zh', 'tsy', 'tsyw', 'dzy', 'h', 'y' and 'ny' respectively. Vowels are written using their IPA symbols. Orthographic vowel sequences where the first vowel is a high front vowel **i** or **ɪ** or a back vowel **o**, **ɔ**, **u**, or **ʊ** are phonologically a sequence of a palatal glide and a labial velar glide respectively. They are written as vowel sequences following the Ewe orthographic convention. Low tones are not marked all other tones are marked with accents.