

## **Phonological variation in Kusaal: A synchronic dialectological study**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a synchronic dialectological approach to phonological variation in Kusaal. It investigates the differences in the phonologies of Agole and Toende dialects of Kusaal, a Mabia language spoken in the north-eastern part of Ghana, using the theory of generative dialectology. It employs a qualitative design in which both primary and secondary data are sourced for the analysis. The primary data are taken from native speakers in Garu and Zebilla for the Agole and Toende dialects respectively. The secondary data are also sourced from two dictionaries, one for each dialect. The study reveals that different realisations of the same phonological process trigger the phonological variations in the dialects. It is apparent that segment alternation, segment deletion and segment substitutions are in the dialects where voiced segments at word-final position in Agole are either realised as voiceless segments or deleted in Toende. Also, the concepts of labialisation and palatalisation are present in Agole but absent in Toende. Nasalisation is also common in Toende but absent in Agole, at least, for some words. The process of vowel sequencing in Kusaal is also distinctive in the two dialects. While Agole accepts diphthongs and other sequential vowels, Toende bars sequential vowels within mono-morphemic words. Finally, vowel harmony and consonant assimilation differences are salient factors for the phonological variations in the dialects. While round or spread harmonic features are optimal in Toende, they are not in Agole. On the other hand, [+/-ATR] harmony is also optimal in Agole but not in Toende.

**Key words:** synchronic, dialectology, phonological variation, dialect, Agole, Toende, generative phonology