WE BEGIN TO WRITE:
CREATING AND USING THE FIRST NABIT ORTHOGRAPHY

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of language ideologies and agency in the development of an orthography for the Nabit language. Based on fieldwork in the Nabdam District of Ghana, it specifically explores the role of community involvement in orthography development.

Approximately 40,000 people speak the Nabit language in the Nabdam District in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Through the work of Project GROW, a non-profit organization led by Vida Yakong, a community-based research project began in order to develop an orthography for Nabit in 2011. After a multi-year collaborative research project, including the development of a Nabit Language Committee, community members finalized the Nabit alphabet in 2014 at an Alphabet Design Workshop.

Developing an orthography is a complex process as there are multiple linguistic and non-linguistic factors which must be considered in the process including which languages and orthographies speakers are already familiar with, how similar or different speakers want the orthography to be from existing orthographies, and how the orthography is seen as representing the identity of the language community. This thesis considers the factors that influenced the development of the Nabit orthography by analyzing the language ideologies of Nabit speakers, which emerged in interviews and at an Alphabet Design Workshop. In particular, this research focuses on the ideologies of language and cultural endangerment, language “purity”, and how Nabit “should” be written. By examining these language ideologies and the role they had in the creation of the Nabit orthography, this thesis demonstrates that both researchers and community members need to consider non-linguistic factors as equally important and sometimes even more important, than linguistic factors in orthography development.
Preface

Ethics approval for this research was given by the Chief of the Nabdam community, the Nabit Language Committee, all participants, and The University of British Columbia-Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H14-00214).
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Preface ................................................................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ......................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... viii

Dedication .......................................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Previous Research ....................................................................................................................... 2
  1.2 Master’s Research ....................................................................................................................... 3
  1.3 Background Information: Ghana, Nabit, and Guren ................................................................. 5
  1.4 Nabit as an Endangered Language ............................................................................................ 11
  1.5 Organization of Chapters ........................................................................................................... 12

Chapter 2: Theory, Methodology, and Methods ............................................................................. 15
  2.1 Outline ....................................................................................................................................... 15
  2.2 Language Ideologies ................................................................................................................... 15
    2.2.1 Linguistic Purity .................................................................................................................... 17
    2.2.2 Literacy Ideologies ............................................................................................................... 20
  2.3 Agency ....................................................................................................................................... 21
  2.4 Framework for Research ........................................................................................................... 22
  2.5 Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 24
  2.6 Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................................... 26
  2.7 Nabit Language Committee (NLC) ......................................................................................... 28
  2.8 Interviews .................................................................................................................................. 30
  2.9 Participant Observation ............................................................................................................ 38
  2.10 Alphabet Design Workshop .................................................................................................... 39
  2.11 Orthographic Considerations .................................................................................................. 42
  2.12 Transcription and Coding ....................................................................................................... 45
  2.13 Summary .................................................................................................................................. 45

Chapter 3: Preservation, Purity, and Progress: Nabit Language Ideologies .......................... 47
  3.1 Outline ....................................................................................................................................... 47
  3.2 Language and Cultural Endangerment ...................................................................................... 50
  3.3 “Pure” Nabit, Nabit kasi kasi ...................................................................................................... 57
  3.4 Differences Between Nabit and Guren ...................................................................................... 62
  3.5 Nabit Orthography .................................................................................................................... 65
3.6 Summary ........................................................................................................................................69

Chapter 4: Symbol Selections, Spelling, and Status: Deciding on the Nabit Orthography ..71

4.1 Outline ........................................................................................................................................71
4.2 Alphabet Design Workshop ........................................................................................................71
4.3 Phonological Analysis of Nabit ..................................................................................................77
4.4 Final Selections ............................................................................................................................81
4.5 Language Ideologies in Action ....................................................................................................83
  4.5.1 How Nabit “Should” Be Written ............................................................................................83
    4.5.1.1 Choosing Special Symbols ..............................................................................................83
    4.5.1.2 Spelling Rules .................................................................................................................91
  4.5.2 Language Endangerment ........................................................................................................94
  4.5.3 Language Purity ....................................................................................................................97
4.6 Alphabet in Action: Nabit Storybooks and Standardization .......................................................99
4.7 Summary .....................................................................................................................................103

Chapter 5: Conclusions ....................................................................................................................105

5.1 Language Ideologies, Agency, and Orthography Development .................................................105
5.2 Reflecting on Research Questions ...............................................................................................106
5.3 Areas for Future Research ..........................................................................................................111
5.4 Contributions to Linguistic Anthropology and Orthography Development .............................112

References ......................................................................................................................................115

Appendices ......................................................................................................................................124

Appendix A: Robyn’s Research Summary .......................................................................................124
Appendix B: Nabit Interview Script ................................................................................................125
Appendix C: List of Interviews and Workshops ..............................................................................135
Appendix D: Swadesh Word List ....................................................................................................136
Appendix E: Ethics Certificate .........................................................................................................139
List of Tables

Table 1.1: Government Sponsored Languages ................................................................. 6
Table 2.1: Nabit Language Committee Membership ...................................................... 29
Table 2.2: Nabit Interviewees ......................................................................................... 34
Table 3.1: Words for Paddle .......................................................................................... 56
Table 4.1: Example Chart from ADW ............................................................................. 75
Table 4.2: Nabit Consonants ......................................................................................... 78
Table 4.3: Nabit Diphthongs ......................................................................................... 80
Table 4.4: Nabit Symbol to Sound Comparison .............................................................. 82
Table 4.5: Glottal Stop Suggestions ................................................................................. 84
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Nabdam District Sign .............................................................................................................7
Figure 3.1: Robyn and Josbert on the motorcycle heading to an interview ........................................49
Figure 3.2: Pitomso, Robyn, and Josbert during a language interview ..............................................50
Figure 4.1: Robyn Leading the ADW ..................................................................................................76
Figure 4.2: NLC members at the ADW ..............................................................................................77
Figure 4.3: Nabit Vowels ....................................................................................................................79
Figure 4.4: The Nabit Alphabet ...........................................................................................................81
Figure 4.5: The NLC with the New Nabit Alphabet .............................................................................83
Figure 4.6: List of Revised Nabit Words for Storybook .................................................................93
Figure 4.7: Nabit Storybook Example Page .........................................................................................101
Figure 4.8: Nabit Storybook Example Glossary ..............................................................................101
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Nabdam community with hope that the new Nabit orthography will help with the preservation of the Nabit language and culture.
Chapter 1: Introduction

If I could write in Nabit? I first of all would like to write about our culture. Why I am saying that is, it is something that is gradually wiping away because our grandfathers were not able to put it in paper, so certain things are getting missing. So if I have the chance to write in Nabit I think my first novel would be on culture.¹

(Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014)

Bob, a Nabit speaker, gave this response when I asked him what he would like to be able to write in his indigenous language, Nabit. Previously, Bob had never been able to write in Nabit because a Nabit orthography, or writing system, did not exist. In his statement, Bob outlines the significance that writing in Nabit would have for him and for future generations of Nabit speakers; he could write about his culture in his traditional language and preserve it in a written form so that future generations would always know about their culture. Bob’s response is representative of nearly all the speakers I interviewed. People wanted to be able to write about cultural practices and traditions to preserve them.

My interview with Bob took place in Ghana, during a six-week fieldwork trip I conducted in May and June of 2014. His interview was one in a set of thirteen interviews I conducted as part of the community consultation process with Nabit speakers to develop an orthography, or writing system, for the Nabit language. During these interviews I investigated what Nabit speakers thought about their language and about the possibility of being able to write in their mother-tongue. Before I discuss the project and Nabit language in depth, I’ll begin by explaining how I came to be involved in this project.

¹ All quotations included in this thesis are edited for clarity, but not for “correctness” as defined Canadian by standards of English. I believe that it is important to let the voices of the speakers I interviewed be shared in as close to their original form as possible so long as the meaning is clearly conveyed.
1.1 Previous Research

My research to develop a writing system for Nabit arose out of a larger initiative connected to Project GROW, which stands for Ghana Rural Opportunities for Women. Project GROW is an initiative that was started on the UBC Okanagan campus in 2007 by PhD student Vida Yakong, to help create economic opportunities for women in rural Ghana. Project GROW is now a non-profit organization and has implemented several successful projects in the Nabit community, such as building a grinding mill and sending girls to school (GROW 2014). A Project GROW committee member, Cindy Bourne, travelled to Ghana in 2011 to discuss possible projects the community would like to pursue. Community members, including both men and women, expressed the desire to learn how to read and write, and specifically explained the need for a Nabit writing system (personal comm. January 20, 2012). Women explained that they must use their fingerprint to sign documents because they do not know how to write their own name, and that this is a very degrading experience for them, as the ink left on their finger marks their illiteracy. Project GROW has since developed an adult literacy program to teach English literacy skills to Nabit speakers.

To address the need for a writing system for Nabit, Cindy and Vida approached my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer, who is a linguistic anthropologist. Dr. Schreyer had completed a very similar project in the summer of 2010, when she helped a community in Papua New Guinea develop a writing system for their language Kala (Schreyer and Wagner 2013). Dr. Schreyer recommended me for the project, and I conducted a preliminary research project on Nabit, with the support of an Irving K. Barber Undergraduate Research Award (URA) from May-August 2012. I worked with Vida, who is a fluent Nabit speaker and respected community member, to document and record Nabit. My interviews with Vida were conducted in Kelowna,
BC, and due to time and financial constraints I was not able to travel to Ghana to interview more speakers or directly involve more speakers in the orthography development process. Together, Vida, my supervisor Dr. Schreyer, and I developed a preliminary orthography for Nabit. To involve more Nabit speakers, we also developed an alphabet book that we sent to Ghana accompanied by MP3 players with a recording of Vida speaking in Nabit to explain the book. We asked Nabit speakers to listen to the recording and read the alphabet book and then provide us with comments on the orthography we developed. We asked reviewers to provide constructive feedback on the orthography, for instance whether they liked the letters Vida chose, or if we represented any sounds incorrectly, etc. In November of 2013 I received review documents from several Nabit speakers in Ghana that Vida had collected. The feedback was mostly spelling revisions of the words included in the Nabit Writing and Counting Book. Unfortunately, one of the challenges of conducting research in Kelowna instead of in Ghana meant that the URA project was already completed by the time we received the feedback. However, I incorporated the feedback into my Master’s research.

1.2 Master’s Research

Although the URA project was officially completed in August 2012, the research was not complete and I continued researching Nabit and working with Vida on the orthography. During the course of my research I became deeply committed to the Nabit language project and decided to pursue a Master’s degree to help finalize the orthography that Vida, Dr. Schreyer, and I had developed. To continue the project we decided it was necessary to travel to Ghana to conduct more language interviews, experience the Nabit culture, and study the role that the Nabit language plays in everyday life. Continuing the project also meant that the feedback we received from Nabit speakers could be incorporated, as well as the voices of more Nabit speakers.
During this period Vida completed her PhD and moved back to Ghana; however, she continued her integral role as collaborator and helped develop the project on the ground in Ghana. She recruited Nabit speakers to sit on the Nabit Language Committee (NLC), which would oversee the project, and convened meetings with the committee to set up the project and brainstorm a list of speakers I could interview. Vida also organized my field stay, finding me lodging, booking me in-country flights, and enlisted her nephew Josbert to be my guide, translator, and research assistant.

I travelled to Ghana in May 2014 and stayed until the end of June 2014. During these six weeks I interviewed thirteen Nabit speakers and met with the Nabit Language Committee twice to finalize the Nabit orthography. My interviews were designed to document the phonology, meaning the sounds, of the Nabit language and understand how Nabit speakers felt about their language. Along with helping to develop the Nabit orthography, I was interested in investigating how community members felt about the potential of a having Nabit orthography and how they felt about their language in general. I was also interested in exploring attitudes of Nabit speakers regarding the possible classification of Nabit as a dialect of Frafra, which I will discuss in more detail below.

My research questions arose from my preliminary research studying Nabit with Vida. The highly connected research questions I address in this thesis are:

1) How will community involvement influence the development of the Nabit orthography?
2) What is the most appropriate writing system to use to represent the language of Nabit, as decided by the community?
3) Is Nabit a dialect of the Frafra language or is it a separate but closely related language?
4) Based on Nabit’s relation to Gurenɛ, should/could Nabit speakers use the already established Gurenɛ orthography?

To answer these questions, I use the theoretical approach of language ideologies, which I detail in Chapter Two. I draw on responses from my language documentation interviews, my interactions with the NLC, and my own observations. In order to understand the context of these questions, I next provide some background information about the Nabit language and Ghana.

1.3 Background Information: Ghana, Nabit, and Gurenɛ

Ghana is a country located in West Africa situated on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered on the East by Togo, on the West by Cote D’Ivoire, and to the North by Burkina Faso. All three of these countries are “francophone”, meaning they were colonized by France and French is their official language. Ghana is the only “English-speaking” country in the area. Ghana has a long history of colonization, beginning first with the Portuguese in the 15th Century, then the Dutch in the 16th Century, and finally the British gained complete control of the colony in the 19th Century. Ghana gained independence from Britain on March 6, 1957 and became the first country south of the Sahara to become a state independent from their colonizer. Ghana became a Republic in 1960, and as a result of several military coups, the country is now in its fourth Republic (Ghana Govt 2014). Although Ghana is politically independent from Britain, the effects of colonization are still felt in the country. In particular, the English language that was imposed by the British remains the official language of Ghana, meaning the government and education systems use English as the language of business. However, English is not a language that everyone in Ghana speaks.

Ghana, although it is a small country, is ethnically diverse. This ethnic diversity also equates to language diversity, as almost every ethnic group has their own language or dialect of a
language. According to *The Ethnologue*, a catalogue of the world’s languages, Ghana has 81 recognized languages, and even more dialects (Lewis *et al.* 2015). Dealing with this diversity is a challenging task for the government, as it is difficult to grant each group the political recognition they would like, and to decide what language to communicate in to reach the most Ghanaians.

The current political system has Ghana divided into ten regions and each region has several districts. Although English is the only official language in Ghana, there are eleven other languages that are “government sponsored” and used as lingua francas in each region, and some of these languages are used in education (NCC 2015). The details of these languages can be seen in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Government Sponsored Languages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akuapem Twi²</td>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asante Twi</td>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mfantse (Fante)</td>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga</td>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangme</td>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>Volta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nzema</td>
<td>Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagbani</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonja</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagaare</td>
<td>Upper West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasem</td>
<td>Upper East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Nabit language is spoken by one ethnic group of approximately 40,000 people, known as Nabdams, in the Upper East Region, specifically in the Nabdam district (Ghana Districts 2014). The Nabdam district was created in June of 2012 when the Talensi-Nabdam

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² Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi, and Mfantse are all dialects of Akan.
District was split into two Districts, the Talensi District and the Nabdam District, as part of a political plan to better implement government policy through local governments (Ghana Districts 2014). It is considered a point of pride for the Nabdam people to be recognized with their own district (pers comm., Vida Yakong, June 2012). This pride is still evident in the district, two years after its creation. Figure 1.1 is a photograph that I took in June 2014, of a sign that is visible on the side of the highway as you enter the Nabdam district.

![Figure 1.1: Nabdam District Sign (Photo by R. Giffen June 25, 2014)](image)

This political division means that the Nabdam ethnic group has their own recognized territory. Despite living in a distinct territory, the Nabdams and the Nabit language are not isolated. Any Nabdam who travels even a short distance outside of the Nabdam district interacts with a variety

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3 This political division of the Talensi-Nabdam district occurred while I was conducting my preliminary research in 2012.
of other ethnic groups and languages, particularly with closely related language groups in the surrounding regions, such as the Gurene-speaking people and the Talene-speaking people.

Dividing Ghana into political districts is almost as difficult as classifying Ghanaian languages into language families. Currently, Nabit is classified by *The Ethnologue* as a dialect of Frafra,\(^4\) which is part of the Gur language family and closely connected to many languages in Ghana and Burkina Faso, a neighbouring country to the north (Lewis *et al.* 2015). “Frafra” is an overarching term used to refer to the five dialects, which are individually known as Nabit, Gurene,\(^5\) Nankani, Booni, and Talene.\(^6\) According to their research on Frafra, Naden and Schaefer (1974:8), determined that the term “Frafra” was originally used to describe all ethnic groups in the Upper East Region, meaning both insiders and outsiders referred to these ethnic groups as Frafra. Although Frafra still technically refers to the entire language group, speakers of some dialects have suggested that Frafra is used more as a term for the ethnic group that speaks the Gurene dialect than the name of an actual language (Denham 2008:40). This idea was supported by several of my community collaborators (Nmabone, Pitomso, Vida) who informed me that now Frafra usually refers to the ethnic group that speaks the “main” dialect Gurene and that speakers of other dialects, like Nabit, would not refer to themselves as Frafra.

Nabit’s classification as a dialect of Frafra is not universally accepted though, as Nabit is quite distinct from the other dialects. In my preliminary research, Vida Yakong told me that speakers of Nabit cannot understand Gurene and Gurene speakers cannot understand Nabit (Giffen, fieldnotes, May 9, 2012). This sentiment has also been expressed in other research on

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\(^4\) There are several spelling variations for this language group such as “Farifari” or “Farefari” but I have chosen to use the spelling “Frafra” as that is how my collaborator Vida Yakong spells it. I have used this spelling throughout, even if the source uses a different spelling.

\(^5\) Guren also has several spelling variations such as “Gurene” or “Gureenne” but this is the spelling used in the official “Gurene-English Dictionary” see Dakubu, M. E. Kropp, *et al.* 2007.

\(^6\) The other dialects also have alternative spellings, but I have chosen to use the spellings Vida provided me.
Frafra dialects. In a research project documenting the Frafra language, Schaefer (1975:3n) suggests that Nabit is actually quite different from Gurenɛ, and that Talene and Nabit might be better classified with either Kusaal⁷ or Mampruli. Naden and Schaefer used intelligibility testing to compare each of the five dialects. To conduct these tests Naden and Schaefer recorded speakers of each dialect, and then asked speakers of the other four dialects to listen and interpret the recordings. Intelligibility is measured based on how well speakers of each dialect can understand the other dialects. The results of these tests demonstrated that Nabit speakers understood the other four dialects quite poorly, and that the Nabit speakers were understood the least by speakers of the other dialects (Naden and Schaefer 1973:9-10). Naden and Schaefer pointed out that only speakers from Tongo, who speak the Talene dialect, understood Nabit particularly well, and they suggest that, “Nabit and [Talene] are either more divergent dialects or closely-related languages” (1973:10). The speakers I interviewed in 2014 also told me that Nabit and Gurenɛ are not mutually intelligible, and that only Nabit speakers who grew up with a Gurenɛ parent or close to the Gurenɛ-speaking area can understand Gurenɛ (Dominic, Ponka, Samare).

In their intelligibility testing, Naden and Schaefer (1973:10) also state that many speakers of Gurenɛ, Nankani, and Booni said that they could not understand Nabit, but when they were encouraged to try to understand Nabit they all scored quite high. Vida also explained to me that she believes that some Gurenɛ speakers pretend that they cannot understand Nabit because Gurenɛ holds a high status and Gurenɛ people do not want to be linked with the “poor” Nabdams. Therefore, Nabit is evidently perceived as a lower status language than Gurenɛ. Nabit is spoken in a small geographic area, only in the villages in the Nabdam district, whereas Gurenɛ

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⁷ For more information on Kusaal see Spratt, David and Nancy 1968. Through my own comparisons of the phonology of Kusaal and the phonology of Nabit I found the two languages to be quite different.
is spoken in the Bolgatanga Municipality, which is the home to the capital city of the region, Bolga.

Gurenɛ has been the focus of more extensive study than Nabit, or the other dialects, and a group of researchers have created an orthography for the language and published a dictionary (Dakubu et al. 2007). According to Gurenɛ scholar Mary Kropp Dakubu, the orthography was adopted by the Bolgatanga District Assembly, a governing body in the district, and is used by the University of Education, Winneba, in the Gurenɛ department as well as in a teacher training college (Dakubu N.d.). The orthography was intended to be used by speakers of all five dialects but, according to Dakubu, Talene and Nabit were included for “socio-political” reasons because at the time both the Talene and Nabit speaking areas were included in the Bolgatanga District and representatives from the district assembly did not want to leave the Nabit speakers out (e-mail, July 19, 2012). The Bolgatanga District has since been divided and both Nabit and Talene speaking areas now have separate districts. As well, Dakubu noted that some of the assembly members were Nabit speakers and were particularly interested in the project. Like Naden and Schaefer, Dakubu also suggests that both Nabit and Talene are more like Kusaal and Mampruli than like the other three dialects of Frafra. One example she gives is how Talene, Nabit, and Kusaal all tend to weaken and drop the final vowel in a trisyllabic word, CVCVCV,8 whereas Gurenɛ usually weakens the second vowel (e-mail, July 19, 2012).

Based on the research by Naden, Schaefer, and Dakubu, my own analysis of Nabit, and the opinions shared with me by Nabit speakers, I believe that Nabit should be recognized as a language separate from Gurenɛ. Therefore, I chose to refer to Nabit as a language, rather than a dialect, in my thesis. Additionally, I refer to Nabit as a speech community separate from the Gurenɛ speech community. A “speech community” is a term in linguistic anthropology and

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8 This means words have a consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel structure.
sociolinguistics that refers to a group of people who speak the same language, but beyond that it also highlights the link between social organization and language use (Rampton 2010:274). This makes it an ideal term to refer to Nabit speakers because it encapsulates the political and social divisions that define the borders of the Nabit-speaking community.

1.4 Nabit as an Endangered Language

Like the majority of the world’s languages, Nabit is endangered. There are several factors that account for Nabit’s endangerment. First, since English is the Ghanaian national language, it is becoming a priority for people in Ghana to speak English (Laitin 1994; Obeng 1997), which could result in the decreasing value and use of indigenous languages, like Nabit, as a language of daily communication. Secondly, Nabit is still classified as a dialect of another language, Frafra, which is also a relatively small language spoken only in the Upper East Region. This makes Nabit a minority dialect, of a minority language, which puts Nabit at an even greater risk of falling out of use, because unless Nabit is recognized as a separate language it could be replaced by a higher status dialect, like Gurene. Thirdly, the language is restricted to a small geographic territory and small number of speakers, and everyone seeking a job or traveling outside of the Nabdam district must learn another language in order to communicate. As a result of the relatively low speaker population, the small geographic region in which Nabit is spoken, and the increasing use of both Gurene and the national language of English, Nabit is a language at high risk of falling out of use. If these factors are not addressed, it is possible that Nabit will stop being passed down to children as a first language within the next two generations and will be replaced with a language that is viewed to have more social and economic benefits, such as English.
By international standards, Nabit is not considered a critically endangered language. According to Joshua Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), Nabit is stage 6, meaning it is spoken in the home and intergenerational mother-tongue transmission is occurring (Fishman 1991:12). However, Nabit is not stable in this stage as some parents are choosing not to teach Nabit to their children, meaning Nabit could very easily slip into stage 7, where only adults can speak the language and they do not raise their children in it (1991:89).

According to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) developed by Lewis and Simons, Nabit is stage 6b, threatened, meaning Nabit is spoken by all generations but is losing speakers (Lewis and Simmons 2010:112). Since Nabit is at an early stage of language endangerment, this project takes proactive approach to address the state that the Nabit language is in before it becomes further endangered.

The new Nabit orthography can play an important role in addressing the endangerment of the language. Firstly, the orthography can increase the number of domains in which the Nabit language is used, such as the education system. Secondly, it can help to increase the status of Nabit because of the new domains in which it is used and the attention of academic research. Thirdly, the new orthography can preserve the Nabit language in written form, which will help Nabit to continue to be spoken and passed down to the next generations. As I will explain in the upcoming chapters, several interviewees and language committee members were interested in the potential the orthography has to preserve the Nabit language and culture.

1.5 Organization of Chapters

In this thesis I first present my theoretical framework for this research project in Chapter Two. I discuss in depth the theory of language ideologies. I also discuss at length the process of orthography development. I explore the classification of Nabit as a language versus a dialect, and
address the concept of linguistic “purity.” I explain the methods I used working with the language committee, the documentation and review interviews, as well as the Alphabet Design Workshop I hosted.

Next, in Chapter Three, I discuss the attitudes and opinions expressed by interview participants during language documentation interviews, which focus on three themes. The first theme, language and cultural endangerment, highlights the challenges people are facing in speaking Nabit. In particular, I consider the issue of forgotten words and special language for rituals that some children are no longer learning. The second theme covers Nabit speaker’s attitudes towards the development of a Nabit alphabet including discussions about how Nabit has been written previously, why people want to write, and what specifically they wish could be written down. Lastly, I discuss speakers’ thoughts about “pure” Nabit explaining how Nabit is being influenced by neighbouring language groups, some of the distinct differences between Nabit and the other Frafra dialects with examples, and where speakers believe the “purest” Nabit can be found in the Nabdam district. I then examine what the concept of “purity” says about language ideology in the Nabit-speaking community.

Subsequently, in Chapter Four, I discuss the orthography development workshop that I hosted for the Nabit Language Committee. I explain who the committee members are and briefly outline the workshop, but the majority of the chapter focuses on the committee’s discussions and the decisions they made. I focus specifically on the symbol options I provided for the committee, and the choices that they made, highlighting eight symbols that resulted in the most discussion and had the most significant impact on the similarity of the Nabit alphabet to the Gurenc alphabet. I also continue the discussion of Nabit “purity” by reviewing the joking and teasing
that occurred between committee members when someone suggested a word that was not “pure” Nabit.

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I return to my research questions and consider how my research, including interview responses, the Alphabet Design Workshop, and my observations, addresses each question. I also address the theoretical and practical implications of this research and discuss plans for future research and continued work on the Nabit Language Project.
Chapter 2: Theory, Methodology, and Methods

2.1 Outline
In this chapter, I will outline the foundations of my research. In particular, I will discuss my theoretical and methodological approaches. This chapter is divided into these two sections, to provide a clearer insight into these approaches and how they informed my research practices. First, I will describe the theory I used, with a closer look at the study of language ideologies. Next, I will focus on my methodology and will discuss the three prevalent methodologies: community-based research, participatory action research, and Indigenous methodologies, and two main methods: interviews and Alphabet Design Workshop, that informed my research.

The two theoretical perspectives that I used in this thesis are language ideologies and agency. I explain language ideologies as my overarching concept, and then focus in on two language ideologies that are particularly relevant to my research, linguistic purity and literacy ideologies. My explanation of agency follows out of language ideologies and will be discussed last, before I transition to the methodology section.

2.2 Language Ideologies
Language ideologies, the main theoretical perspective behind my analysis of Nabit, refers to understanding the way people think about their language, and how sociocultural and sociopolitical factors influence the language. They highlight the connection between language and social processes. Specifically, Kroskrity says that, “language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group” (2010:195). As Kroskity (2010:197) also notes, speakers can, and usually do,
subscribe to more than one language ideology at a time because of their multiple social experiences.

Speakers can also have varying degrees of awareness of the language ideologies they hold, some playing a more conscious role while others may have a more indirect or unconscious effect on a speaker, as they may be aware of some at a conscious level but not others. In such cases these ideologies may be specifically tied to “ideological sites,” meaning physical spaces or domains of use where language ideologies are produced and discussed (Kroskrity 2010; Silverstein 1998). These sites can vary from religious ceremonies, like the Arizona Tewa’s kiva (Kroskrity 1998), to gendered spaces, like Gapun men’s houses in Papua New Guinea (Kulick 1998), or institutional spaces, like courtrooms in Tonga (Phillips 2000). One such site, in the case of Nabit, are the Nabit Language Committee meetings. Discussions at meetings of the NLC specifically focus on the Nabit language, its status and relationship to Gurenɛ, and plans for its development. These concentrated discussions on the Nabit language makes these meetings an excellent arena for language ideologies to be discussed and debated, because these topics of conversation encourage, and almost require, people to share their opinions, which are reflections of their language ideologies. For example, when discussing the relationship between Nabit and Gurenɛ NLC members can express their opinion on whether they think the two languages are similar and whether they want them to be classified together or separately, and these beliefs represent their language ideologies.

Language ideologies are also a factor in creating social identity. As Kroskrity explains, “language, especially shared language, has long served as the key to naturalizing the boundaries of social groups” (2010:203). Language was and still is used to define ethnic groups. This can be a very political enterprise though as linguistic differences can be accentuated in cases where
groups are seeking political independence, but linguistic similarities can just as easily be emphasized to support a position of unity. Language ideology can play an important role in understanding these distinctions between language groups, and according to Kathryn Woolard (1998:16), are especially helpful in analyzing multicultural and multilingual communities. Specifically, understanding language ideologies can help to explain the statuses of languages and speech varieties, and why some languages garner prestige that others do not (Woolard 1998:16). As Ahearn notes, “language ideologies at [the] macro level can affect, for example, which speech varieties are labeled as languages and which as dialects” (2010a:45). Analyzing the language ideologies of Nabit speakers may help to explain the status of the Nabit language and its relation to other languages in the area, such as Gurre and Talene.

### 2.2.1 Linguistic Purity

A particular language ideology many Nabit speakers hold that I will analyze is linguistic purism or linguistic conservatism. Linguistic purism advocates that language should not change and should avoid influences from other languages. Moreover, it implies that there is a “true” or “pure” form of the language that should be maintained. Linguistic purism exists to some degree in all language communities. Even the English language has supporters that try to maintain English in its “purest” form and discourage users from incorporating slang and colloquialisms (Dorian 1994:479). Many language scholars support the theory that all languages must change to survive and, therefore, argue that linguistic purism can present challenges for a speech community especially in language revitalization projects. In some cases older generations remain attached to a traditional form of the language that is no longer spoken by younger generations. This can cause issues as younger speakers may be discouraged from speaking if they cannot speak “properly,” thus causing the language to lose rather than gain speakers (Crystal 2002;
Dorian 1994; Hinton 2001a; Hinton and Ahlers 1999; Wong 1999). The challenge in this case is
that there are often differences of opinion within a speech community, with some community
members supporting the traditional form and some more willing to accept changes in the
language. I saw this ideology surface in my data-elicitation interviews and the Alphabet Design
Workshop. For example, Nabit speakers were concerned about which words were actually true
Nabit words, versus those that had been borrowed in through language contact.

The lexicon, or vocabulary, of a language is one aspect of language that is particularly
susceptible to change, and is therefore important to discussions about linguistic purism.
According to ideologies of linguistic purity, it can be difficult to accept language changes but
also to intentionally create changes, such as when the need arises for new words. Speakers must
make decisions when it comes to incorporating new words; will new words be borrowed directly
into the language from a dominant language, or will new terms be created in the indigenous style
to fit the morphology and syntax patterns of the language? The creation of new words is
inevitable for any language, endangered or thriving (Hinton and Ahlers 1999; Kimura and
Counceller 2009). With modernization and the creation of new technology there are constantly
new concepts and items produced that must be incorporated into the lexicon, if the language is to
be used in all domains of life. Creating new words as part of a language revitalization project is,
however, a difficult task. The incorporation of new words is a controversial topic because the
inclusion of words from outside of the standard domain of use might significantly change the
language (Hinton 2001a:15). For example, a traditional language with specific values and
worldviews must incorporate western ideas of science and technology to be used in the
classroom but this might contradict the values and views of the culture the language is associated
with. This is a challenge that Nabit speakers are facing as several new technologies have been introduced to the villages.

While there are some strategies for incorporating changes to the language, there are still some speakers who would rather avoid all change and outside linguistic influences. Although many theorists suggest that this sort of purism is the result of xenophobia or anti-hegemonic actions (Henningsen 1989; Jernudd 1989), Kroskrity argues that it could simply be the result of local models of interaction. Through his work with the Arizona Tewa, Kroskrity (1998:108-109) demonstrates that even though code-mixing might be devalued, outside languages like Hopi and English still have high value to the Tewa as a means of intervillage communication and economic advancement. In cases of highly multilingual communities, the desire to maintain a “pure” form of the language may have important implications for the language’s status and relation to neighbouring languages. For example, in order to maintain the differences between closely related languages or dialects, speech communities may try to maintain a form of the language that does not allow for borrowing from the other language, in order to avoid a blending of the two languages. In the case of Tatar, spoken in Tatarstan, of the former Soviet Union, significant efforts have been made for “de-Russianification” of the Tatar language. According to Suzanne Wertheim, a Tatar researcher, this has been deemed necessary by Tatar speakers in order to “retain linguistic and cultural integrity in an assimilating society” (2003:347). This is also certainly the case for Nabit speakers, who wish to maintain an identity separate from Gurenɛ speakers, and therefore, stress the importance of “pure” Nabit using only the Nabit lexicon and discouraging borrowing from Gurenɛ.
2.2.2 Literacy Ideologies

It is also important to analyze the literacy ideologies that Nabit speakers hold, because my research focuses on the development of an orthography for Nabit. The two main ideas I considered were people’s attitudes towards literacy in general, and then specifically about the developing Nabit orthography.

Literacy, meaning the ability to read and write, has a complicated history in many parts of the world. In many indigenous communities, literacy was introduced with colonial contact. As a result, many indigenous people learned and continue to learn literacy in a language other than their mother-tongue. In these cases ideology becomes incredibly important, since literacy can then become linked to hegemonic forces and can be seen as having a negative impact on traditionally oral languages, because people must learn to speak another language to gain literacy. As Ahearn notes about her research with Junigau speakers in Nepal, “in the case of Junigau, it is clear that ideology cannot be separated from literacy, as young villagers in the 1990s acquired literacy skills in the context of certain social forces that emphasized the importance of formal education as part of becoming ‘modern’ and ‘developed’” (2010b:313). To survive in this “modern” world then, literacy is a necessary skill. The alternative to learning literacy in another language is to develop orthographies for indigenous languages so that people can learn to read and write in their own language, possibly at the same time as they learn colonial languages or as part of their transition to literacy in the colonial language. Even the decision as to whether or not a language should be written can be complicated though with several ideological principles at work (Debenport 2010; Morgan 2009; Schieffelin 2000).

Historically, orthographies have been a point of contention in many cases as some speech communities do not want their language written (Hinton 2001b; Morgan 2009; Sebba 2007) or
the orthographies were developed by outsiders and do not suit the needs of the community (Ottenheimer 2001). For minority and indigenous languages, many original orthographies were developed by colonizers in order to translate religious texts (Neely and Palmer 2009:272). As Woolard explains, “orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized as simply reducing speech to writing but rather are symbols that themselves carry historical, cultural, and political meanings” (1998:23). Indeed, orthographic development is quite complicated, and is the result of choices people make based on their values (Cahill 2014; Neely and Palmer Jr. 2009; Ottenheimer 2001; Schieffelin and Doucet 1998; Sebba 2000, 2007). One case where orthographic development has been a complicated and tense process is the development of an orthography for Haitian kreyòl. Numerous orthographies have been proposed, some with an emphasis on phonemics while other have emphasized etymology, but the issue centers on representation of “Haitianness” (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998:285). The debate comes down to whether “Haitianness” is better represented by a system unique to the language or based on the literary tradition of one of the source languages. There is no easy answer to this question; it can only be answered by understanding the values of the speakers and the sociocultural processes at work. In my role helping develop the Nabit orthography I was very conscious of the hegemonic position of Gurenɛ in the Upper East Region, and the English language in the whole of Ghana, and provided symbol options that were both similar to and different from Gurenɛ and English to address this potential concern.

2.3 Agency

These ideologies about linguistic purism, literacy, and social identity ultimately affect decisions that people make about their language and as a result, language and literacy ideologies are also tied to agency. Ahearn defines agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (2010a:28). Ahearn goes on to recognize the “social nature of agency” and what she calls “the
pervasive influence of culture on human intentions, beliefs, actions” (Ahearn 2010a:29). In this view, taking action, such as making decisions, is seen as a complex process affected by numerous internal and external factors.

In regards to language, individuals and the larger community of speakers repeatedly make decisions about the use of their language, such as deciding when to speak it instead of another language or choosing to call it a language versus a dialect. Analyzing these decisions with the agency lens allows me to explain the importance of cultural and social influences, and ideologies, on the decision-making process. Specifically, in my research project, the NLC drew on their language ideologies to make decisions about the development of the language and how it should be written down. As will be outlined further in the methodology section, the NLC, on behalf of the Nabit speech community, made all of the decisions about the Nabit language project. Therefore, it is important to understand the agentive processes at work within the NLC to better understand how and why decisions were made.

2.4 Framework for Research

Language ideologies and agency provide an important framework for answering my first two research questions: (1) How will community involvement influence the development of the Nabit orthography? and (2) What is the most appropriate writing system to use to represent the language of Nabit, as decided by the community? As this is a community-based research project, the NLC made all decisions regarding the Nabit language project and orthography development. This approach recognizes the agency of the Nabit speech community. As well, based on their language ideologies, the language committee decided what orthography was “appropriate” for the Nabit language. Nabit culture, including values and cultural decision-making processes, informed the decision about why a symbol was or was not considered “appropriate” by Nabit
speakers. This was a complex process as there are numerous factors that affect the way that Nabit speakers think about their language. These include political factors such as the political division, which separates the Frafra language communities into districts, social factors such as being recognized as poor and rural in comparison with Gurenɛ speakers, and what other language and writing systems NLC members were familiar with. On a broader scale, the community’s decision to initiate this language project, demonstrates something about their language ideologies, which is that the language is so strongly tied to their culture and identity that it is worth preserving. Therefore, Nabit speakers believe that changing the language by introducing an orthography for a traditionally oral language is worth doing in order to ensure that the language continues to be used.

Language ideologies are also related to my last two research questions: (3) Is Nabit a dialect of the Frafra language or is it a separate but closely related language? and (4) Based on Nabit’s relation to Gurenɛ, should/could Nabit use the already established Gurenɛ orthography? Since language ideologies can influence the categorization of languages as a language or a dialect, this means that language ideology in the wider Ghanaian society could be a significant factor in Nabit’s classification as a dialect of Gurenɛ despite Nabit speakers’ opinion that it is a distinct language. Something I addressed in the introductory chapter, in order to understand how Nabit is related to Gurenɛ, is how people at different levels, such as the government and/or public educators perceive Nabit in relation to Gurenɛ. This can be addressed by examining how the Nabit speech community is defined. Since language use is affected by social organization, Rampton notes that, “when our sense of speech community alters, there are often consequences for the kinds of language practices that we attend to” (2010:274). By redefining the Nabit speech community, as exclusive from Gurenɛ and the other dialects of Frafra, Nabit may be able to
introduce new language practices like writing or speaking Nabit in schools. This has in some ways already been done as a result of the district reorganization, which granted Nabit a unique district separate from the other language groups.

Although the theoretical framework is important for addressing my research questions, so are the methods I use to implement my theoretical analysis. In the next section I will detail the methodology I used to frame my research practices and the methods I used to carry out this research and address my research questions.

2.5 Methodology

While selecting the methodology and methods that I would use for my research I was interested in finding strategies that would support my theoretical analysis but would also be reflective of my approach to the Nabit language project as an outsider joining a community-initiated project. The methodologies that I chose, and the methods that followed out of these, allowed me to answer the research questions I was investigating while also being mindful of my relationship with my research community.

Three methodologies, community-based research, participatory action research, and Indigenous Methodologies, informed the design of my project. Stoecker (2003:35) defines community-based research as collaborative research, which uses multiple sources of knowledge to achieve social change. Community-based research includes elements of several types of research, including participatory action research and service-learning. Participatory action research according to Brydon-Miller *et al.* “embrace[s] the notion of knowledge as socially constructed and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction” (2003:11). Specifically, action research attempts to create “larger-scale democratic social change” (2003:11). Indigenous Methodologies
acknowledge the indigenous experience, and require that research be “by and for indigenous peoples” (Evans et al. 2009:894).

These methodologies were important to the design and implementation of my research because members of the Nabit speech community initiated this project and invited me in as a linguistic anthropologist to assist with the project. Therefore, I wanted to very clearly establish myself as a researcher working in collaboration with community members, not as an outsider trying to take control of the project. My research utilized community-based research because community members initiated the project, and the outcome ultimately affects community members, so it was important that representatives from the community controlled the direction of the project. My role was acting as a linguistic resource to guide the process by providing suggestions about the best orthographies and symbol choices, but I did not make any decisions regarding the Nabit orthography. Participatory action research was an important part of the creation of this project. Nabit speakers’ initiated this project to create change in their community by developing a Nabit orthography and increasing access to education and they asked me to be a part of creating that change. Since I was constantly engaging with community members I became deeply invested in the changes Nabit speakers wanted to see in their communities and the role I could have in assisting with these changes. I also utilized Indigenous Methodologies because my goal in the project was to ensure that the voices of the Nabit people were heard and that Nabit speakers made all decisions so that the research benefitted the indigenous community not just me as the researcher. My choice of sharing Nabit voices is clearly demonstrated in chapters three and four when I include numerous quotations from Nabit speakers.
2.6 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this project extend beyond the requirements of the Research Ethics Board. As I outlined in the previous section, my commitment to community-based research ensured that the project was first and foremost beneficial and fulfilling for community members, not only for me as the researcher. This methodological choice set up my project in an ethical way that allowed me to acknowledge my influence as an outsider in the project and also ensured that control of the project stayed with the community.

The choice to develop an orthography also requires ethical consideration, as there are some potential risks for a language community that is transitioning from orality to literacy. For instance, when sacred knowledge or cultural traditions are written down it becomes harder to control who has access to that information, and as a result secret knowledge may be shared with people who were not originally intended to know (Hinton 2001b; Schreyer 2011). Another potential risk is that orthography development often prioritizes one dialect over another in the standardization process, which can create an unnatural hierarchy and tension between speakers of different dialects (Rudes 2000). There are however several benefits of writing systems; for instance, it is a way to document cultural traditions, as a transitional literacy to bridge to another language, and for personal uses, like writing lists or letters to friends and relatives (Hinton 2001b). To engage ethically in a project like this the benefits must outweigh the risks. However, as I already explained this is a community-based research project so it is the community that must decide if the project is worth the potential risks, not me as the researcher. Since the Nabit community initiated this project, they clearly believe that developing a writing system is worth any potential risks.
To ensure this project met research ethics obligations, I adhered to the ethics protocol of the University of British Columbia, the American Anthropological Association’s Code of Ethics, the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and local models of ethics. There are three levels of permissions that I addressed in this project. First, my project was reviewed and approved by the UBC Okanagan Research Ethics Board. Second, I received permission to conduct research from the Chief of the Nabdam community, Sakoran, on behalf of the Nabdam people. Third, each participant as a member of the language committee or a language interviewee consented to be part of the project on an individual basis.

Whenever possible I gained consent for the project in English, but to gain consent from monolingual Nabit speakers I relied on my bilingual research assistant. When explaining the project and gaining consent, I (or my bilingual research assistant) explained that participation in the project was voluntary and participants were able to leave the project anytime they wanted. I also explained that I would like to write papers and present at conferences about the research I was conducting on the Nabit language, and that by giving consent they were giving me permission to do this. I also asked if people would like to be identified by name in any publications of this research, or if they would prefer I use a pseudonym to maintain anonymity, which no one chose. I asked for permission to audio-record the interviews and take notes, and I also offered to provide copies of the audio-recording to my interviewees. Nabit speakers felt more comfortable giving oral consent than written consent, so I recorded oral consent with my audio-recorder and tracked it on my consent forms.

I provided some sort of honorarium to everyone who worked with me on the project. For my research assistant Josbert, I replaced his salary for the six weeks he worked with me because
he was not working his regular job; I also paid for his dinners and gas for his motorcycle.\(^9\) I gave each of the speakers I interviewed an honorarium of 20 cedi (approximately $8 CAN), as this was the amount that Vida suggested would be appropriate. For the language committee, I provided lunch on the day of our alphabet workshop, as Vida told me that she had been providing food at all of the other meetings.

2.7 Nabit Language Committee (NLC)

Since this was a community based research project, the first step in the research process was to develop a language committee, comprised of elders and respected community members, who would be responsible for making decisions about the writing system on behalf of the community, as it was not practical to try to work with every member of the community. Ideally, the language committee would have been representative of the Nabit speaking community, which means there would be equal representation of men and women, equal representation of all villages, and would be comprised of community members who are well-known and well respected in the community. This would be ideal to ensure that everyone in the Nabit speaking community feels represented on the committee and feels that they can trust the decisions of the committee. In reality, the complexity of developing this committee resulted in unequal representation. The creation of the committee was significant for the project, and as this is a community project, the community therefore controlled the development of the committee. Vida Yakong, my original community collaborator, was the leader of the committee development as she initiated the project and had insight about who would be an asset to the committee, which was established in February 2014. The committee was not static though, and after my interviews two Nabit speakers, Ponka Paul and Samare Patrick Pasure were added to the committee because of their knowledge of the Nabit

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\(^9\) This cost was shared between another researcher and I as we were conducting research simultaneously and both working with Josbert.
language and valuable insight they provided me during the interviews. The committee was made up of a variety of people representing several villages and occupations and this diversity is important to ensure that all Nabdams feel represented on the committee. Please refer to Table 2.1 for more details about the committee members.

**Table 2.1: Nabit Language Committee Membership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Nicholas Kolog</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Thomas Azongo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Dominic Panti</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunwane</td>
<td>Josbert Zure</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Francis Sapaat</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Ponka Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkunszei</td>
<td>Hannah Dok</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Seamstress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkunszei</td>
<td>Maramah Ba’an</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Philomena Yakong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Vida Yakong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lecturer (University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyogbare</td>
<td>N.N. Nayenbil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Peter Banoya</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Samare Patrick Pasure</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Nmabon Dogumdeni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Farmer/Trader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Samson Nwom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Farmer/Adult Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NLC played an important role in the development and implementation of this research project. In their initial meetings in February 2014 the NLC discussed the goals of the project and what they would like to see as the outcome. I wrote a brief synopsis of my research in the third person\(^\text{10}\) so Vida could share it with the committee at meeting prior to my arrival in Ghana, so that they understood the goals of my fieldwork trip and how the NLC would be involved. At this meeting the committee also brainstormed the names of Nabit speakers who I could interview. I asked that the committee recommend mother-tongue Nabit speakers who were

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\(^\text{10}\) Please refer to Appendix A: to see the Research Summary.
elders, as they might remember Nabit words that are no longer used, and if possible, were monolingual speakers as their speech would be less influenced by other languages. The NLC compiled a list of thirty speakers who fit the criteria for interview.

Upon my arrival in Ghana I met with a few committee members, Vida, Josbert, Francis, Nicholas, and Dominic to discuss the project, timeline, funding, and expected outcomes. At this meeting these NLC members had a chance to review the interview script and discuss the speakers they had suggested. Since the committee wanted me to interview significantly more speakers than I had initially anticipated, we decided that I would shorten my interview script to allow me to interview two speakers per day. One of the committee members, Dominic, also volunteered to be my first interviewee to allow me to check the length of my newly shortened script.

The main role of the committee in my research was their participation in the Alphabet Design Workshop that I hosted at the end of my fieldwork. The workshop, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, was the culmination of my research in Ghana. I met with the committee for one day and assisted them in deciding on a Nabit orthography. At this workshop, the committee members made all of the decisions about which symbols would be included in the alphabet, based on my suggestions and explanations, a process which aligns with my community-based research methodology of the community controlling the project.

2.8 Interviews

In this research project I was collecting two types of language data. Firstly, I was documenting the phonology, or sounds, of the Nabit language to allow me to make suggestions about which symbols should be included in the Nabit orthography. Secondly, I was collecting opinions from Nabit speakers about their perspective about the Nabit language and their interest in writing in
Nabit. To gather Nabit language data, I adapted a comprehensive interview script that was used in the Kala language project and used with permission from Schreyer.\textsuperscript{11} The interview was divided into four sections. Part one focused on personal background of the interviewee, such as where they grew up and their knowledge of other languages. This information was important for understanding the perspective that the Nabit speaker was bringing to the interview and also any differences in their speech, which might result from their knowledge of other languages. Part two of the interview was the extended word list to document the phonology of Nabit. The word list included words for local foods, plants, and cultural items, short sentences and phrases, as well as numerals. I adapted the word list based on research of Ghana, studying which plants and animals were indigenous to the country. I also asked my community collaborators for feedback on the word list, and it was revised by Vida Yakong in 2012 and was further revised in 2014 with the help of Josbert. Their revisions were invaluable as they were able to add terms for local items that I never would have thought to include. Part three asked interviewees to share a story about Nabit life. Listening to Nabit speakers share a story was a chance for me to hear the Nabit language spoken naturally, but also to document stories that can later be transcribed and written in the new orthography. As well, listening to a story specifically about Nabit life helped me to learn more about the culture and customs. In Part four of the interview, I collected attitudes and opinions about the language and about how speakers hope to be able to use Nabit in the future. I was especially interested in hearing what Nabit speakers’ thought about the creation of a Nabit alphabet and understanding what they wanted to be able to write in Nabit. These questions also helped me to understand the language ideologies that each speaker held about Nabit. In particular, I was interested in seeing how people perceive Nabit in relation to Gurenc, to better understand how similar or different the languages are from a cultural perspective. This cultural

\textsuperscript{11} Please refer to Appendix B: to see the full interview script.
perspective on the Nabit language is important because it allows me to highlight the opinions of Nabit speakers, which suits my Indigenous Methodology approach.

Since I had conducted preliminary data elicitation interviews with Vida in 2012, I already had some knowledge of the Nabit language but it was important for me to document more speakers of the language before proposing a final orthography. Documenting more Nabit speakers was important for several reasons. Firstly, I was able to interview both male and female speakers to account for any gender differences in the language. Secondly, I was able to interview speakers from several villages to check for dialect diversity. Thirdly, I was able to account for individual speech variations of Nabit speakers. Lastly, I was able to involve more community members making this project more collaborative and more community-centered to better align with my theoretical and methodological framework. Therefore, as part of my research I travelled to Ghana for six weeks from May 18-June 29 2014, in order to record speech from other community members.

While developing my research plan I initially anticipated interviewing twelve Nabit speakers, two men and two women from three different Nabit villages, specifically the three villages most involved with Project GROW. However, when I arrived in Ghana, the NLC recommended 30 potential interviewees, as mentioned above, which caused me to significantly adjust my research plans. The interviewees suggested by the NLC were all Nabit speakers with excellent command of the language that they thought I would benefit from working with. However, after I explained the importance of equal gender and village representation in my documentation, the NLC made it clear that I did not have to interview all of the speakers they suggested. Working with my collaborator Josbert, I organized my time so that I could interview as many of the suggested speakers as possible, while also ensuring that all Nabit villages and
both genders were equally represented. Although it is important to include both genders in any language project to record any gender differences in language use, it was particularly important to me to ensure equal representation of men and women, as much as possible, since this project originated from Project GROW which aims to provide opportunities to women that they were not traditionally given. In order to cover as much of the Nabdam district as possible, to account for potential dialect diversity, we decided to interview one man and one woman from ten different villages, resulting in twenty interviews. However, I became very ill early in my fieldwork stay and we had to cancel and reschedule several interviews. In the end we decided to reduce the number of interviews I was doing to ensure that I had time to properly review my interviews and prepare for the Alphabet Design Workshop. Josbert helped me to select villages that we could remove from the interview schedule, suggesting which villages were nearest together and would be represented by another village. Finally, we selected six villages in which to conduct interviews. We tried whenever possible to interview speakers from the list suggested by the NLC. However, some villages did not have representatives on the list and in those cases we relied on suggestions from NLC members. For example, Francis suggested both of the speakers I interviewed in Nangodi, and Samare suggested the woman I interviewed from Pelungo. In the case of the Sakote village, I ended up interviewing two women because both of them were highly recommended by the NLC.

In the end I conducted data elicitation interviews with thirteen speakers in the Nabdam District, one man and one woman from six different villages Kongo, Daliga, Pelungo, Sakote, Nyobok, and Nangodi, plus one extra women in Sakote. The full details of the interviewees can be found in Table 2.2.12

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12 Please refer to Appendix C: for more information about interviews.
Table 2.2: Nabit Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Daknab Sapak</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Dominic Zuure</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Dugdarg Badugma</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Ponka Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangodi</td>
<td>Binimami Yen</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangodi</td>
<td>Boyadan Kurug</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Bersiki Tii</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Pitomso Yamigla</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Mvokanye Nab</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Samare Patrick Pasure</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Nmabon Dogumdeni</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Yenbelung Gulugmo</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Man Yam (Bob)</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The speakers selected by the NLC were mostly elders who were mother-tongue Nabit speakers. Most of them had not been formally educated in any other language so their speech was less influenced by English and other Ghanaian languages than other Nabit speakers. My local collaborator Josbert contacted all interviewees on my behalf and also scheduled all of the interviews. Each interview took between one and three hours, and the length varied mostly depending on how long our discussion in part four of the interview script took. I audio-recorded each interview using a portable audio recorder and also transcribed the interview. I transcribed parts one and two of the interview in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)\(^1\) during the interview and I took notes in English during parts three and four of the interview. I transcribed part four of the interview in English after the interview, which will be discussed later.

Since only four of the thirteen Nabit speakers I interviewed spoke English, I was dependent on Josbert, my research assistant to translate for me. When I arrived in Ghana I had

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\(^1\) The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a writing system used by linguists to transcribe languages. The IPA uses a one symbol to one sound system, so it can be used to write any language in the world. For more information please visit: [https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org](https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org)
some knowledge of Nabit due to my previous research and could hold a very brief conversation, but nothing more complex than “hello, how are you?” Even at the end of my six-week stay, when my conversational fluency had improved tremendously, I was still well below the level of complexity that was required to translate the interviews, and therefore was dependent on Josbert to translate. In order to facilitate the translation process Josbert and I met before I began the interview process to discuss the interview script in detail. I explained why I was asking each of the questions and what kind of information I was looking for in their responses. Josbert also attended my second interview, which was with Bob, a Nabit speaker who was fluent in English. During this interview Josbert was able to see how I asked the questions and what kind of follow-up questions I asked to get the information I was looking for in. This interview also allowed us to work together in an interview for the first time in English to iron out kinks in the interview process.

In interviews with monolingual speakers I was dependent on Josbert’s translations to facilitate the interview process. For part one of the interview, Josbert translated the questions I asked from English into Nabit and then translated Nabit responses into English for me. For part three of the process Josbert asked the speaker to share a story in Nabit and then translated the story the speaker shared into English. Josbert explained the story in English, but gave an overview rather than a word by word translation. For part three of the interview Josbert translated the interview questions from English to Nabit, and then the interview responses from Nabit to English. After Josbert translated the responses, I would often ask follow-up questions and he would repeat the translation process, but as the interview process continued he began to ask the follow-up questions before I did.
Translating part two of the interview, the extended word list, was the most complicated portion of the interview. For this section I said a word in English, Josbert translated it to Nabit, and then the speaker repeated the word that Josbert said. This was an imperfect translation and language elicitation method as interviewees could have been influenced by Josbert’s pronunciation and tone. To reconcile this, Josbert would explain at the beginning of this section that the speaker should say the word however they felt was correct and did not need to copy him exactly. Josbert also asked speakers to tell us if they thought a word was incorrect, borrowed, or if they could think of another word instead of the word Josbert had said. A better way to conduct this portion of the interview that many linguists and linguistic anthropologists who document languages use is to conduct the interview in a facilitation language. For example, Schreyer conducted her language documentation interviews in Tok Pisin, a lingua franca of Papua New Guinea (Schreyer and Wagner 2013). However, since I was working with monolingual Nabit speakers there was no common language I could use to conduct language interviews in. Another option would have been to use images or gestures instead of having Josbert translate words into Nabit. I decided that this process would be too tedious for my interviews though, as my extended word list was nearly four hundred words and sentences. As well, since my research assistant was a mother-tongue Nabit speaker, I believed that the potential for error in translation was minimal. I did, however, decide to use gestures to document body parts, pointing to one body part and having the speaker name that body part. I would then say the word for many [bazoʔò]14 to elicit for purposes of documentation the plural form of the word. When necessary Josbert helped translate this section also.

14 All sounds and words written in the IPA will be indicated by [], including allophones. Phonemes of Nabit will be written in / /. All Nabit letters will be indicated by <> and any additional information in quotes will be indicated by { }. Any writing in the new Nabit orthography will be in italics.
Following the interviews, I reviewed all of the transcripts and interviews. During this review phase, I was checking for differences in pronunciation between men and women and any differences in pronunciation between villages. I was also looking for minimal pairs, meaning words that differ in only one sound. The significance of finding minimal pairs is that it allows you to determine which sounds in the language are phonemes and which sounds are allophones. Phonemes are sounds that cause a difference in meaning and according to most orthographic conventions require a unique symbol in the alphabet. Allophones are sounds that do not cause a change in meaning, and therefore can usually be represented by the same letters. Finding minimal pairs is, therefore, incredibly important to understanding the phonology of the language.

I then scheduled follow-up interviews with four interviewees to review sounds, ask questions, and clarify complex words. During these interviews I also documented a Swadesh word list in Nabit with each speaker. The Swadesh word list was developed by linguist Morris Swadesh (1971) and can be used to analyze languages to understand their historical development and compare languages to determine how closely they are related. The word list is a list of 100 words that are considered to be slow-changing as they are less likely to have been borrowed or influenced by other languages, which makes the words ideal for comparing between languages. During interviews I documented and transcribed the 100 words in Nabit, and then compared them with the same 100 words collected in Gurenɛ by Schaefer in 1975 in order to see how similar the two languages are linguistically. According to my preliminary analysis (Giffen 2013) comparing the Swadesh word list I documented with Vida and Schaefer’s Gurenɛ word list the two languages are significantly different. I collected the Swadesh word list to supplement my examination of differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ. However, I have not focused on

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15 Please refer to Appendix D: to see the Swadesh Word List I used.
analyzing this information as it is beyond the scope of the orthography development and this thesis but I plan to return to it for future research.

Once I finished the review interviews and reanalyzed my data, I began to prepare for the alphabet workshop. Specifically, I compared the new data from my 2014 interviews with the preliminary data and orthography I developed with Vida in 2012. This allowed me to see what changes might be necessary to make to the preliminary orthography. I also compared my new data with the information I had about the phonology of Gurenɛ and the Gurenɛ orthography to be able to make suggestions about how the Nabit orthography could be similar or different to the Gurenɛ orthography. The full description of the alphabet workshop appears in Chapter Four.

2.9 Participant Observation

Participant observation also informed my study of Nabit. Participant observation, as a research method, is the engagement of the researcher in day-to-day tasks and activities with the community of study. As Burgess explains, “participant observation involves examining social behavior as it occurs rather than as it is reported through interviews and questionnaires” (2008:14). As I was trying to fit in with the community, I did not carry around a notebook or recorder during my participant observation sessions. Instead I recorded my observations in my fieldnotes as soon as I got home or at the end of every day.

I used participant observations in two places. Firstly, I used participant observation in the Nabdam villages. I travelled to the villages regularly, as nearly all of my interviews were conducted at people’s homes. I also visited the villages on other occasions, including when I met the chief and when I participated in a Project GROW ceremony. Participant observation at these times complemented my research interviews as it allowed me to record information about Nabit in use such as how often Nabit is spoken, in what domains, and if there were any instances of
writing. This helped me to better understand the role that Nabit plays in village life and what possible benefits literacy could have for Nabit speakers. I also used participant observation when I was in the city I stayed in, Bolgatanga. In Bolgatanga the main language of communication is Gurene. However, I would intentionally speak Nabit to people I interacted with such as the waitresses at the hotel, the shopkeepers, and the seamstresses I visited. This helped me to understand how Gurene speakers responded to Nabit being spoken in a predominately Gurene area based on whether they understood me or “corrected” my speech. This helped to inform my research because many of my interactions with Gurene speakers supported what Nabit speakers shared with me in interviews, that Gurene and Nabit are not mutually intelligible and that they have distinctly different statuses.

2.10 Alphabet Design Workshop

Following my language interviews and extensive phonology review, I hosted an Alphabet Design Workshop to assist the community in developing the orthography. An Alphabet Design Workshop is an orthography development process in which community members discuss, analyze, and practice writing their language, usually facilitated by a linguist/linguistic anthropologist who can provide linguistic analysis and orthographic suggestions. This type of orthography development is also known as the midwife approach (Fitzgerald et al. 2012). I chose this method because it allows community representatives to make all of the decisions about the orthography, which aligns with my theoretical approach of engaging in community-based research. My workshop to discuss the development of the Nabit orthography was informed by the workshops hosted by Catherine Easton (2000) and Christine Schreyer and John Wagner (2013). Easton has worked extensively in Papua New Guinea (PNG) developing orthographies and has developed a manual for community orthography development in PNG (Easton 2000;
Easton and Wroge 2002). Christine Schreyer and John Wagner worked in collaboration with the Kala language community in six villages in PNG to develop an orthography for the Kala language (Schreyer 2015b; Schreyer and Wagner 2013). Both Easton and Schreyer and Wagner demonstrate how community involvement and community control of the project result in successful orthography development.

Easton proposes two week Alphabet Design Workshops (ADWs) wherein different members of a community work collectively to form a type of “trial” orthography for their language. Typically, a linguist will assist the community members, but the community members themselves make all decisions regarding the orthography. ADWs aim at creating a writing system that will be useful for the community and best serve its needs. This will hopefully result directly from the decisions being made by the speakers themselves. Additionally, speakers having decision-making power in the construction of the orthography encourages a feeling of ownership over it, which in turn helps guarantee its practicality and continued use. This process gives speakers agency in the process. To ensure that the decisions made about the writing system are continually addressed and that any issues that arise can be resolved, ADWs follow a circular pattern to assess and reassess any challenges and changes that may need to be made. Firstly, participants read/write the language, then identify problem areas, they then discuss problem areas, make decisions, and then test decisions. Several issues can be addressed in a shorter time frame if the alphabet is used for the duration of the workshops, and this also allows for many community members to be indirectly involved in the process, as committee members can discuss and consult with other community members between meeting times over the course of the ADW (Easton 2000).
Schreyer and Wagner utilized a shorter version of an Alphabet Design Workshop for Kala, for which they created a two-day alphabet workshop for the Kala Language Committee. Schreyer, the team’s linguistic anthropologist, used the first day to review the sounds present in Kala, and make suggestions as to how to represent them orthographically. The committee debated all of the letters and symbols, and after the session they reflected on the discussion and considered any potential issues. Then on the second day of the workshop, the letters were discussed again, with emphasis on any that had been controversial the first day, and then new questions were presented. The committee made final decisions about the orthography at the end of the second day. Schreyer and Wagner then hosted a week long workshop, to teach more community members how to use the new alphabet. Schreyer and Wagner returned to the community in 2013, three years after the orthography was developed. On this visit Schreyer and Wagner reviewed how the community had been using the writing system, and held workshops to teach more community members how to use the orthography (Schreyer Submitted; Schreyer and Wagner 2013).

I held a one-day Alphabet Design Workshop for the NLC to develop the Nabit orthography. The workshop was only open to NLC members because the NLC decided that, since they were going to be the only people deciding on the orthography they wanted to be the only participants at the workshop. During the workshop I discussed the preliminary alphabet developed by Vida Yakong, Christine Schreyer, and I in the summer of 2012. I also discussed changes that I noticed based on information from the interviews I conducted in 2014. Lastly, I discussed suggestions I had for the orthography. During the workshop we finalized the orthography, brainstormed words to represent all of the sounds that could be used in an alphabet book, and translated words to be used in a Nabit book-making project by some of my UBC
The book-making project was part of UBC Okanagan’s education GRIP (Guided Reflective Inquiry Process), which involved seven Bachelor of Education students working with two local schools to develop Nabit storybooks. PhD student Cindy Bourne, who is studying the development of culturally relevant international learning opportunities, led this project. The workshop will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

### 2.11 Orthographic Considerations

Aside from ensuring community involvement, I also had to address some other issues in the development of the Nabit orthography. In the opening chapter of his book, *Spelling and Society*, Mark Sebba outlines several of the social factors that influence orthography development. Some of the most relevant social factors for the Nabit orthography are the role that the orthography will play in literacy (Sebba 2007:13) and the intended function of the orthography, meaning what purpose the orthography will serve (Sebba 2007:23). Both of these factors were important for me to consider because the purpose of this orthography is to promote literacy and it is intended to be used both in education and in everyday home life. Therefore, I needed to ensure that the orthography fit with these end goals.

Another aspect of orthography development I considered is what script would be used. Since the official language of Ghana is English and people either know English or want to learn English, we decided that the Nabit orthography should use the Roman script, with some necessary additions to represent sounds that are not represented in the Roman script. In her work with the Shinzwani language, Harriet Ottenheimer studied the various orthographies that had been employed for the language over the past four centuries. One orthography Ottenheimer (2001:21) addressed was the Shinzwani orthography that used the Arabic script, even though Shinzwani has more phonemes than Arabic. This highlights the issue that using a script that was
not designed for the language can cause. While documenting the phonology of Nabit I realized that I too would encounter this problem and that I would, therefore, need to add symbols because the Roman alphabet could not adequately represent all of the sounds of Nabit.

The addition of new symbols may be controversial in a community though. In the case of the Touo language, Terrill and Dunn found that many speakers held strong opinions on what could be considered a “proper” letter. Often the symbols used in Roman-based writing systems are what many speakers were familiar with. This meant that they often did not like IPA symbols, and did not view diacritics favorably (Terrill and Dunn 2003). Another linguist, David Snyder, has conducted research on writing systems in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and has focused on understanding which symbols are used in orthographies in PNG. Snyder (1994) discussed some of the 300 symbols outside of the Roman alphabet used to represent unique sounds in orthographies in PNG. Since Nabit has some unique sounds that could not be captured by the Roman alphabet, Snyder’s work provided some useful symbols I considered suggesting to the Nabit Language Committee to be used in the Nabit orthography. However, since many language groups in Ghana use the Roman script as the basis for their orthographies, they have already had to add symbols to denote sounds not represented in the Roman alphabet. These symbols made good suggestions for the Nabit orthography, since some Nabit speakers who could write in other Ghanaian languages were already familiar with these symbols.

In an attempt to avoid adding letters or adapting a script to fit a language, another option is the use of diacritics to mark additional components of the language such as tone or nasalization. Using diacritics needs to be carefully analyzed though, because some studies have shown that an overuse of diacritics actually hinders people’s ability to read (Bernard et al. 2002). Other studies have demonstrated that marking all tones in a language is not necessary in writing
for native speakers to be able to read effectively (Bird 1999; Roberts 2009). Based on my analysis I discovered that although high and low tones exist in Nabit, these tones do not affect native speaker’s ability to understand a word or phrase, but several speakers pointed out that when I said words with the incorrect tone they sounded wrong. I considered other potential uses for diacritics in the Nabit orthography, such as for marking nasal vowels, nasal consonants, or in place of digraphs.

Another issue that often arises in orthography development is standardization, meaning that there are rules that govern the use of the orthography to ensure that it is used the same for every dialect and in every location. Standardization can be an issue when dealing with several dialects but there can be options to allow more diversity in the writing system. Two options are consensus spelling and flexible spelling. Consensus spelling requires negotiation and collaboration between representatives of different dialects to decide which features of each dialect will be included in the orthography. This system works best for languages with very few dialects. Flexible spelling allows each dialect to spell words in accordance with how they are pronounced in each dialect (Rudes 2000). The flexible spelling system, termed the “parallel dialect approach” by Schreyer (Submitted), is used in the Kala orthography, which has four dialects (Schreyer and Wagner 2013). Since I worked with only Nabit speakers I did not need to account for dialect diversity between the five Frafra dialects, however, I did notice slight variations between speakers from the six different Nabit villages. Since the language committee ultimately decided to use the same orthography as Gurenɛ, a system of flexible spelling seems to best describe the relationship between Nabit and Gurenɛ writing as both languages use the same symbols but spell words differently.
2.12 Transcription and Coding

As previously mentioned, transcription of the interviews happened in two parts. I transcribed part one of the interview, background information, and part two, the extended word list, in the IPA during the interviews and revised the transcriptions while I was still in Ghana. I have not transcribed part three of the interviews, stories, yet but it is a future project. I transcribed part four of the interview, attitudes and opinions about Nabit, when I returned to Canada. I transcribed part four of the interview in English, but made note of when Josbert and the interviewee spoke in Nabit. I transcribed the interviews word-for-word including pauses, filler words, and stutters. Since this is a community-based research project it is important to me to include the voices of Nabit speakers in my thesis, so having these interviews transcribed in full allows me to use direct quotes to support the arguments I make.

After I transcribed all of the interviews I coded them based on themes that emerged. The three themes that were prominent in these interviews were language and cultural endangerment, purity, and the Nabit orthography. Since I was only using three themes and the interviews were quite short, I coded part four of the interviews using the highlight feature in Microsoft Word, rather than using a coding software.

2.13 Summary

I chose my theoretical and methodological frameworks because they help me to best explore the connections between Nabit language, culture and identity. Language ideologies that speakers’ hold help us to understand what people think about their language, what they value in their language, and how their language is connected to their culture. Using this theoretical framework allows me to analyze the language ideologies that Nabit speakers hold and how they influenced the development of the Nabit orthography. Since this is a community-based research project and
since I need to understand what Nabit speakers think about their language and the development of an orthography, I worked very closely with Nabit speakers in my research process through interviews and the Alphabet Design Workshop. In the next chapter I discuss the language interviews I conducted in further detail and explain the themes that emerged, which illustrate language ideologies that are prevalent in the Nabit speaking community.
Chapter 3: Preservation, Purity, and Progress: Nabit Language Ideologies

3.1 Outline
In this chapter I explore and analyze the three main themes that emerged from the language interviews I conducted with Nabit speakers. As explained in Chapter two, I interviewed thirteen Nabit speakers to document the phonology of Nabit and to collect attitudes and opinions about the Nabit language and the orthography development project. This chapter will focus on the responses from part four of the interview which asked questions about differences between men’s and women’s speech in Nabit, how similar or different Nabit is to Gurenɛ, and what people wanted to be able to write in the new orthography. Although I relied on an interview script, the content of the questions were not static, and several questions evolved as my interviews progressed. As well, based on the discussions I was having with Nabit speakers some questions were added to the interview script, like “which village(s) speaks the ‘purest’ Nabit?” Lastly, I would like to mention that as a researcher engaged in community-based research, I believe it is important to share the voices of the Nabit speakers I worked with and therefore this chapter is infused with numerous quotes from my interview participants.¹⁶

The first theme, language and cultural endangerment, highlights the challenges people are facing in speaking Nabit. In particular, the issues people had regarding forgotten words and special language for rituals that some children are no longer learning. The second theme is “pure” Nabit, which explains how Nabit is being influenced by neighbouring language groups, some of the distinct differences between the Frafra dialects with examples, and where people

¹⁶ My research assistant Josbert translated my questions from English into Nabit, and interviewees’ responses from Nabit to English during the interviews. Therefore, all quotations are based on the translation provided by Josbert. All interviews required translation except Ponka Paul, Samare Patrick Pasure, Man (Bob) Yam, and Dominic Zuure who are fluent English speakers and were able to complete the interview in English.
believe the “purest” Nabit can be found in the Nabdam district. The third theme, Nabit orthography, covers Nabit speaker’s attitudes towards the development of a Nabit alphabet, including discussions about how Nabit has been written previously, why people want to write, and what specifically they wish could be written down. These themes do not exist in isolation though. Each theme is interconnected with the others and ideas expressed in one theme affect other themes. As will be seen in some of the quotes, part of the reason that Nabit is endangered is because it was unwritten, and the fact that Nabit is endangered influenced many people’s thoughts about developing a Nabit orthography. As well, conceptions of language purity affected people’s thoughts about how Nabit should be written and how the language should be maintained.

To better explain my interview process, I have included the following excerpt from my fieldnotes. While this is a specific interview, it is a good representation of most of my interviews in terms of set-up, interruptions, and general mood.

Josbert and I got on the motorcycle and drove the short distance to our second interview. We sat down on some chairs under a large tree in the field, while we waited for the man to come out and join us, and I quickly ate a protein bar because I knew I wouldn’t make it through the next interview without it. An elderly man, Pitomso Yamigla, came out and joined us. Since this interview had not been arranged in advance Josbert made introductions and asked Pitomso if he had time to meet with us. Josbert explained that Vida was his aunt, and the creator of Project GROW, and that I was a researcher from Canada studying the Nabit language and making an alphabet to help people write. He told him that I wanted to interview him to listen to Nabit and ask some questions. Pitomso agreed to the interview and Josbert explained that I was going to use my audio recorder to record the interview. Just as we were about to start we were joined by his teenage son, who he introduced to us. I turned on the audio recorder and we began the consent process. Josbert asked Pitomso to repeat after him and say the equivalent of, “I, Pitomso Yamigla, consent to be a part of the interview process” in Nabit. After he said it Josbert asked if it was okay for me to use his real name when I write papers and talk about my research. Pitomso agreed. We then began documenting the word list, and a couple of words in, Pitomso’s neighbor came over and joined us. The interview went fairly well, except that when I would try to repeat a word more than once, he would yell the word, as if the problem was my
hearing rather than my inability to produce some Nabit sounds correctly, which Josbert and I both found amusing ... At the end of the interview I practiced my Nabit on him and said [mpoʔa niʔi zi nm] which translates to “thank you for sitting with me.” When we paid him he was so grateful and told me that God would bless me, which has actually been very common when I give people their honorarium.

(Giffen, fieldnotes, June 7, 2014)

Figure 3.1: Robyn and Josbert on the motorcycle heading to an interview (Photo by C. Bourne May 31, 2014)
3.2 Language and Cultural Endangerment

The language is dying, yes and the death of our language is the death of our culture.

(Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014)

In this quotation, Samare perfectly sums up the concerns of Nabit speakers and language activists worldwide: the loss of a language means the loss of its associated culture (Crystal 2002; Hinton 2001a; Nettle and Romaine 2000). Although Nabit is not yet critically endangered, as described in Chapter One, it is at risk of falling out of use as a first language among youth, and Nabit speakers are concerned about the impact this could have on their culture and traditions. Some speakers are concerned about globalization. For example, Bob, another Nabit speaker, explained this concern in this way:

A lot of our culture is getting missing because of the global age. When we were young boys, children at home, children in the night, before our mothers would
finish the food and we would come and eat, or after we have eaten, the old lady in the house will put a mat and sit down so that we, these children, will all come and sit around. Then she will start telling us stories, telling us stories, and some of those stories were creative, they were putting knowledge into the children. Yes, but now when someone opens a video or a TV set then all that disappears, the video, the TV, the radios, the music, and also for us is letting all these things to go away.

(Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014)

The new era of technology is changing the way that people interact and pass cultural knowledge on from one generation to another. Several Nabit speakers told me that they do not share stories the way that they used to, and as a result some speakers (Bersiki, Binimami, Daknab, Dugdarg) were not able to remember a story that they could share with me, which was part of the interview process. On the motorcycle ride home from our last interview, I asked Josbert if he knew why so many women did not have stories to tell us. Josbert was surprised that women did not have stories because he said that storytelling was traditionally done by women when they would gather their children after dinner and tell them stories (Giffen, fieldnotes, June 11, 2014).

Another reason for the slowing transmission of language and cultural traditions is increased ability to travel beyond the villages. This has led to Nabit speakers learning other languages, and some speakers have prioritized teaching languages other than Nabit to their children. Nmabone explained it to me this way:

They prefer speaking a different language to the child instead of Nabit and that is their own point of view. Especially English, some will just give birth to the children and start speaking English to the children and the child might not be able to speak Nabit very well…That it is common, especially those who travel to Kumasi, Accra, with their children. They go there [and] they won’t speak Nabit to the child there; they will speak Twi, the language spoken there, to the child. They will bring the child home and tell you oh my child doesn’t understand Nabit only that language she speaks…it is mostly those who travel.

(Nmabone, Interview, June 2, 2014)

This increased travel between villages and to distant cities in Ghana has also increased intermarriages, another significant cause of language and cultural change, because the children
usually learn the languages of both parents, although one is often prioritized over the other. Intermarriage creates challenges to endangered languages around the world, and often results in children being raised in a lingua franca rather than the endangered language that only one of the parents speaks. This can been seen in cases such as the regional language Tok Pisin spoken by children instead of the indigenous language Kala in areas Papua New Guinea (Schreyer 2015b) and Portuguese spoken instead of Amazonian indigenous languages in areas of South America (Shulist 2013). In the case of Nabit children a lingua franca is not introduced, but there is a negotiation between the two parent’s languages. Samare gave the following example:

I can be a Nabit then I go to a Guren ɛ speaking area and marry a Guren ɛ girl and come here. Then the children will be given birth to and the man is not always stable. You see a man is not always stable it is the woman who is stable who is always at home and the children grows up with the woman you see so the language that the woman speaks the children tries to pick up that one faster than that of the man. You see and some of the words remain in them, they remain in the children so it will take some time before they try to change for the indigenous Nabit words.  
(Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014)

Samare raises an interesting point here, that often it is the mother’s language that has the most influence on children. While it would be unfair to say that men, meaning fathers and grandfathers, do not influence the language development of children, in the Nabit context women, meaning mothers and grandmothers, have a more significant effect. This is likely a result of traditional gender roles, because as Samare notes, children grow up at home with their mothers who are the primary caregivers so children, therefore, learn the language of their mother. This important role of women in intergenerational language transmission, as primary caregivers, can also been seen in indigenous language transmission in North America, in the case of Southern Tuchone, spoken in the Yukon, (Ferguson 2011), Secwepemc spoken in British Columbia (Mortenson 2008), and N’syilxcn spoken in British Columbia and Washington (Johnson 2013). In these cases women, and particularly grandmothers, play the largest role in
language revitalization. As a result of travel and these intermarriages Nabit is no longer the mother-tongue of all Nabdams. As explained by Nmabone and Samare, some children are learning Nabit as a second language after English, Gurene, or Akan, or not at all. A key to language maintenance and revitalization is creating new speakers (Fishman 1991; Hinton 2001a; Schreyer 2011) so this slowing rate of language transmission could significantly increase the level of endangerment of the Nabit language.

Nabit speakers explained to me again and again that the Nabit language is closely tied to Nabit culture, and that to understand one you must understand the other. Although Nabit speakers consider Nabit to be the same in all domains, meaning they do not recognize a formal register and informal register, there are some differences in the way the language is used depending on the context. These differences are important aspects of communicative competence in Nabit, and to achieve fluency in Nabit, speakers must learn what is culturally appropriate (Hymes 2001). As Dominic explains, “take for example if, let’s say, a man is worshiping his idols\(^ {17}\) the language he will use there will be formal. It will be different from when he is calling or chatting” (Dominic, Interview, May 25, 2014). The language can be different because of the topics that are discussed or the terminologies that are used. Daknab explained that the setting dictates the topics of discussion so, “if it is a meeting or a ritual, let’s say the flooring, for instance, they should be talking about what to add to what, to make up things {referring to the plaster compound}, if it is funeral they should be talking about soothsaying\(^ {18}\) like the traditional consultation kind of thing” (Daknab, Interview, June 9, 2014). The other significant difference about these events is the gender divide. Yenbelung told me that, only men are involved in traditional soothsaying, and only women take part in plastering the floors, which provides each

\(^{17}\) An idol is a material object representing a deity.

\(^{18}\) Soothsaying is a type of traditional consultation, wherein a consultant known as a soothsayer advises people.
gender the opportunity to discuss private things away from the opposite gender (Yenbelung, Interview, June 2, 2014). Although you can discuss a broader range of topics in some situations, other situations, such as funerals, are very limited in what is considered appropriate conversation. For example, Dugdarg told me, “when you see me in the funeral you only greet, but you don’t welcome it’s a norm that you are not supposed to tell somebody welcome in the funeral” (Dugdarg, Interview, May 31, 2014). This demonstrates the significant affect that language can have on cultural practices. Someone’s choice of words, saying [toma] for hello, instead of [ɪbɪgwi] for welcome at a funeral, can mean the difference between being well received at a funeral and offending someone.

Some situations also have very specific terminology that is used, which distinguishes the language from casual, everyday Nabit. For instance, a Nabit speaker who is a soothsayer, or traditional consultant, told me that, “when I am doing certain things the words I will use will be different from the ordinary way of speaking. When we are doing consultations we don’t call millet like the [ki] we will call it [zot]” (Pitomso, Interview, June 7, 2014). Other instances where special terminologies can be used is in storytelling. In a story a rabbit is not referred to by the usual name [soʔoŋ], instead it is called [sambula] (Samare, Interview June 10, 2014). Therefore, although there are differences in language, be it topic of conversation or terminology, Nabit speakers consider Nabit to be the same in all domains.

There are also several idiomatic expressions in Nabit that speakers must be aware of to understand Nabit fully. Samare shared one of them with me:

Maybe a mountain has run down in this village, the mountain has run down, to mean the chief is dead. So that now that you are a matured language speaker in that language community when this thing is said then you tend to say it’s serious. Oh then the one who doesn’t do, ah the mountain has run down here means what? The mountain has run down here means what? They will go around asking this
question, until you explain that expression he will never know but you know it and it is part of your language.  

(Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014)

This idiomatic phrase, which could also be considered a metaphor, is used as a subtle way to explain that the chief has passed away. Metaphors can play an incredibly important role in language and are used differently by different cultures and language groups (Basso 1989). As Basso says, “for it is in metaphor—perhaps more dramatically than in any other form of symbolic expression—that language and culture come together and display their fundamental inseparability” (1989:79). Learning metaphors in a language is, therefore, an important element of developing communicative competence. When I asked Nabit speakers about learning, specifically about how they teach children the Nabit language, they told me that children learn it from being immersed in it. Across cultures there are numerous styles of language acquisition. According to Ochs and Schieffelin (2001) language acquisition and socialization are interrelated, meaning children learn how to speak as they become members of the community, and the reverse, children also become members of the community as they learn the language. This relationship of learning language and also learning how to behave in the culture is supported by what Boyadan told me: “that it’s about involving the children in some of these performances, so that as they grow up they grow up with the tradition they will get to know” (Boyadan, Interview, June 11, 2014). Therefore, in order for children to learn the terminology and expressions that accompany cultural traditions they must experience them. The reverse is also true, in order to continue these traditions, the terminologies must be taught, because without them these cultural practices cannot be done. As Pitomso said, “when you really don’t know certain terms you can’t do the consultation” (Pitomso, Interview, June 7, 2014).
Some words have already been lost in Nabit. On numerous occasions during my interviews I had speakers tell me that they could not remember a word for a plant or animal, and often they were unsure whether they had forgotten the word or if they never learned it. One such word is the Nabit equivalent of paddle. Although everyone knew the word for canoe, [ãːruŋ], there was no consensus on the word for paddle. The most common was [ãːruŋ paowk], but one speaker, Dominic, called it a [ãːruŋ dɔr] meaning canoe stick, another speaker, Yenbelung, called it [ãːruŋ naba] meaning canoe legs, and two speakers could not remember the word for it, as can be seen in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Paddle (in IPA)</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Daknab Sapak</td>
<td>vugir</td>
<td>paddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daliga</td>
<td>Dominic Zuure</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ dɔr</td>
<td>canoe stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Dugdarg Badugma</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongo</td>
<td>Ponka Paul</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ dibil</td>
<td>canoe stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangodi</td>
<td>Binimami Yen</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ paowk</td>
<td>canoe wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangodi</td>
<td>Boyadan Kurug</td>
<td>kwa paowk</td>
<td>water paddling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Bersiki Tii</td>
<td>dam paowk</td>
<td>canoe wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyobok</td>
<td>Pitomso Yamigla</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ paowk</td>
<td>canoe wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Mvokanye Nab</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelungu</td>
<td>Samare Patrick Pasure</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ paowk</td>
<td>canoe wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Nmabon Dogumdeni</td>
<td>dagarhok</td>
<td>wood for paddling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Yenbelung Gulugmo</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ naba</td>
<td>canoe legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakote</td>
<td>Man Yam (Bob)</td>
<td>ɑːruŋ paowk</td>
<td>canoe wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is possible that no word ever existed, most of the speakers I interviewed believe that there was a word they just could not remember it, since canoeing is not a common practice anymore. Speakers of the Manindala dialect of Kala experienced a similar issue with a lost word. Since there are no wallabies near the village, they had forgotten the Kala word for wallaby, however, they were able to borrow the word from another dialect (Schreyer 2015b). In the future,
Nabit speakers may also decide to borrow words from Gurene or the other Frafra dialects to replace some of these lost words.

The challenges facing Nabit speakers, to maintain and protect their language and culture, are not unique. Indigenous groups around the world are addressing similar challenges. Similar to the Nabdams, groups in Papua New Guinea, Australia, and Canada have also lost their traditional storytelling practices, which has had a negative effect on their languages and culture (Cruikshank 1990; Nettle and Romaine 2000; Noori 2009). The interaction with other languages groups, increasing travel, and the introduction of new technology are important factors to consider in understanding why languages and cultures are being eroded. The concerns raised by Nabit speakers about language and cultural endangerment raises some interesting ideas about the language ideologies they might hold. Firstly, Nabit speakers highly value their language and are concerned about the potential loss of language and the effect it would have on their culture. Secondly, Nabit speakers see the connection between their language and their culture and are aware of the impact that losing one has on the other, such as the diminishing tradition of storytelling. In the next section I will discuss further some of the causes of Nabit language and cultural loss and also the attitude of Nabit speakers who want to protect the “pure” form of the language.

3.3 “Pure” Nabit, *Nabit kasi kasi*

Another theme that emerged from my language interviews was the idea of purity and documenting the “pure” forms of Nabit. Despite the fact that my interviews were translated I learned early on to recognize the expression [nabʔt kasi kasi] meaning “pure, pure Nabit.” As I explained in Chapter Two, both researchers and speakers have often viewed a purist ideology negatively because of the potential restrictions it places on the language, such as limiting
borrowing and the creation of new words. In this case, however, Nabit speakers are concerned about the purity of their language because the unique features of Nabit distinguish it from Gurenɛ and the other Frafra dialects. If Gurenɛ features replace all of the “purely” Nabit features of the dialect, then the Nabit dialect will cease to exist, and since dialectical differences are an important factor in differentiating between Nabdams and Gurensis, the divide between these ethnic groups could also be lost, if the dialects converge.

The concept of purity emerged in my interviews in several ways. Firstly, when speakers were explaining how Nabit was spoken and how it differed from other dialects of Frafra, particular terminologies emerged referring to an underlying “pure” version of the language. Dominic referred to the “real Nabit” (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014), Nmabone spoke of “pure Nabit” (Nmabone, Interview, June 2, 2014), Samare called it “typical Nabit” (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014), and Binimami mentioned “proper Nabit” (Binimami, Interview, June 11, 2014). While real, pure, typical, and proper, can all have different meanings in English, in this context I consider them all to be referring to the same idea because each time a Nabit speaker mentioned it they said [nabʔt kasi kasi] and then either they or Josbert translated it to one of these English words as an equivalent. This terminology for discussing the language suggests that an unaltered form of Nabit exists separate from the mixed and changed versions of Nabit heard in casual, everyday conversations. For some this idea of purity transcends the language and was applied to people as well. Bob spoke of “pure” Nabdams in a discussion about funeral terminologies, when he said, “some terms are there and if you are not pure Nabdam probably when they say it you will not understand what they have said” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014).

When I asked speakers if Nabit was the same in all of the Nabdam villages I was told by everyone I interviewed that it was the same. Speakers who had travelled to other villages or

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19 Gurensis is a term used to refer to Gurenɛ-speaking people.
moved for marriage did recognize some small differences, but explained that these differences were changes to the language from borrowing and interaction with other languages. These changes were not dialect differences inherent within Nabit, but rather a result of circumstance. One speaker, Yenbelung explained it nicely when she said Nabit, “should be the same now but it’s [referring to the differences] because some of the mixture” (Yenbelung, Interview, June 2, 2014). Yenbelung’s reference to “mixture” refers to the incorporation of words from other languages, like Gurene, Talene, and Twi, which have been borrowed into Nabit because of Nabit speakers’ interactions with these languages.

To better understand the differences between villages and the concept of purity I began asking speakers where the “purest” form of Nabit was spoken. This came up in my very first interview, so I added this question to my interview script right away, and used it in every interview. Although I received a wide range of responses, the general consensus was that villages surrounded by other Nabit-speaking villages had “purer” Nabit than those villages that border different languages. Dominic explained that, “if you are born and bred at home, you grew at home, and you have the purest Nabit; it should be from around Pelungu, Sakote area and Nangodi area” (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014). Although some speakers would disagree with Dominic that the Nabit spoken in Pelungu and Nangodi is pure (Bob, Pitomso, Samare) nearly all of them would agree with his choice of the village of Sakote. Of the Nabit speakers I interviewed, six of them (Bersiki, Dominic, Nmabone, Ponka, Samare, Yenbelung), identified Sakote as having the “purest” Nabit, which was more than any other village. This village is quite central within the Nabdam district and is, therefore, surrounded by other Nabit-speaking villages, which could explain this perceived purity. Interestingly though it is also the Chief’s village,
which could add to the perception of Sakote having “purer” Nabit because of the association with the well-respected Chief, Sakoran.

The main explanation given by speakers for why Nabit is changing is the mixing with neighbouring languages. More mixing occurs in Nabit-speaking villages that border other language groups such as Gurene, Talensi, and Kusasi. As a result of Nabit-speaking villages bordering Gurene and Kusasi-speaking villages Ponka explained that, “because of the interaction and the marriages we are at times bound to you know, chip in some of the Gurene words or the Kusasi words or so on and so forth you see that” (Ponka, Interview, June 30, 2014). Bob explained more specifically the results of these marriages when he said that, “Nabdams like Zanlerigu, they are closer to Gurensis, they marry many from Gurensi and when their mothers come they can’t stop the Gurene, so some of the children speak borrowed words, languages, names, from the Gurene language and put into their Nabdam” (Bob, Interview, June 29, 2014).

The other significant cause of change to the Nabit language is borrowing from languages other than the neighbouring Frafra dialects, as a result of travel. Samare explained this when he said:

But still there are problems, problems because there are some people who have travelled and come back and they have come back with some words you see like ‘so’. You talk and you say ‘so’ this ‘so’ is an English word, you see, you talk and you say ‘because’ you put ‘because’ as a conjunction in there then you say [nti], [nti] is a tree an Asante word you see then you say ‘you see’, you talk in Nabit and you say ‘you see’ {laughs}. You see all these things are there then another thing is [tiasaja], [tiasaja] is just completely out of Nabit, [tiasaja] is an Asante expression but because they have been accepted by the Nabit people the moment they add them in the language they understand what they mean, you see, but we know for sure that they are borrowed, they are borrowed words.

(Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014)

As Samare noted, borrowed words are becoming increasingly popular in Nabit, and even those who frown upon the borrowings use some of the words out of necessity. For example, the word
for blanket, which all thirteen speakers told me, is [kuntum] which is actually borrowed from the Twi language. Traditionally Nabdams used a piece of fabric known as a [fugabok] to cover themselves, but the speakers I interviewed did not consider this term interchangeable with the word for blanket. As well, several foods that are not indigenous to Nabdam territory were introduced recently and almost all of the new food names were borrowed in, such as [kwadu] for banana borrowed from Akan. Some new words are integrated into the language, rather than directly borrowed, such as [kamato] for tomato borrowed from English or they are named for their borrowing, such as the Nabit word for cowpea which is [nasala tia] meaning European beans. English words are also being borrowed into greetings. For example when someone asks “how are you” [i ˈɛjɛla], the typical response would be [laʔasoma] meaning “good” or “fine,” however it is now common to hear speakers respond [laʔafajn] incorporating the English word “fine.” Although this was very common and I heard Nabdams of all ages using the word [laʔafajn], I was corrected when I said it and Nabit speakers told me that I should say [laʔasoma] because I was learning “proper” Nabit (Giffen, fieldnotes, May 24, 2014).

Indigenous Nabit speakers easily recognize the borrowed words in Nabit and several of them told me that they, as speakers of the “pure” Nabit, could tell who was mixing their Nabit with other languages. Bob told me, “here, not far from Peliga and others, we also marry a lot from the Talensi and when they come in their language exists within and their children borrow some of their words and when they call certain things it is we who knows that is not pure Nabit” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014, emphasis added). Sometimes this mixing results in light-hearted joking between speakers, as Bob explained:

There are those that live along areas where different languages exist and they borrow in, they cannot actually produce the pure Nabit they have to involve the other language nearby. Especially like lets say Talensi, those that are closer to Talensi, they bring in a little Talensi and those who are closer to Gurenɛ area, they
bring in a little Gurenɛ, so when we come together, when we speak, we identify them and at times we tease them. We say because you are staying nearer to the Gurensi look at what you have just said.

(Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014)

Although this teasing can be light-hearted, there is genuine concern about this mixing and the fact that young speakers are not being raised to speak the “pure” Nabit. Nmabone shared a story from a recent PTA meeting regarding a school in Sakote. She said, “they wanted people to speak pure Nabit but they could not, especially the children here they don’t teach them Nabit” (Nmabone, Interview, June 2, 2014). Ponka also expressed concern about it this. He shared a hypothetical story to explain how this happens:

If I married someone from Bolga or from Bongo they are Gurenɛ speaking so when they come they speak Gurenɛ, so when they give birth to children they speak Gurenɛ to them, only I speak Nabit you see that. So the children are bound to you know take up their language you see that but as they grow they drop the Gurenɛ language and take to Nabit but they cannot drop everything completely, you see that right, so that is the problem that we’re having here. But those of us who have stated Gurenɛ and Nabit as well we can make a difference and we can actually speak pure Nabit.

(Ponka, Interview, May 30, 2014)

Ponka makes an interesting distinction here. He believes that those speakers who grow up learning both Gurenɛ and Nabit but then stop speaking one language never speak a pure form of the other language. On the other hand, speakers like him, who are fluent in both Gurenɛ and Nabit, are able to distinguish the two languages allowing them to speak the “pure” Nabit.

3.4 Differences Between Nabit and Gurenɛ

Although the differences in Nabit between the Nabdam villages are minimal, the differences between the Nabit and Gurenɛ languages are so noticeable that they can be used to identify where a person is from and their ethnic background. Nabit speakers told me that they can tell right away whether a person is speaking Nabit or Gurenɛ. The reason for this might be that greetings in Nabit and Gurenɛ differ slightly. The Nabit response to the question how are you
As can be seen from this example, the most identifiable difference is in vocabulary. Although some words are the exact same or similar, several words are entirely different. I previously studied the morphological differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ, by comparing the Swadesh 100 word list collected in Gurenɛ by Schaefer in 1975 and the same Swadesh 100 word list I collected in Nabit in 2012 and found significant differences between the two presumed dialects (Giffen 2013). I was, therefore, expecting to hear Nabit speakers tell me that many words are different between Nabit and Gurenɛ, which is precisely what happened.

Dominic shared a few examples, such as: “a calabash” in Nabit it’s [ŋman] that same calabash in Gurenɛ is [wani]. They just don’t look alike at all but there are some, some that are the same, that’s the same [damer] that is “drink” in Nabit, the Gurenɛ will also say [damer] so those similarities are there” (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014). Interestingly, Dominic explained that the words do not look alike, rather than saying they do not sound alike. While Dominic was explaining this I was writing the words he said in the IPA and since he is familiar with the IPA and the Gurenɛ orthography from his Master’s degree, he was referring to what I had written down, although it is also clear that the words do not sound alike either. Bob also supported the idea that some words between Nabit and Gurenɛ are different, but still quite similar, for example, “when we talk of pot, when you say a pot in Nabit we say [damer] in Gurenɛ they say [damer] you see the difference and when we come to names too we can call someone [damer] when you go to Gurenɛ they say [adamer]” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014). The difference in proper names was pointed out to me several times, and is one of the distinguishing differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ. Nmabone explained that, “if you see a Gurenɛ speaking person’s name, you will just

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20 A calabash is a gourd vegetable that can be hollowed and dried, which are then used to make bowls and instruments.
know oh this person is from this, if you see a name from Nabit here Nabdam here you will also know the person is coming from Nabdam for the Gurenɛ people they like adding [a] [atia] [abuɣali] [adoŋo] but we will not add [a] we will call it [ti] [doŋ] [bugil]” (Nmabone, Interview, June 2, 2014). Additionally, Samare explained that, “most of the words in Gurenɛ end with vowels but most of the words in Nabit end with consonants” (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014).

Differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ raise the question as to whether Nabit should continue to be classified as a dialect of Frafra or as a separate language from Gurenɛ and the other dialects. Despite all of the differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ, like vocabulary, morphology, and pronunciation, most Nabit speakers told me that they could still understand what Gurenɛ speakers were saying. In their research on the Frafra dialects, Naden and Schafer (1973) concluded that Nabit and Gurene are not mutually intelligible and my analysis (Giffen 2013) based on Swadesh word list comparisons also suggested that the two languages would not be mutually intelligible. However, Samare told me “when they speak the understanding is there, we know what they are saying, when we speak back they also know what we are saying, but only that the words sometimes are different but we know the meanings” (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014). The difficulty here is understanding whether the two languages are actually mutually intelligible because of how similar they are, or whether speakers understand each other because most Nabit speakers interact with Gurenɛ speakers on a regular basis and are therefore familiar with the language. While many speakers I interviewed felt that they were not familiar enough with Gurenɛ to say whether Nabit is a separate language, one speaker, Samare had specific opinions about this. He told me that, “I would have classified (Nabit) as a dialect because things that we have in them differently are more than those things that are alike so it would have been a dialect by itself, it stands a chance of being a dialect by itself” (Samare, Interview, June 10,
2014). I followed up and asked, if by “dialect by itself” he meant a separate language, and he said yes. This opinion demonstrates that Samare, and likely some other Nabit speakers, see significant enough differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ that they would classify them as distinct languages.

Describing fully the differences between Nabit, Gurenɛ, and the other dialects of Frafra is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to understand the view that Nabit speakers have of their relationship to neighbouring languages. This represents another language ideology that Nabit speakers hold, they view their language as unique from the other dialects of Frafra. As well, Nabit speakers whom I interviewed, held onto the ideal that Nabit should remain “pure” and avoid influences and borrowing from other languages. Interestingly, this idea of Nabit not changing did not apply to the development of an alphabet, which could be considered a significant change to the language. As discussed in Chapter Two, some language communities have chosen to maintain their language as an oral language, and rejected the option of developing an orthography. Nabit speakers, however, seem to view the benefits of an orthography, particularly as a means of preserving the language, as worth the change to their language. In the next section I will explore further Nabit speakers attitudes towards the development of an alphabet.

3.5 Nabit Orthography

During my interviews with Nabit speakers I asked several questions about writing Nabit to understand why people wanted an orthography and what they would like to be able to write. Specifically, I asked whether they wanted Nabit to have an alphabet and why, what they would like to be able to write in Nabit, and if they were familiar with the Gurenɛ alphabet I asked them if they wanted the Nabit alphabet to be similar or different.
Overall, the response to the development of a Nabit orthography was overwhelmingly positive. All thirteen of the speakers I interviewed were excited about the development of an alphabet for Nabit and thought it would be beneficial for the Nabit language and its speakers. When I asked what they would like to write, most speakers said they would like to document Nabit ways of life by writing about the culture, customs, stories, farming methods, and development projects. While many people viewed the development of a Nabit alphabet, and the potential to record Nabit traditions in writing, as a means of protecting the Nabit language and culture, these proposed writing projects aligned exactly with this view. Bob, who was quoted in the introduction of this thesis, explained beautifully what he views the benefit of writing to be.

If I could write in Nabit? I first of all would like to write about our culture. Why I am saying that is, it is something that is gradually wiping away because our grandfathers were not able to put it in paper, so certain things are getting missing. So if I have the chance to write in Nabit I think my first novel would be on culture. (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014)

This sentiment was echoed by several other speakers such as Bersiki, who said that if she could write in Nabit she would like to write about farming because “it will still let the young generation to come and know how things were done” (Bersiki, Interview June 7, 2014). Another speaker, Samare, said that it would help the development of the community, because it could decrease the reliance on English. He said:

We are told, and we even, we have a reason in papers that China have never gone into you know learning someone’s language, that they use their own language and they do everything marvelously you see using their own language. Here we will go, before we developed this thing, the English language and we will depend on you see. And you know everything has got a starting point and everything in the future, even if we are no more, our offspring will also, you know, want to develop you see when we develop using our own language I think it will also help. (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014)
Samare explained that he knows there are places where people have successfully “developed” without depending entirely on someone else’s language and he hopes that the creation of a Nabit alphabet will allow them to do the same thing in the Nabdam area.

The Nabit speakers who were involved in education especially saw the benefit of introducing a Nabit writing system to schools. Nmabone, who works in a local school, said “it’s good especially when we get it in schools and children go to school to learn it with their own mind” (Nmabone, Interview, June 2, 2014). Bob was excited about the possibility of writing stories, because they could then be “put in our schools” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014). Ponka, a retired teacher, had been involved with a non-government organization working on a mother-tongue literacy program for students who had dropped out of school but wanted to go back. He developed curriculum and trained facilitators who taught students Gurenɛ, then English, and then transitioned them back into school. Ponka saw great success with the program teaching literacy in the mother-tongue with students performing better once they were back in formal school and several who completed senior high school and went on to training colleges (Ponka, Interview, May 30, 2014). These results are supported by studies of other mother-tongue education programs in Africa and around the world (Graham 2010; Hornberger 2009; Malone and Paraide 2011; Ngwaru and Opoku-Amankwa 2010). There is currently important research being done to reform education policies in Ghana and implement mother-tongue education (Akrofi 2003; Owu-Ewie 2006; Rosekrans et al. 2012).

Of the Nabit speakers I interviewed, four of them were familiar with the Gurenɛ alphabet, and had used it, or attempted to use it to write Nabit. I heard similar testimonies from these four speakers about how they had previously written Nabit. Dominic told me that as children in school they were taught how to write. He said:
You see that, you see that this long n that we have [ŋ]. We learned it; it was there in those days and then we have Ghanaian language vowels. The Ghanaian languages vowels are seven, we use them and then the consonants too are there, then the diphthongs and other things are there that we used.

(Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014)

Bob repeated this idea, and also told me that “the Ghanaian language in general we have particular letters for the Ghanaian language whether you are writing in Twi, you are writing Kasena, or you are writing Kusal, we are using the same vowels and the same consonants” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014). Although I could not find any academic references to this “Ghanaian Alphabet” several Nabit speakers knew it. I was commended in my interviews and in the alphabet workshop for using these “local characters”, although my use of these “local characters” was not intentional, as I was writing using the International Phonetic Alphabet.

I was also told that aside from using the Ghanaian alphabet, Nabit speakers could write with the Gurenɛ alphabet. Dominic said, “if you can speak Gurenɛ very well or Nabit very well you can use either of them to write the other language” (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014). Although some Nabit speakers felt that they could effectively write in Gurenɛ or the Ghanaian alphabet, the challenge they face is that it is not recognized. Ponka told me about this challenge he faced while he was doing a degree in Gurenɛ at university. He explained:

We read Gurenɛ throughout, you see that, and even if there is translation you translate English to Gurenɛ or Gurenɛ to English but since Nabit wasn’t there if you translate into Nabit it will be wrong, maybe the lecturer will not even understand what you are saying you see so though we know the Nabit and can write it but provision hasn’t been made for us to do that.

(Ponka, Interview, May 30, 2014)

Since Nabit is not officially recognized as having an alphabet or standard writing system, writing in Nabit is a challenge, simply because it will not be recognized as coherent writing. These speakers, Dominic and Ponka, told me that although Nabit could effectively be written with the Gurenɛ alphabet, they all believed that the Nabit writing system would inevitably have to be
similar to the Gurenɛ alphabet because the two languages are so similar. Dominic said, “Nabit cannot have a different alphabet from Gurenɛ… I don’t see any differences” (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014) and Samare said “the alphabetic aspect of it, the alphabets that we are using, the Gurenɛ are using the same thing” (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014). Both men, Dominic and Samare, had studied Gurenɛ at university and were aware of the phonetic similarity of the two languages. However, whether the Nabit and Gurenɛ alphabets would end up being similar to Gurenɛ or not, Nabit speakers agreed that Nabit needed an official alphabet so that writing in Nabit could be recognized and understood. This desire for an official and recognized orthography demonstrates that Nabit speakers value writing as a general practice, and are interested in writing in Nabit. Interestingly, speakers feel attached to the pre-existing “local characters” and the desire to include these characters in the Nabit orthography shows the extent that Nabit speakers identify with the greater Ghana community. Familiarity with these characters could also be considered an agentive influence, which would affect the decisions of the NLC when deciding which symbols to include in the Nabit orthography. These ideas also relate back to the discussion on purity. Utilizing “local characters” might be considered a way to make the alphabet reflect the “pure” language. As well, like having a “pure” or “real” language, speakers want a “real” alphabet that is recognized as Nabit, instead of just using other language’s writing systems.

3.6 Summary

The interviews I conducted with Nabit speakers are crucial to my understanding of the Nabit language and Nabit language ideologies. Nabit speakers’ stories about how Nabit is changing and the fear speakers have that their language and culture will be lost demonstrated the importance of creating a proactive language revitalization plan to address language
endangerment and language shift before it becomes a critical issue. Already it is clear that some cultural traditions are being lost and Nabit words along with them. Nabit speakers also shared their perspectives on Nabit’s relationship to Gurene and the other Frafra dialects and explained that the changes the Nabit language is undergoing as a result of interaction with these languages including borrowing and bilingualism. In addition, Nabit speakers discussed “pure” Nabit, which is a form of the language that is unaffected by borrowing that they want to protect. The opinions and attitudes Nabit speakers shared with me greatly influenced the Nabit Alphabet Design Workshop that I hosted for the NLC and the suggestions I made for the Nabit orthography, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.
Chapter 4: Symbol Selections, Spelling, and Status: Deciding on the Nabit Orthography

4.1 Outline

In this chapter, I discuss the development of the Nabit orthography and analyze how Nabit language ideologies influenced the orthographic decisions of the Nabit Language Committee. To begin I review what occurred at the Alphabet Design Workshop that I hosted. Then I discuss the phonology of Nabit, making note of the phonological differences between Nabit and Guren. I present the final orthographic selections of the committee and, again, make comparisons between the Nabit orthography and the Guren orthography, showing how the two alphabets differ. Next I discuss the language ideologies that surfaced during the alphabet workshop and the effect these ideologies had on the Nabit alphabet. Lastly, I discuss how the orthography has been used since its development and the ongoing standardization process.

4.2 Alphabet Design Workshop

As introduced in Chapter Two, I hosted a one-day Alphabet Design Workshop (ADW) for the NLC members to develop the Nabit orthography. The goal of the workshop was to select all of the symbols that would be used in the Nabit orthography and, time permitting, develop some literacy materials in the new orthography. The workshop was held in a classroom at Sakote Senior High School, in the Sakote region of the Nabdam district. Eleven committee members out of fifteen attended the workshop and they travelled from all across the district to attend. Most of those in attendance arrived on motorbikes, but a few walked or bicycled, and Vida drove Philomena, Josbert, and I from Bolgatanga. All of the NLC members, except Nmabone, spoke
English, so Josbert and Vida took turns translating what I said into Nabit, and what Nmabone said into English.

To begin the workshop I introduced myself and explained that during the previous five weeks I had been interviewing Nabit speakers and analyzing the Nabit language. Although I had already met most of the NLC members, some of whom I had interviewed, it was important to introduce myself to those who had not worked directly with me yet. I explained the purpose of the workshop and my role as a facilitator. Josbert then helped me to collect oral consent from the NLC members and the workshop began. I outlined the format that we would follow wherein I would explain each sound, make suggestions for symbols to use that could represent each sound, and then open the discussion for the NLC committee members to select a symbol. I then asked the committee how they would like to make decisions, either by consensus or by a majority vote. Francis said “the best would be consensus” (ADW, June 21, 2014) and everyone agreed. We also decided to maintain a respectful and friendly environment that allowed for productive discussion where everyone felt safe to share and discuss the symbol suggestions I presented.

I also explained the four principles that guided my suggestions for the Nabit orthography, which were based on best practices for orthography development. First, one symbol should represent only one sound. Ideally, one symbol would represent only one phoneme whenever possible, but could represent two allophones (Cahill 2014; Seifart 2006; Snider 2014). Secondly, I suggested we should begin to establish standard spellings but could still allow for individual preference and variation in pronunciation, meaning everyone could still feel free to pronounce words how they usually did, even if it varied from the agreed upon spelling (Rudes 2000). Thirdly, I suggested symbols that would make the orthography as easy to use and learn as possible, since ideally everyone, from young children to the very elderly would be using and
learning the orthography and so it should be simple (Cahill 2014; Snider 2014). This meant that I limited my suggestions of unfamiliar characters and use of diacritics. Lastly, to help facilitate the easy to use and learn principle, my suggestions utilized the Roman alphabet, which the English language uses. Since the national language of Ghana is English, anyone who goes to school is educated in English and learns to read and write English, so the more similar the Nabit orthography could be to English the easier the transition from one literacy to the other would be (Cahill 2014; Hinton 2014; Sebba 2007).

Aside from these four principles and my linguistic analysis, there were a few other non-linguistic considerations I made before suggesting symbols for the Nabit orthography, such speaker’s attitudes towards other languages and wanting the orthography to look similar or different from other languages (Cahill 2014). As explained in Chapter One, Nabit has traditionally been classified as a dialect of the Frafra language, but my and other researchers’ linguistic analysis, as well as Nabit speaker’s opinions, suggests Nabit is actually better classified as a separate language. Therefore, the NLC decided to develop a distinct Nabit alphabet, instead of using the Gurenɛ orthography that was established in 2007 by Dakubu et al. to write in Nabit. In response to this decision, I was mindful to show the committee how each sound was represented in the Gurenɛ writing system and provide several suggestions, some that followed the Gurenɛ alphabet and some that did not, so that the NLC could decide how similar or different the Nabit orthography should be from the Gurenɛ orthography.

It is important to note that the Gurenɛ orthography was technically designed to be able to be used by all of the dialects of Gurenɛ, including Nabit. As well, an earlier orthography had been proposed in 1975 by Schaefer, again designed to be used by all the dialects, and many Nabit speakers told me that they had informally learned to write some Nabit words in this
orthography in primary school. As well, four people on the NLC had degrees in Gurene language education and were, therefore, able to write Nabit using the Gurene orthography. During our first interviews, two of these speakers, Dominic and Samare, provided me example documents showing me how they wrote Nabit, which I was able to discuss with each of them during review interviews. Additionally, my first research collaborator Vida also developed a personal orthography she used when taking fieldnotes conducting her graduate research in Nabit. She also used this personal orthography to write down words when I conducted a phonological analysis of Nabit with her in 2012. These personal orthographies and previous orthographies were important for me and the NLC to consider as they had been in use in the community in various ways and provided insight to me about the symbols that people might already be familiar with and might want to see in the new Nabit orthography.

Lastly, I considered the symbols that people might already be familiar with and the perceptions Nabit speakers might have about what “proper” letters are. In their work on the Touo language, Angela Terrill and Michael Dunn (2003) found that speakers of the language had very particular ideas about what constituted a “proper” letter. In particular, speakers did not like symbols from systems other than the Roman alphabet such as the half o symbol <ɔ> from the IPA. This challenge, of introducing new symbols that do not exist in the Roman alphabet, has occurred in many other communities where orthographies have been proposed such as for the Shenzwani language spoken in the Comoro Islands (Ottenheimer 2001), the Catawba language spoken in the United States (Heinemann-Priest 2000), and Lisu spoken in China, Burma, and Thailand (Morse and Tehan 2000). Since the English alphabet does not have enough symbols to represent all of the sounds in Nabit, I had to suggest symbols from outside the Roman alphabet so I considered which symbols might be acceptable to the NLC should this challenge arise. I
made these suggestions based on the knowledge I gained from my interviews, by looking at writing in the Nabdam district on signs, and by studying the symbols that were used in other Ghanaian orthographies like Gurenɛ, Dagbani, and Akan.

To address all of these considerations I put together a very specific presentation for the ADW. Table 4.1 is an example of what I showed the committee when I discussed each sound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>[ŋ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>ng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurenɛ</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Nabit Orthography (Vida’s Choice)</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Symbols</td>
<td>ŋ  ng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example Word</td>
<td>donkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top line of the chart shows the sound written in the International Phonetic Alphabet. Below is the symbol that English would use to represent that sound, then the symbol that Gurenɛ would use, followed by the symbol that Vida selected for the preliminary alphabet. Below those examples I put my suggestions and then example words so that the committee could see what each symbol would look like in use. This example is the velar nasal [ŋ]. In English the digraph < ng > represents this sound, but in Gurenɛ it is represented by < ŋ >. This is how I explained this sound and symbol selections to the NLC:

So this is the [ŋ] sound, and this sound doesn’t start words, so that’s why I only have examples with it at the end, but in English we would write this as < ng > so like in the word [lɔŋŋ] < long >. Gurenɛ uses just the one symbol {referring to < ŋ >} and this is really common in Ghanaian alphabets so I think that it’s simpler if you use just the one < ŋ > but if you wanted you could do that < ng > as well because you do already have both of the symbols the < n > and the < g >.

(Robyn, ADW, June 21, 2014).
By explaining each sound this way the NLC could see that I considered how the sound is represented in other alphabets, which allowed them to choose a symbol that was similar or different from Gurene or English. This is just an example of one of the many sounds that we discussed. In the next section I outline the phonology of Nabit.

Figure 4.1: Robyn Leading the ADW (June 21, 2014)
4.3 Phonological Analysis of Nabit

While a full analysis of the phonology of Nabit is not possible in the scope of this thesis, understanding the basic phonology of Nabit is important to understand the symbol selections that the NLC made. Table 4.2 details the consonants of Nabit in the IPA. Symbols on the left side of a column are voiceless consonants and symbols on the right are voiced consonants; as stated earlier, symbols in [ ] are allophones of a phoneme.
Table 4.2: Nabit Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Labio-velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plosive</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>kp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td>ηn</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>ηm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[r]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ɣ]</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 24 consonant phones, or sounds, in Nabit, but only 22 phonemes, as [r] is an allophone of /d/ and [ɣ] is an allophone of /g/. Phonologically Nabit is very similar to Gurenɛ. The only difference is that Gurenɛ does not have the [ńw] sound, instead Gurenɛ has an [ŋw].

The Nabit vowel system includes nine vowels, which each have four different articulations: regular, long, nasal, and long nasal. The full details of the Nabit vowels are shown in Figure 4.3.
The symbol [ʊː] representing the rounded, back, close-mid, lax, long sound, is written in round brackets because we believe the sound exists but the NLC could not think of a representative word. Similarly, the symbol [ẽ] representing the unrounded, front, close-mid, lax, nasal sound, is in round brackets because the only example word the NLC could think of is to pronounce [ẽ] to mean yes. At present, I have no example words for the sounds [ẽː], [õ], or [õː], which is why they do not appear in the charts above, and I believe it is possible these sounds do not exist in Nabit because they do not exist in Gurene. The sound [ẽ] also does not exist in Gurene. In total Nabit has 31 confirmed vowels, 2 nearly-confirmed vowels, and 3 more potential vowels. While it might seem strange to have “potential vowels,” as Bird (2001) notes, new orthographies are often based on preliminary phonological analyses. After further phonological analysis, by myself or
other scholars in the future, these vowels will be either confirmed and added to the alphabet or refuted and left out.

Vowels can also be combined to create several diphthongs. At present I have documented five diphthongs, though there could easily be more. The details of Nabit diphthongs are shown in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3: Nabit Diphthongs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>əj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nabit is also a tonal language with two tones, a high tone and a low tone. Tone is rarely contrastive though meaning that if a word is said with the incorrect tone it does not usually affect the meaning. Therefore, the NLC decided that marking tone on all words was not necessary, and tone markings for high tone <́> and low tone <̀> would only be written in cases where the meaning was ambiguous.

Let me return briefly to the issue I mentioned previously that even though the Nabit alphabet would be based on the English, Roman-based alphabet, it does not have enough symbols to adequately represent all of the sounds in Nabit. The English alphabet has 26 letters, so assigning only one sound to one symbol means that the alphabet can only represent 26 phonemes. Nabit, however, has 31 phonemes (not including the different articulations of vowels that can be represented with diacritics or the diphthongs that can be represented with digraphs) that need to be represented, which requires at least 5 more symbols. To develop symbol suggestions for these extra phonemes I considered the linguistic factors such as readability and ease of use, and the non-linguistic factors such as how these sounds are represented in other Ghanaian languages, that I mentioned previously. In the next section I showcase the NLC’s final orthographic decisions.
4.4 Final Selections

Based on the discussions at the Alphabet Design Workshop, the NLC selected 54 symbols for the Nabit alphabet. The orthography can be seen in Figure 4.4 below.

![Figure 4.4: The Nabit Alphabet](image)

Although there are 54 symbols, there are only 26 unique characters in the alphabet < a b d e e f g h i k l m n o o p r s t u v w y z' >, as some English letters were not included such as < c j q x >. The NLC decided to use the symbol < ŋ > to represent the sound [ŋ] instead of the English digraph < ng >. To represent the Nabit consonant sounds that do not exist in English, the NLC decided to add three digraphs < ŋm > < ny > < nw > and the < ' >. The NLC also decided to add two additional vowel symbols < Ė > and < ŏ > which are not used in the English alphabet, although these sounds do exist in English, such as in the English words “bet” and “or”. Table 4.4 outlines in more detail which sound(s) each symbol represents.

---

21 The regular apostrophe < ' > is used to mark the glottal stop [ʔ].
Table 4.4: Nabit Symbol to Sound Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Sound(s) Represented</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Sound(s) Represented</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Sound(s) Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>[iː] / [i]</td>
<td>ui</td>
<td>[uː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>āa</td>
<td>[āː]</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>[k]</td>
<td>au</td>
<td>[au]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>[b]</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>[l]</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>[p]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gb</td>
<td>[gb]</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>kp</td>
<td>[kp]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>[n]</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>[r]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>[ŋ]</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>[s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>[eː]</td>
<td>ηm</td>
<td>[ŋm]</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>[t]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ē</td>
<td>[ē]</td>
<td>ny</td>
<td>[ŋ]</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>[u] / [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>nw</td>
<td>[ŋw]</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>[u] / [uː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ēe</td>
<td>[eː]</td>
<td>ō</td>
<td>[o]</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>[v]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>[f]</td>
<td>ōō</td>
<td>[oː]</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>[w]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>[g] / [ɣ]</td>
<td>ōō</td>
<td>[oː]</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>[z]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td>ōō</td>
<td>[oː]</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>[j]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>[i] / [ɪ]</td>
<td>ai</td>
<td>[ai]</td>
<td>’</td>
<td>[ʔ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section I discuss how the Nabit language committee decided on some of the controversial symbols and analyze the language ideologies that emerged in these discussions at the ADW.
4.5 Language Ideologies in Action

As I introduced in Chapter Two, meetings of the Nabit Language Committee are ‘ideological sites’ or places where people produce and discuss language ideologies (Kroskrity 2010). Many of the same language ideologies I noticed in my interviews (language endangerment, purity, and how Nabit “should” be written) were also prominent in the discussions at the Alphabet Design Workshop. In this section I will discuss each of these ideologies.

4.5.1 How Nabit “Should” Be Written

4.5.1.1 Choosing Special Symbols

Since most of the symbols that I suggested for the Nabit alphabet were taken directly from the English alphabet, my suggestions were quite straightforward, such as suggesting <p> to represent [p] and <d> to represent [d]. However, suggesting symbols for sounds that differ from
English was significantly more complicated. In particular, there were four consonants [ʔ η ɲ ɣ] and four vowels [ɛ ɔ i u] that required special consideration before I could develop suggestions for how each of these sounds could be written. Nabit speakers had very particular ideas about how some sounds should be represented and we discussed most of these eight sounds at length before reaching consensus on a symbol selection. The discussions the NLC had about these sounds highlighted the language ideologies that NLC members held as their underlying ideologies surfaced in their opinions and decisions.

The first sound that required special consideration was the voiceless, glottal stop [ʔ]. As this sound does not exist in English I considered how the sound had been written in other languages, including other Ghanaian languages such as Gurenɛ. I provided five symbols that could be used to represent this sound, which can be seen in Table 4.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>[ʔ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurenɛ</td>
<td>,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Nabit Orthography (Vida’s Choice)</td>
<td>,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Symbols</td>
<td>,  ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ɛ  &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example Word</td>
<td>rabbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sɛɛɛɛş</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>sɛɛɛɛş</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The only suggestion that was well received was the apostrophe < ’ >. Samare said, “that one at the top there {referring to the apostrophe} no question is a glottal so that if it is in word form, to
me that one is correct [sɔʔɔŋ] {referring to < sɔ’ɔŋ >}” (Samare, ADW, June 21, 2014). The rest of the committee agreed that Nabit speakers were already familiar with this symbol and adding something new would be confusing. As Ponka said, “the top one {referring to the < ’ >, it is correct because in the pronunciation you have a glottal stop there that is why that is there, but you see when you are writing you don’t know the question mark {referring to the < ? >” (Ponka, ADW, June 21, 2014). After a very short discussion the NLC agreed to use the < ’ >.

The next sound that required special consideration was the voiced, velar nasal [ŋ]. I learned very early on in my fieldwork that some Nabit speakers were already familiar with this symbol. During my very first interview in Ghana with Dominic, the 10th word I asked him was “donkey,” which he told me was [bɔŋ] and when he looked over at my notes he commended me on my use of the “local character” of the n with the tail < η > (Dominic, Interview, May 27, 2014). At this point I realized that the IPA symbol would likely be well received and not contentious as unfamiliar IPA symbols often are in other languages and proposed orthographies (Terril and Dunn 2003), meaning we could use a single letter instead of the < ng > digraph that English uses. I suggested both < η > and < ng > to the NLC, but after a very short discussion the NLC quickly decided to use the < η >.

One symbol that led to extensive discussion with the NLC was the voiced, palatal nasal [ɲ]. In this case I made two suggestions, n with a tilde < ñ > or < ny >. Although the digraph < ny > technically goes against the first principle of the Nabit orthography, where we decided one symbol represents one sound, I included it because it is used in many other Ghanaian orthographies, specifically in Gurenɛ. As well, < ny > can already be seen in writing examples in the Nabdam district; in particular the name of a Nabdam village Nyobok is spelt with an < ny >
on the road sign. The main debate for this symbol was whether the NLC should pick a unique symbol or a familiar one, which is highlighted in the following excerpt:

Vida: No I mean what we are familiar with is the < ny > that is what I am saying. So now what I am just trying to say is if we also want to make it unique we can look for something different but not complicated anyways.
Francis: That one seems to be more complicated, the second one {referring to the < ñ >}.
Nicholas: We already have words that are nasalized and we have tried to avoid the nasal sound so why should we use this one. If we are to use the nasal sound we will nasalize all, we will use for all the words that are nasalized so once we have avoided it, let’s leave it out, and use the < ny >.
Vida: But why are we avoiding the nasal sound if that is really how we speak?
Nicholas: It still comes out.
Ponka: It still comes out.
Nicholas: If you put the < n > and the nasal sound < ̃ > or the < n > and the < y > the nasal still comes out, it comes out clearly.
Ponka: Yes, because of the two combinations coming together, nasalized.
Robyn: So like you said the benefit of this one {referring to the < ny >} is that it is something that people are familiar with and there are already words spelt in it but as Vida mentioned, if we wanted something that was different that is unique to only Nabit then the n with the squiggle {referring to the < ñ >} would be nice.
Sampson: If that be the case the < ny > is more convenient.
Vida: So for the sake of convenience it’s < ny > for the sake of being unique it’s the other one.

(ADW, June 21, 2014)

For the preliminary orthography Vida had selected < ñ > because she wanted the symbol to be different from the Gurenɛ alphabet that uses < ny > (ADW, August 7, 2012). Vida also championed the unique symbol in the ADW discussion, but after a long back and forth discussion the NLC selected < ny > because even though < ñ > would be unique, the familiarity and ease of a symbol that was already known was decided to be simpler.

Deciding what was simpler, both to teach and to learn, also played a key role in discussion of the sound [ɣ]. This sound [ɣ], the voiced, velar fricative is an allophone of /g/, which means that [g] becomes [ɣ] in the middle of a word. I suggested that [ɣ] could be represented by the symbol < g > but said that an extra letter such as < ɣ > could be added to
represent the sound if the NLC felt it was necessary. Using \(<\ g\ >\) has already been the practice in
the region though; for example, the village Lorgre is pronounced \([l\omega\gamma\ri]\) so the \([\gamma]\) sound is
represented with \(<\ g\ >\). One NLC committee member, Francis, who is a primary school teacher,
was concerned that speakers, and especially children, would pronounce words incorrectly if the
symbol \(<\ g\ >\) were used to represent the sound \([\gamma]\), which can be seen in the following excerpt:

Francis: But the problem in \([p\omega\gamma]\), that one, is \(<\ g\ >\).

Ponka: That one is okay.

Francis: She \{referring to Robyn\} is using this alphabet to change it. It is better if
we use the first one \{referring to \(<\ y\ >\}\) in writing so can we get an
alphabet in place of the \(<\ g\ >\).

Samare: No that one doesn’t go, it doesn’t go with it, it won’t go with this one.

Francis: This is not a \(<\ g\ >\).

Samare: This is local character known as a \(<\ g\ >\).

Nicholas: It is true that that one \(<\ g\ >\) takes the place of the \([\gamma]\) because we don’t
have that character always so we all write it with \(<\ g\ >\).

Francis: And the \(<\ g\ >\) is changing the pronunciation we have.

Vida: \([p\omega\gamma]\)

Nicholas: It’s \([p\omega\gamma]\)

Francis: I understand it but when you are to pronounce…

Nicholas: What happens is when you have speakers they will pronounce it in a
way and you will understand that this is what they want to say but you will
know it is \([p\omega\gamma]\) so why are you worrying about how someone will call
what you have written there?

Samare: You see but I think if we use the top one \{referring to \(<\ g\ >\}\ and write
that it is a local character.

Ponka: It will help to use local characters.

Nicholas: Let’s allow the \(<\ g\ >\) to go because we have already used others for
other ones.

Francis: But you see \([ba\ be\ bi\ p\omega\gamma\ p\omega\gamma]\)\(^{22}\) like you know we use \([ba\ bi\ be]\) \([ba\ bi
be\ pi\ po\ po]\) and the \(<\ g\ >\) \([g]\) that is the way we pronounce it and then that
is a dilemma because they are all learning \([ba\ bi\ be\ po]\) and the \(<\ g\ >\) \([g]\)
that is the way people pronounce it.

Robyn: But what you have to know, when you learn, if we keep just the \(<\ g\ >\,\) if
somebody said to you \([p\omega\gamma]\) that’s not a word, so then you know that that
can’t be the \([g]\) sound it has to be the \([\gamma]\).

Francis: That is her position but the spelling form, for example, if you are teaching
a child a P1 child\(^{23}\) \([ba\ bi\ be]\), which you all know…

Nicholas: Do something when you are teaching the \([ba\ bi\ bo]\), when you teach the
\([\gamma]\) sound you will know that the \([\gamma]\) comes from that one \{referring to the

\(^{22}\) This is a technique teachers use to teach children sounds.

\(^{23}\) P1 refers to Primary 1, the Ghanaian equivalent of Grade 1.
Francis’s perspective as a teacher led him to think about how children would learn the alphabet, which added an important dimension to the conversation. This turned into a long discussion and debate about whether it was easier to add an extra symbol or learn that \(< g >\) represents two sounds. This was the second discussion we had about allophones, having already decided that even though [r] is an allophone of [d] and only occurs in the middle of words, the orthography would include both letters \(< d >\) and \(< r >\). Once Nicholas and I made suggestions about how the letter \(< g >\) could be taught to people learning the alphabet to avoid confusion all of the NLC members agreed that \(< g >\) should be used for both sounds [g] and [ɣ]. We also agreed that if people were having trouble learning, this debate could be reopened, because even though this is the “final” Nabit alphabet, writing needs to be tested before a true standard is established (Karan 2014; Schreyer 2015a).

There were also vowels that required special consideration before I could make suggestions. Nabit has nine vowels \([i \ i \ ɛ \ a \ ɔ \ o \ u]\), which cannot be adequately represented by the five vowel symbols in the English alphabet \(< a \ e \ i \ o \ u >\). To represent the sounds [ɛ] and [ɔ] I was prepared to make suggestions for using the regular \(< e >\) with a variety of diacritics to represent [ɛ] and \(< o >\) with a variety of diacritics to represent [ɔ]. However, I learned early on in my research that the \(< e >\) and \(< ɔ >\) IPA symbols were used frequently in other Ghanaian alphabets including Guren, Dagbani, and Akan, and Nabit speakers also considered these symbols to be “local characters.” As I explained in Chapter Three, Bob told me “the Ghanaian language in general we have particular letters for the Ghanaian language whether you are writing
in Twi, you are writing Kasena, or you are writing Kusal, we are using the same vowels and the same consonants” (Bob, Interview, May 29, 2014). As a result, I ended up not suggesting any other symbols for the orthography and simply proposed the \(< \varepsilon >\) and \(< \varnothing >\) IPA symbols, which the NLC selected.

On the other two vowels \([i]\) and \([u]\) the NLC had a longer discussion. These sounds are phonemic in Nabit, just as they are in Gurenɛ, but traditionally Ghanaian alphabets only use 7 vowel symbols \(< \text{i e e a o u } \rangle\). Instead of suggesting a new symbol, I proposed using existing symbols \(< \text{i } >\) and \(< \text{u } >\) with diacritics to represent these sounds. I originally suggested \(< \text{i } >\) or \(< \text{i } >\) to represent \([i]\) and \(< \text{u } >\) or \(< \text{u } >\) to represent \([u]\). All of these suggestions were rejected by the NLC. Instead the NLC chose to let \(< \text{i } >\) represent both \([i]\) and \([i]\) and \(< \text{u } >\) to represent both \([u]\) and \([u]\), which is the same convention as the Gurenɛ orthography. These decision were made once I demonstrated that people would likely still be able to pronounce words correctly with only the two symbols as can be seen in the following excerpts from the ADW.

Robyn: if I wrote \(< \text{lolog } >\) how would you pronounce it?
Everyone: \([\text{lolog } ]\)
Robyn: so you put the \([i]\) sound in because you knew that that’s what the word sounded like, you didn’t say \([\text{lolog } ]\) and if I wrote that \(< \text{gbin } >\) what would you say?
Everyone: \([\text{gbin } ]\)
Robyn: so you still pronounce that one correctly too

...  
Robyn: so if I wrote this word \(< \text{kɔbug } >\)
Everyone: \([\text{kɔbug } ]\)
Francis: what is it?
Robyn: feather
Francis: feather
Robyn: so you knew to pronounce that as the \([u]\) even though I didn’t tell you, and what if I wrote this word {referring to \(< \text{bupuŋ } >\)}, how would you pronounce it?
Everyone: \([\text{bupuŋ } ]\)
Robyn: so because you know the words well enough, you know how to pronounce them so I think we can use the same symbol and you will know based on the word whether you say [u] or you say [ʊ]

(ADW, June 21, 2014)

In both of these excerpts, the NLC members were able to correctly pronounce words, pronouncing [i] in [lolig] even though it was written as <i> and pronouncing [ʊ] in [kɔbug] even though it was written with <u>. Therefore, the NLC decided that in both of these cases using one symbol to represent two sounds would still allow Nabit speakers to correctly pronounce words so an additional symbol was not necessary.

It is clear that these decisions the Nabit Language Committee made about symbol choices tell us about the language ideologies that they hold. Firstly, it demonstrates that speakers had opinions about how Nabit should be written and that they wanted to be included in the discussion about writing. Specifically, Nabit speakers held ideas about writing that extended far beyond linguistic representation (Cahill 2014). Although we did discuss the importance of symbols representing particular sounds, all of the orthographic discussions I presented here focused more on non-linguistic factors like identity, social context, and learnability. As I mentioned previously, the orthographies of several other Ghanaian languages use these symbols < ’ŋ ny Ṇ >. Akan, one of the largest and most widespread indigenous languages in Ghana spoken mainly in southern Ghana, uses three of the five symbols < ny Ṇ >. Dagbani spoken in the Northern region uses all five < ’ŋ ny Ṇ >. And both of the Gurenɛ orthographies, the proposed from 1975 and the official from 2007, used these five symbols < ’ŋ ny Ṇ >. Therefore, the letters that were deemed as “proper” by the NLC were valued for their Ghanaian identity. In particular these decisions demonstrate that Nabit speakers felt attached to the pre-existing “local characters” and the desire to include these characters in the Nabit orthography shows that Nabit speakers identify with the greater Ghana community. In fact, this connection to Ghana as a whole was stronger
than the desire to develop a unique orthography as choosing to use all the “local characters” meant that Nabit was using the same symbols as Gurene rather than developing a distinct orthography. Secondly, it highlights the fact that Nabit speakers are influenced by a number of other languages and their orthographies, which ended up being an incredibly important consideration in the orthography development process.

4.5.1.2 Spelling Rules

While symbols are important to an orthography, there needs to be an agreed system of use for these symbols because as Seifart notes, “an orthography is defined as the conjunction of a set of graphemes, such as an alphabet, and a set of accompanying rules regulating their use” (2006:277). To develop rules that govern the use of the new Nabit orthography, we first had to address three spelling rules that pre-dated the development of the Nabit orthography. The first was, adding an <e> at the end of words ending with <r> when it was not pronounced. For example, while we were discussing the word [nɔːr], meaning mouth, one of the NLC members suggested that I add an <e> to the end of the word. Samare was very opposed to this. He said, “yes but this [r] sound is already there [nɔːr] you see but if you add the <e> or any other vowel then you’ve changed it because if you add e it would be [nɔːre] and it’s not [nɔːre] it’s just [nɔːr].” In response, Vida proposed, “but the <e> may be silent” and Samare responded, “if it is silent what is the use of putting it there?” Another similar spelling rule was to add an <i> to words ending with <h>. One Nabit plural marker is to add an [h] sound at the end of the word, for example the word for dog is [baa] and the word dogs is [baah]. When I wrote this word on the board several speakers suggested I spell it <baahi>. It is not entirely clear where these two spelling rules came from, however, when I discussed it with Samare, an NLC member, in an interview he suggested that people might think <r> and <h> cannot stand on their own and
need a word final vowel (Samare, Interview June 18, 2014). Alternatively, it could also be part of a previous noun classification system that Gur languages traditionally used although most have fallen out of use (Naden 1988). To address these spellings I reminded the committee of our first principle that each symbol represents a sound and if we were going to teach people that < e > represents the sound [e] then writing it at the end of a word means people will pronounce it. So as Samare had already pointed out spelling mouth with an < e > at the end should be pronounced [nɔːre] and we want people to just say [nɔːr]. As well, we do not want to add an < i > to the end of the word for dogs because we want people to say [baah] not [baahi]. The NLC agreed to change these spelling rules, but they are surprisingly well established and when we began to practice writing several committee members still added < e > and < i > to words where they were not pronounced. This can be seen in Figure 4.6, a list of newly spelled Nabit words, where number 38 “hoe” was originally written < kũure> with an extra, silent <e>. However, the reviewer, another Nabit speaker, crossed it out to become < kũur > since it is pronounced [kũːr].
The last spelling rule I addressed is the tendency to drop unstressed vowels. For example, the word for fire is usually pronounced [bugəm] with an unstressed second vowel, so some people spelled it < bugm > instead of < bugum >. When I discussed it with the committee we decided that the true form of the word was [bugum] and, therefore, the second vowel should be written. This issue also arose in the practice spelling session for the word [sēgər] meaning forest. This word was needed for two different stories so one group spelled it < sēger > and the other spelled it < sēgr >. The spelling without the second vowel < sēgr > is what we decided to use in the storybooks, so the decision to follow this rule of including unstressed vowels may not be followed in all instances.
We also developed a few new rules to be used with the Nabit orthography. Two of these rules relate to writing the nasal diacritic \( \text{\textasciitilde} \). The committee agreed that nasal markings would only be used on the first vowel of long nasal vowels such as \(< \text{\textasciitilde}{\text{ābaru}}} \text{\textasciitilde}>\) which means canoe or on the first vowel in cases where a nasal vowel is interrupted by a glottal stop as in the word for kitchen which would be written \(< \text{dā`aŋ} \text{\textasciitilde}>\). The NLC also decided that the nasal diacritic did not need to be written on vowels that follow nasal consonants \(< \text{m n ŋ m ŋ ŋ m ŋ ŋ}>\) since these vowels are always nasal writing the diacritic would be unnecessary. For example the word for monkey is pronounced \([\text{m̥j̥a}:ŋ]\) but written \(< \text{m̥jaaŋ} \text{\textasciitilde} >\). This rule may change though as people begin writing they may find it easier to consistently mark nasalization.

### 4.5.2 Language Endangerment

During the workshop we also indirectly discussed endangerment of the Nabit language. In particular, committee members remembered some forgotten or uncommon words highlighting the loss of language even among fluent mother-tongue speakers, as they told me words that people I interviewed had not mentioned. The fact that some speakers remembered these words might be seen as an argument against language endangerment, but it does highlight the fact that some words are falling out of use and without documentation they could be lost or replaced. One discussion of uncommon words arose while we were discussing the sound \([\text{ɣ}]\). I introduced the word for uterus as \([\text{dɔɣhuŋ}]\) but this resulted in a long debate about whether this word was the correct word or not as some committee members felt the correct word was \([\text{dɔɣhum}]\). This led to other words being suggested, including a word for vagina that I had not documented in my interviews. Here is part of the discussion that followed:

Samare: \([\text{dɔɣhum}]\) is a word but meaning the number of times, referring to the number of times given birth not referring to the uterus

{debating in Nabit}

Ponka: the first one, the one on top {referring to \(< \text{dɔɣhuŋ} \text{\textasciitilde} >\)
{Robyn points at < dɔɣhuŋ >}
Francis: yes, yes, that is the uterus
Robyn: and is this a word? {referring to < dɔɣhum >}
Samare: that is a word
Vida: it is, number of times somebody has given birth

(ADW, June 21, 2014)

Then as we continued discussing how we should write [ɣ] more words emerged and the meaning of each word was debated.

Francis: [pɔɣhum] write [pɔɣhum] on the list
Robyn: wait there’s a < p >?
Vida: [pɔɣhum]
Josbert: yes
Robyn: what am I writing? Is that what I’m writing?
Josbert: < h >
Samare: < h > < g-h > < g-h >
Robyn: oh
{Robyn writes < pɔɣhum > on board}
Philomena: which one is that?
Vida: [pɔɣhum]
Philomena: but which
Vida: [pɔɣhum]
Philomena: [pɔɣhum] is the vagina itself
{debating in Nabit}

... Robyn: Josbert what is this word? {referring to < pɔɣhum >}
Josbert: [pɔɣhum]
Robyn: ya, what does it mean
Josbert: [pɔɣhum] so what is the meaning of the first [pɔɣhum]?
Robyn: ya, what is this word? {referring to < pɔɣhum >}
Philomena: [pɔɣhum] is the vagina
Robyn: really?
Vida: well so that is different because of the you know that [pim]
Robyn: ya [pim]
Vida: is the vagina that the [pɔɣhum]
Philomena: when it is related to birthing they use the word [pɔɣhum] to mean coming out is too small
Vida: so that is in a different context
Philomena: a different context
Nicholas: the [pɔɣhum] refers to the birth canal, all the organs associated with birth
{debating in Nabit}

... Francis: and do you know that this [pɔɣhum] and [dɔɣhum] is the same?
Nicholas: they are related but they are not the same, they are used differently
(ADW, June 21, 2014)

This discussion brought forward words that are not commonly used like [pɔɣhum] and that are, therefore, not easily defined. As well, it shows that there are some words that are already falling out of use, as the only word people told me during interviews for vagina was [pim], but during this discussion I learned that there were several more words relating to the vagina, female productive organs, and birth. Anytime the meaning of a word was in question the NLC discussed and debated it, as can be seen in the discussion of [dɔɣhum] above, so that the correct meaning could be documented. Although the NLC members were not explicitly discussing the endangerment of Nabit, the fact that there are terms that are uncommon suggests that some Nabit vocabulary is being lost, and likely some already have been, which is a concern that was raised in several of my interviews (Bob, Nmabone, Samare) and which I already demonstrated with the missing term for paddle in Chapter Three. As well, whenever a word was mentioned that could have more than one meaning, committee members would tell me the other meanings so that they could be documented in the record of the language and preserved for future use. For example, I originally listed the meaning of [sɔr] as path but was told it could also mean journey or permission. The NLC clearly wanted to use the opportunity of the ADW, and the chance to write in general, to document their language. This was a benefit that many speakers I interviewed (Bersiki, Bob, Samare) also believed the new writing system would bring.

This discussion about [dɔɣhum], and other discussions during the workshop, also demonstrated the importance of language to speakers. As I discussed in Chapter Three, speakers told me during interviews that they wanted to be able to write about Nabit culture and traditions in their own language. Similarly, during the ADW, speakers demonstrated that they also wanted to discuss their language in their own language, rather than in English. As you can see in the
example above, several times I have transcribed {debating in Nabit}. Any time that a controversial word or sound arose the committee first discussed it in Nabit, and then translated or summarized what had been said in English. This also supported what had been said in several interviews (Bersiki, Bob, Nmabone, Samare) that the Nabit language is important to speakers and that they want to be able to do things like analyze their language and write, in their own language rather than in English.

4.5.3 Language Purity

The discussion the NLC had about the meaning of words also relates to the ideology Nabit speakers hold about language purity. In the case of [dɔɣhum] shown above, the NLC wanted to ensure that the correct meaning of the word was recorded. NLC members also thought it was important to point out additional meanings of words so that a complete definition could be recorded. These discussions of a word’s meaning began very early in the workshop and continued throughout. For example, [d] is the fourth sound I discussed and this is the discussion the NLC had about the word I presented:

Robyn: so this is the [d] sound and this would be [duŋ] mosquito
Francis: can also be an animal
Ponka: can also be an animal
Robyn: the word means more than one thing?
Francis: yes, we are saying that the word [duŋ] can also mean an animal
Robyn: oh
Vida: yes animal [duŋ] is correct

(ADW, June 21, 2014)

In this excerpt it is clear that NLC members wanted to share additional definitions of words. This happened several times in the workshop when additional meanings for words were given such as [sɔr], [duŋ], [pɪk] and when the meaning of a word was debated like [dɔɣhum] and [jam]. It was, therefore, important to the NLC that the correct and complete definition of Nabit words be recorded to preserve “proper” Nabit.
Another discussion about Nabit purity arose during my presentation of the sound [ʃ]. This was a particularly interesting discussion about purity because in this case the NLC rejected a sound that is not supposed to exist even though a majority of speakers used it, as can be seen in the following discussion:

Robyn: so this is the [s] sound [sa:] < saa > so this is the [s] we also in Nabit have a variation of this sound and it’s [ʃ] um Gurenɛ doesn’t have this sound um so this is in the word hawk, some people say [seluk] some people say [ʃeluk] and then the plural…
Francis: it’s [seluk]
Ponka: there’s no [ʃeluk]
Francis: it’s [seluk]
Ponka: no [ʃ] we don’t have this [ʃ]
Robyn: of the 13 people that I interviewed 11 people said [ʃeluk]
Philomena: this is other pronunciation, which is probably why
Nicholas: we don’t have [ʃ]
Ponka: just [seluk]
Robyn: just < s >, so if people were saying that [ʃ] sound where do you think that comes from?
Nicholas: so we have some people who are pronouncing some words wrongly but we are saying this cannot be written down because of wrong people
Robyn: well if this sound does exist my recommendation would still be to write it as just < s > because < s > is the most common sound and if we write it this way {referring to < s >} people are still free to pronounce it how they want so if they want to do the [ʃ] for [seluk] they can but then they’ve written it that way < seluk >

(ADW, June 21, 2014)

In this discussion it is clear that there is strong opposition to the sound [ʃ], which was considered by the NLC to not exist in Nabit. As Nicholas pointed out pronunciation of the word [seluk] as [ʃeluk] is “wrong” however, Philomena said [ʃeluk] is an alternate pronunciation. Further analysis is needed to determine if the sound [ʃ] has been borrowed into Nabit, or if it is a very uncommon allophone of /s/. Regardless of how the sound [ʃ] ended up in the word [ʃeluk] it was not considered to be a “correct” Nabit sound and was therefore vetoed by the NLC and not included in the orthography.
The other way that purity ideologies surfaced in the ADW was in the way that NLC members teased each other when someone suggested a word that was not “pure” Nabit. At the end of our discussion about vowels I asked the NLC to suggest Nabit words that represent the four different articulations of Nabit vowels, to help me fill in gaps in my analysis. During this discussion a few speakers suggested words that were quickly rejected by the others as borrowed terms rather than Nabit. Although these rejections and discussions happened in Nabit, and were not usually translated for me, it was always clear to me when someone had proposed a borrowed word, because everyone else would react loudly and quickly disagree. Then the person who had proposed the word would be teased in a very friendly manner with everyone laughing and joking. Although the treatment was light and jovial, it was still clear in these moments that the NLC took very seriously the boundaries of the Nabit language and in particular the division between Nabit and Gurenɛ.

4.6 Alphabet in Action: Nabit Storybooks and Standardization

My original goal for the workshop was to provide the NLC with lots of time to practice writing in the new orthography so that we could test it and deal with any issues that arose, which has been effective in other orthography development processes (Easton 2000; Fitzgerald et al. 2012; Schreyer and Wagner 2013). Unfortunately our workshop started late because we first had to visit the family of a NLC member to pay our respects as there had been a death in the family. Then a storm blew in late in the afternoon, abruptly ending the workshop as many people needed to get home on motorcycles and bicycles before the storm began. Since we were short on time we did not have as much time to practice writing as I hoped and did not get to develop some of the literacy materials that I had planned.
Before the workshop ended, however, the committee members were able to practice writing in the new Nabit alphabet by translating words needed for the Nabit storybooks that Cindy and her team of students were developing, as mentioned in Chapter Two. The NLC members split into four groups and I gave each group a list of words in English, mainly nouns, from one of the stories. Working together, each group translated the English words into Nabit words, spelling them with the new alphabet. Since we did not have time to review the words as a group, we decided that Samare and Nicholas would review the lists of words to ensure that words were spelled according to the agreed upon orthography and rules. For an example see Figure 4.6. Once the words were finalized I worked with the student team to add the words to the storybooks. The student team decided to use the words to label the items/people in the images, seen in Figure 4.7 and also included a glossary at the end of each story, as seen in Figure 4.8. Both examples are from one of the storybooks (Nabdam School District 2014).
Once upon a time, there lived many wild animals in the Nangodi Forest.

**Figure 4.7: Nabit Storybook Example Page**

**Figure 4.8: Nabit Storybook Example Glossary**
Nearly one year after the alphabet workshop and the storybooks were published, we are working on the first revisions to the storybooks to correct errors and change spellings. Remembering that orthography development and literacy are a process, these are only the first of what will be many revisions as we work to standardize writing in Nabit, and each evolution brings us one step closer to a standard. These evolutions in language materials are incredibly important in the process of writing. As Schreyer demonstrated with her work developing a dictionary for the Kala language (Devolder et al. 2012), even though there are mistakes in the first edition of the dictionary, it has helped improve the prestige of the language and helped some dialects recognize borrowed words so that they can try to reintroduce indigenous terms (Schreyer 2015a). These books are an important progression in the stabilization and standardization of the new Nabit alphabet.

Although we attempted to develop a standard for the alphabet use and for spelling, this orthography is still new and it will take time to develop an acceptable “standard”. For instance, we chose to use a shallow orthography, meaning the focus was on how symbols represent sound, so that words can be pronounced correctly (Karan 2014; Seifart 2006; Venezky 2004). This is demonstrated by the spelling reforms I proposed, so that there are no “silent” letters. The alternative is to develop a more morphophonemic or etymological orthography that may not always result in correct pronunciation but provides more information about the origins of the word (Karan 2014; Venezky 2004;). As I suggested, Nabit may have previously had a more complicated noun classification system as several Gur and Niger-Congo languages did (Naden 1988) and the NLC may eventually decide that they want the spelling or words to represent their original forms rather than their current pronunciation. Additionally, there is still the potential that some symbols may change. As Nabit speakers begin to learn the alphabet, issues may arise, such
as Francis’s concern that \(< g >\) representing both \([g]\) and \([\gamma]\) will be too complicated for children to learn, and the symbol \(< \gamma >\) may be added to the alphabet. Standardization takes time and we need to continue to use and test the orthography before standardization can occur (Karan 2014). In the case of the Montagnis language spoken by the Innu in Quebec and Labrador, it took 25 years to establish a standard orthography acceptable to speakers of all the dialects (Baraby 2000). The Innu recognized that creating an orthography is an ongoing process and even once there was a working orthography the committees that developed it were maintained so that they could deal with issues that arose as orthography use continued to grow. As a speaker said in one of their Innu Language workshops, “let us remember that standardization of the orthography of the Innu language is a process to be continued into future years” (Baraby 2000:81). The NLC can follow this example, which serves as a reminder that simply creating an orthography is not enough to create a literate community. The language must be continually taught and cared for by the community, and the orthography itself must be taught and maintained. I hope that the NLC will continue to meet to discuss and document the Nabit language, to debate and work through orthographic issues, and produce literacy materials, all of which will help prevent further endangerment of the language.

4.7 Summary

The three prominent language ideologies NLC members held that emerged in the ADW were language and cultural endangerment, “purity”, and how Nabit “should” be written, which were the same ideologies held by Nabit speakers that I interviewed. NLC members’ language ideologies are important to analyze because they influenced the decisions that the NLC made about which symbols would be included in the orthography. In particular, these ideologies were significant when the NLC was selecting symbols for the Nabit alphabet as the selection process
for each symbol had to deal with a number of competing concerns, including linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Some of these factors were deciding which existing orthographies the alphabet would emulate or differ from, how the writing system would encapsulate Nabit identity, and how easy the writing system would be to learn and use. In some cases the NLC had to prioritize one factor over another, such as ease of use over unique Nabit identity. Understanding the language ideologies of NLC members, and other Nabit speakers, that influenced the development of the Nabit orthography allows us to better comprehend the intrinsic connection between language, culture, and identity.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Language Ideologies, Agency, and Orthography Development

Using the theories of language ideologies, meaning the way people think about their language (Kroskrity 2010), and agency, referring to the complex process of making decisions while taking into consideration cultural influences (Ahearn 2010a), such as gender, economics, politics, social differences, etc., I have sought to understand the factors which influenced the development of the Nabit orthography. In this thesis I analyzed the responses of Nabit speakers that I interviewed and the discussions the NLC had at the Alphabet Design Workshop to determine the language ideologies of Nabit speakers, particularly in regards to literacy. Through this analysis three main ideologies that Nabit speakers hold about their language emerged: (1) language and cultural endangerment, (2) linguistic purity, and (3) ideas about how Nabit “should” be written. Then using my other theoretical perspective of agency I analyzed how these language ideologies influenced both my suggestions to the NLC and the decisions that the NLC made. Through this analysis I aimed to address the following research questions:

1) How will community involvement influence the development of the Nabit orthography?
2) What is the most appropriate writing system to use to represent the language of Nabit, as decided by the community?
3) Is Nabit a dialect of the Frafra language or is it a separate but closely related language?
4) Based on Nabit’s relation to Gurene, should/could Nabit speakers use the already established Gurene orthography?

Reflecting on the process of documenting the Nabit language and my role in helping the Nabit community to develop an orthography for Nabit I will now explicitly address how my theoretical framework and resulting analysis allows me to answer each of these questions.
5.2 Reflecting on Research Questions

Although my research questions are all interconnected, to best explain how my analysis answers these questions I will address them individually. Firstly, community involvement had an incredibly meaningful influence on the development of the Nabit orthography. The opinions, representing language ideologies that Nabit speakers expressed during my interviews, significantly influenced the suggestions that I made during the Alphabet Design Workshop. These language ideologies, particularly the literacy ideologies about how Nabit “should” be written, informed me that some symbols were perceived to be “local characters” such as $\text{ŋ̃}$ and should definitely be included in the alphabet. Even more, the NLC who selected all of the symbols had an incredible influence on the final Nabit alphabet. Had I been developing the orthography without community input or selecting the symbols instead of the NLC I am confident that some of the symbols in the alphabet would be different. I likely would have chosen some alternate symbols than those the NLC chose, like $\text{ñ}$ instead of $\text{ŋ̃}$ and $\text{ɱ}$ instead of $\text{ŋm}$ in order to differentiate Nabit from Gurene if I had not realized the significance of these “local characters.” This would have been a major oversight because the choice to prioritize the uniqueness of Nabit conflicts with other non-linguistic factors that were equally, if not more, important to the NLC like Ghanaian identity and familiarity resulting in an easy to use alphabet. This demonstrates that there are always several non-linguistic factors to consider when selecting symbols for an orthography and these factors exist in a hierarchy, which is not static. Therefore, the pros and cons of prioritizing one factor over another had to be considered by the NLC for each symbol they decided on. This leads to the second question, what is the most appropriate writing system for Nabit?
The appropriate writing system, as decided by the NLC, was an alphabet based on the Roman alphabet with a few additional symbols that are used in the orthographies of other Ghanaian languages. The NLC had fulsome discussion about each sound and potential symbols, and selected symbols that they felt were appropriate. Since the NLC was deciding which symbols to include in the alphabet there were several agentive processes at work, which can be seen in the complex discussions the NLC had about each symbol. As I introduced in Chapter Two, Ahearn explains that agency is “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (2010a:28) meaning decision-making processes are influenced by social and cultural experiences and knowledge. Therefore, each decision the NLC made is the result of several social and cultural factors. In particular, the committee favoured symbols that were familiar to Nabit speakers and would be easy for them to use. Even when presented with unique symbols that would differentiate the Nabit alphabet from the Gurenɛ alphabet, familiarity was more important to the NLC. As I mentioned previously, the final Nabit alphabet that the NLC selected was nearly the same as the Gurenɛ alphabet, differing by only one symbol < nw > in Nabit which is < ñw > in Gurenɛ. At first this was quite surprising to me because Nabit “purity” was a very strong language ideology that focused on protecting “pure” Nabit, namely by avoiding influences from Gurenɛ. I thought that the NLC would select as different of an alphabet from that used by Gurenɛ as possible to help separate the languages and avoid more influence from Gurenɛ.

Upon further consideration though it is clear that the choice to use familiar characters actually aligns with Nabit identity, because of the strong connection to Ghanaian identity. As well, the choice to use these symbols also embodies another language ideology that Nabit speakers held which is language and cultural endangerment. As I explained in Chapter Four, the symbols that the NLC selected that were the same as Gurenɛ were also the same as other
Ghanaian languages. Since Nabit speakers associate with their Ghanaian identity this choice to use Ghanaian characters may also be viewed as way to maintain a cultural connection to this new language use. Additionally, Nabit speakers are concerned about language and cultural loss and view the development of an orthography as a means of protecting against further loss because of the documentation that writing will allow. The choice to use familiar symbols might indicate that the NLC thought having a familiar writing system meant that people could quickly learn it and begin using it to document the Nabit language and culture. If their goal is language and cultural documentation, having a unique alphabet is riskier because it would take more time to learn or could possibly be rejected by speakers as too foreign, resulting in revisions to the alphabet, thus delaying or significantly slowing the documentation of Nabit. Lastly, it is important to remember that Nabit speakers chose all of the symbols in the Nabit alphabet. This means that Nabit speakers must believe that despite the similarity to Gurenɛ, their choice of symbols for new alphabet represents their identity as Nabit speakers.

The third question, is Nabit a dialect of the Frafra language or a separate language, might be the most difficult to answer. Phonologically, the two languages are quite similar with only two sounds existing in Nabit, [nw] and tentatively [ɛ], which do not exist in Gurenɛ. Morphologically, however, there is more variation between the languages. As I heard in my interviews, Nabit speakers and Gurenɛ speakers use significantly different words for many items like calabash, which is [ŋman] in Nabit and [wani] in Gurenɛ. They also have different greeting responses to the question “how are you?” which in Nabit is [i ɛla?]. For instance the Nabit response for good is [laʔasoma] but the Gurenɛ response for good is [laʔawani]. Lastly, they have different naming practices as all Gurenɛ names require an [a] at the beginning. For example, in an interview Samare told me that a Nabit individual named [ti:] would be called
[ati:] in Gurenɛ (Samare, Interview, June 10, 2014). As a linguistic anthropologist though, the argument I believe is most important for considering Nabit and Gurenɛ as different is that the Nabit speakers I interviewed believe that the languages are quite different and they want to maintain these differences. Distinction from Gurenɛ is incredibly important to Nabit speakers and they have very serious concerns about the effect that the Gurenɛ language is having on the Nabit language, as a result of language contact, namely through intermarriage. As demonstrated by the discussion of differences between Nabit and Gurenɛ in Chapter Three and discussion of language purity in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, it is clear that Nabit speakers are interested in maintaining a pure form of their language, safe from the linguistic influences of Gurenɛ. And at least one speaker, Samare, is highly in favour of Nabit being classified as a language separate from Gurenɛ, to provide even further separation of the two languages. More research is needed to determine the linguistic status of Nabit as a dialect of Frafra or as a separate language, but when social and cultural factors are taken into consideration it is evident that Nabit could be classified as a language separate from Gurenɛ.

The creation of a Nabit alphabet separate from the Gurenɛ alphabet could help to separate the two languages. As Sebba notes, “where there is insufficient distance between related varieties to establish the claims of one variety to be autonomous from another, adopting divergent orthographies can provide a useful was of creating a sense of difference, even to the point of mutual unintelligibility” (2000:68-69). As well, a “common literature” or lack thereof is also considered in the classification of languages in ISO 639-3 code system. ISO 639-3 language codes are part of the ISO 639 language code system, which establishes internationally recognized codes for languages, which helps maintain records of how many languages exist and how they are related. SIL International regulates ISO 639-3 codes, which specifically strive to code all of
the languages in the world. The “Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code” form states, “where intelligibility between varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central variety that both understand can be strong indicators that they should nevertheless be considered varieties of the same language” (SIL 2015). Therefore, language varieties with different literatures and ethnolinguistic histories could be considered different languages. So for those who want Nabit to be considered a separate language, the Nabit alphabet is a step in the right direction because it helps establish a unique literary tradition for the language, which in turn may help to distinguish Nabit from Gurenɛ. Since the Nabit alphabet is so similar to Gurenɛ alphabet though, this leads to question four, could Nabit speakers have used the Gurenɛ alphabet instead of developing their own?

Although the Nabit alphabet only differs from the Gurenɛ alphabet by two characters < nw > and < ě > I think that it was an important process for Nabit speakers to develop their own orthography. As I heard in the testimonials of several Nabit speakers that I interviewed, they believe the languages to be very different and as a result think it is important for Nabit to have its own writing system. Even though the alphabets are incredibly similar, the Nabit alphabet can still be recognized as a separate alphabet, which can help to give prestige to the Nabit language, because having an established writing system that can be used in new domains will help to raise the status of the language. This is very important because Nabit speakers I interviewed who could write in the Gurenɛ orthography, told me that even if they used the Gurenɛ alphabet to write Nabit it was not recognized as writing because it was not correct Gurenɛ words or spellings. For instance, if a Nabit speaker wrote < ṇman > to mean calabash, it would be considered incorrect by Gurenɛ standards because that word does not exist in Gurenɛ. As Ponka said, “we know the Nabit and can write it but provision hasn’t been made for us to do that”
(Ponka, Interview, May 30, 2014). The development of a Nabit alphabet provides the necessary “provision” for Nabit writing, and even though the Nabit alphabet is similar to Gurenɛe, the fact that it has officially been recognized by the NLC means that Nabit writing can be recognized as correct and meaningful in its own right.

5.3 Areas for Future Research

Even though the development of the Nabit orthography is completed, there are several possible areas for future research on the Nabit language. First and foremost, there is more work to be done on the Nabit orthography. A fuller phonological analysis is needed to determine whether the vowels [ɛː], [ɔ], or [ɔː] exist and possibly to determine the origin of the sound [ʃ]. More morphological analysis can be done to determine what purpose the word endings [-hi] and [-re] originally served and if there is a benefit to writing them, resulting in a “deeper” orthography. Additionally, more work can be done with the NLC to practice writing and further test the orthography to help it progress to a standard form. As well, significant work is required to teach the Nabit orthography to more speakers which requires that more pedagogical materials be developed. Research can then be conducted to see what strategies people are using to teach or learn the alphabet and how new writers are using the alphabet and the effect this new literacy practice is having on their lives.

Although this research was focused on the development of the Nabit orthography, there are several other areas that emerged as topics of future research. Predominantly, there is a desire in the community to see the development of literacy materials including an alphabet book, which is in progress, storybooks, and a translation of the bible. Additionally, proverbs and metaphors emerged during interviews as a particularly important form of speech that merits additional study, analysis, and especially documentation before these expressions are lost. Lastly, another
morphological comparison of Nabit and Gurenɛ, using the Swadesh word lists I documented, would be useful to help clarify the similarities and differences between the two languages, especially if the NLC would like to pursue recognition as a separate language rather than a dialect of Frafra.

5.4 Contributions to Linguistic Anthropology and Orthography Development

This research, examining the language ideologies and agency of Nabit speakers, has benefits for the field of linguistic anthropology. Firstly, it demonstrates the importance of examining language ideologies to better understand the way that people think about their language. In particular, it highlights the Nabit Language Committee meetings as an “ideological site” that may be a useful arena for other researchers to recreate to reveal language ideologies of speakers they are working with. This research also emphasizes the significance of understanding the context of language ideologies, especially that of language “purity” before writing it off as an unhelpful attitude that resists change. In the case of Nabit, “purity” is important because maintaining a “pure” form of the language helps to maintain the linguistic boundary between Nabit and Gurenɛ. Lastly, this research supports the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity. Nabit speakers wanted to develop an orthography as a way to document and preserve both their language and culture. The NLC also decided to create their own orthography rather than using the pre-existing Gurenɛ to accentuate their separate identity because as Brown notes, “orthography is itself a presentation of oneself, one's identity, a direct reflection of the culture” (1993:84). This research can, therefore, also contributes more specifically to discussions about orthography development.

The development of the Nabit orthography is another example of the value of community involvement in orthography development and the importance of considering factors beyond
linguistic analysis. In the case of Nabit, some speakers that I interviewed or who were on the NLC were familiar with at least two other writing systems which influenced the symbols I suggested and the symbols they ended up choosing. So even when working with a language that has never been documented or written, researchers need to consider that speakers might still be familiar with other orthographies and may have well-developed ideas about how they want their language represented in writing (Sebba 2007). This, therefore, requires researchers to consider factors beyond linguistic analysis when developing orthographies including social, cultural, historical, and political context (Cahill 2014; Ottenheimer 2001; Terril and Dunn 2003). As I introduced in Chapter Two, Woolard proposes that, “orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized as simply reducing speech to writing but rather are symbols that themselves carry historical, cultural, and political meanings” (1998:23). Therefore, if we as researchers understand that orthographies carry social meaning, researchers need to consider these social meanings when developing writing systems. In making suggestions for the Nabit alphabet, I considered that people would like to transition from writing in Nabit to writing in English, so explained how each sound was represented in English. I considered that the NLC may wish to separate themselves from Gurenɛ so I also highlighted which symbols the Gurenɛ alphabet uses. Lastly, I considered which symbols were easy to use and learn as this was important to the NLC. It is especially important to recognize the speakers’ attitudes and opinions and ensure that they are represented in the choice of orthography. In the case of Nabit we developed a committee that oversaw the entire project and made the final decisions about which symbols would be included because then they could pick the symbols that they identified with. Community approval is, I would argue, the most significant factor in orthography development, because in the end it is better to have developed an orthography that the community identifies with and will use, than an
orthography that perfectly correlates to a linguistic analysis, that no one would ever write with. This community approval and ownership, I believe, is what we achieved in the development of the Nabit alphabet and what I hope will make it a successful orthography.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Robyn’s Research Summary (written by Robyn and presented by Vida to the Nabit Language Committee at a meeting in February 2014)

The goal of Robyn’s trip to Ghana is to work with the language committee to finalize the Nabit alphabet and develop language materials for the community.

When Robyn arrives in Ghana, the first step will be to meet with the committee to discuss the project, timeline, funding, and expected outcomes. Robyn will also ask the committee if they are willing to be interviewed or if they can suggest Nabit speakers for Robyn to interview.

The next step of the process is to interview and record Nabit speakers. Robyn proposes to conduct interviews with twelve speakers in the Nabdam District, two men and two women from the three different villages Nyobok, Nkunszei, and Sakote, (but these numbers are flexible). Ideally Robyn would like to interview speakers who are elders who are mother-tongue Nabit speakers and have not been formally educated in another language, because their speech will have been less influenced by English and other Ghanaian languages. These interviews will be fairly long and take approximately 4-6 hours over the course of a day or two days.

After she finishes all the interviews Robyn will compare the new data with the preliminary data and alphabet she developed with Vida. This will allow her to see what changes might be necessary to make to the alphabet. She will develop a presentation for the language committee making suggestions about how each sound could be represented, including information about how each sound is represented in English and Gur language.

The next step will then be to hold an alphabet design workshop with the language committee. The workshop will take approximately one day. Robyn will present the preliminary alphabet developed by Vida and Robyn in the summer of 2012 and we will then discuss any changes that are necessary based on Robyn’s interviews in 2014, and also any changes that the committee would like to make.

Once the orthography is finalized, Robyn will lead training sessions to teach community members how to use the Nabit alphabet. The first session will be for the language committee, community leaders, elders, and teachers. Then once these community members feel comfortable with the writing system, they can lead the teaching of other speakers. At this time we will also create language tools, such as alphabet charts and storybooks, which can be used in the schools and adult literacy programs.

The final step in the process will be for Robyn to meet with the language committee to discuss the success of the project and ensure that all objectives have been met. This meeting will also include discussion about the future of the project.
Appendix B: Nabit Interview Script

Nabit Language Project
PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW SCRIPT

The following set of questions has been developed as a guide for language elicitation with Nabit speakers. The purpose of the interviews is to document all of the sounds of the language of Nabit so that a writing system can be developed. The focus is on words and sentences in the Nabit language that will help the researcher to better understand the language’s phonology. The interviews will be conducted in a place where the research participant feels most comfortable.

PART 1
PERSONAL BACKGROUND:

1) Full name (Nabit name and nicknames if any):

2) Date of birth:
   Place of birth:
   Where most childhood time was spent:
   Where most adult life has been spent:

3) Names of parents:
   - Father:
   - Mother:
   Community of origin of parents:
   Number of siblings:

4) Personal clan/community membership:
   Parent clan/community memberships:
   - Father:
   - Mother:

5) Number of years of formal schooling:
   Language of schools:

6) Which languages do you speak?
PART 2

EXTENDED WORD LIST:

NOUNS: In English ask “How do you say……?” Robyn will repeat each term and record it in IPA in order to make sure pronunciation is correct and to check for plural forms.

ANIMALS:
1. dog(s)
2. cat(s)
3. pig(s)
4. rat(s)
5. elephant(s)
6. monkey(s)
7. hare(s)
8. goat(s)
9. sheep(s)
10. donkey(s)
11. cow(s)
12. bull(s)
13. fowl(s)
14. guinea fowl(s)
15. horse(s)
16. rabbit(s)
17. hedgehog(s)
18. lion(s)
19. hyena(s)
20. hippopotamus(s)
21. antelope(s)
22. buffalo(s)
23. bird(s)
24. bat(s)
25. egret(s)
26. duck(s)
27. hawk(s)
28. eagle(s)
29. parrot(s)
30. owl(s)
31. woodpecker(s)
32. chicken(s)
33. crow(s)
34. dove(s)
35. lizard(s)
36. snake(s)
37. crocodile(s)
38. frog(s)
39. turtle(s)
40. housefly(s)  
41. cockroach(s)  
42. mosquito(s)  
43. bedbug(s)  
44. louse(s)  
45. fish(s)  

PLANTS AND FOOD:  
46. tree  
47. flower  
48. grass  
49. banana  
50. coconut  
51. sweet potato  
52. yam  
53. rice  
54. corn/maize  
55. cowpea  
56. sorghum  
57. millet  
58. ground nuts  
59. beans  
60. tomato  
61. game, meat  

EARTH AND WEATHER:  
62. sun  
63. moon  
64. star  
65. sky  
66. cloud  
67. water  
68. saltwater  
69. ocean  
70. river  
71. riverbank  
72. lake  
73. sand  
74. ground  
75. mountain(s)  
76. forest  
77. swamp  
78. flood  
79. mud  
80. stone  
81. hole
82. rain
83. wind
84. fog
85. dry season
86. rainy season
87. earthquake
88. path

MISCELLANEOUS:
89. ghost
90. spirit 1
91. spirit/soul/shadow
92. house
93. cookhouse
94. village
95. garden
96. knife
97. axe
98. clay pot
99. handbasket
100. sleeping mat
101. bed
102. blanket
103. pillow
104. broom
105. drum (music)
106. comb
107. spear
108. bow/arrow
109. carrying stick
110. fence
111. fire
112. ashes
113. smoke
114. stone oven
115. canoe
116. paddle
117. net
118. meeting
119. walking stick

PERSONAL PRONOUNS:
120. I/me
121. you (singular)
122. we (inclusive)
123. we (exclusive)
124. you (plural)
125. we (incl dual)
126. we (excl dual)
127. you (dual)
128. he
129. she
130. it
131. they (dual)
132. they (plural)

BODY PARTS:
133. my head
134. your head
135. his head
136. her head
137. our heads
138. our heads
139. your heads
140. their heads
141. forehead
142. occiput(s)
143. jaw(s)
144. mouth(s)
145. lip(s)
146. tongue(s)
147. tooth(s)
148. eye(s)
149. cheek(s)
150. nose(s)
151. face(s)
152. breast(s)
153. vagina(s)
154. clitoris(s)
155. uterus
156. penis(s)
157. scrotum(s)
158. testis(s)
159. anus(s)
160. buttock(s)
161. leg(s)
162. knee(s)
163. foot(s)
164. arm(s)
165. hand(s)
**KINSHIP TERMS:**

166. man  
167. men (pl)  
168. woman  
169. women (pl)  
170. child  
171. children (pl)  
172. my son  
173. my daughter  
174. my father  
175. my mother  
176. my grandfather  
177. my grandmother  
178. my grandson  
179. my granddaughter  
180. my great-grandson  
181. my great-granddaughter  
182. my husband  
183. my wife  
184. my mother-in-law(s)  
185. my father-in-law(s)  
186. my sister-in-law(s)  
187. my brother-in-law(s)  
188. my uncle(s) (father’s side)  
189. my uncle(s) (mother’s side)  
190. my aunt(s) (father’s side)  
191. my aunt(s) (mother’s side)  
192. my house is big  
193. my house is little  
194. this fish is big  
195. this fish is little  
196. this is a good basket  
197. this is a bad basket  
198. this man is good  
199. this man is bad

**COLOURS:**

200. blanket  
201. black blanket  
202. white blanket  
203. red blanket  
204. yellow blanket  
205. green blanket  
206. blue blanket  
207. multicolored blanket
208. bird
209. black bird
210. white bird
211. red bird
212. yellow bird
213. green bird
214. blue bird
215. multicolored bird

216. today I go to the village
217. yesterday I went to the village
218. tomorrow I am going to the village
219. I have not gone to the village yet

TRANSITIVE VERBS:

220. I see you (sg)
221. I see him/her
222. I see you (pl)
223. I see them

224. You (sg) see me
225. You (sg) see him
226. you (sg) see them
227. you (sg) see us

228. he sees me
229. he sees you (sg)
230. he sees us (in)
231. he sees us (ex)
232. he sees you (pl)
233. he sees them

234. they see me
235. they see you (sg)
236. they see us (in)
237. they see us (ex)
238. they see you (pl)
239. they see them

240. we see you (sg)
241. we see him
242. we see her
243. we see you (pl)
244. we see them
245. you (pl) see me
246. you (pl) see him
247. you (pl) see us (in)
248. you (pl) see us (ex)
249. you (pl) see them

QUESTIONS and NEGATIVES:
250. where are you going?
251. when are you going home?
252. which way are you going?

253. who bought a goat?
254. what did my mother buy?
255. what did my mother buy the goat with?

LANGUAGE TERMS:
256. I talk to you (sg)
257. You (sg) talk to me

258. I listen to you (sg)
259. You (sg) listen to me

260. I write a story
261. You (sg) write a story

NUMERALS:

NUMBER OF ITEMS:
262. zero pigs
263. one pig
264. two pigs
265. three pigs
266. four pigs
267. five pigs
268. six pigs
269. seven pigs
270. eight pigs
271. nine pigs
272. ten pigs
273. eleven
274. twelve
275. thirteen
276. fourteen
277. fifteen
278. sixteen
279. seventeen
280. eighteen
281. nineteen
282. twenty
283. twenty-one
284. twenty-two
285. twenty-three
286. twenty-four
287. twenty-five
288. twenty-six
289. twenty-seven
290. twenty-eight
291. twenty-nine
292. thirty
293. forty
294. fifty
295. sixty
296. seventy
297. eighty
298. ninety
299. hundred
300. two hundred
301. three hundred
302. four hundred
303. six hundred and five

COUNTING:
304. one
305. two
306. three
307. four
308. five
309. six
310. seven
311. eight
312. nine
313. ten

END of Words and Phrases

PART 3
STORIES:
1) Please provide a short story about some aspect of life in Nabit.
2) Please provide a short story about something funny.
3) Please provide a short story about when you were a child.
PART 4

AUTONYM:
1) What do you call your language?
2) What do others call your language?

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES:
1) How do men speak in Nabit?
2) How do women speak in Nabit?
3) What are the main differences, if any?
4) How do children speak in Nabit?
5) How is children’s speech different from adults’ speech?
6) Is there a Nabit for formal situations? If yes, how is it different than everyday Nabit?
7) Is there a Nabit for ritual situations? If yes, how is it different than everyday Nabit?
8) Do adults speak a different version of Nabit to children? (like Baby talk?) If yes, how is this Nabit different from everyday Nabit?
9) How is the Nabit in your village different from the Nabit in other villages?
10) How is Nabit different from Gurenɛ?

WRITING:
1) Have you ever written Nabit? If Yes, what letters did you use?
2) Would you like to be able to write in Nabit? If yes, what would you like to be able to write? (stories, notes)
3) Did you know that Gurenɛ has a writing system already? Would you like Nabit to use the Gurenɛ writing system or have its own?
Appendix C: List of Interviews and Workshops

2014
Bersiki Tii-Interview June 7, 2014 Nyobok, Upper East Ghana
Binimami Yen-Interview June 11 and 18, 2014 Nangodi, Upper East Ghana
(Bob) Man Yam-Interview May 29, 2014 Sakote, Upper East Ghana
Boyadan Kurug-Interview June 11, 2014 Nangodi, Upper East Ghana
Daknab Sapak-Interview June 9, 2014 Daliga, Upper East Ghana
Dominic Zuure-Interview May 25 and June 20, 2014 Bolgatanga, Upper East Ghana
Dugdarg Badugma-Interview May 31, 2014 Kongo, Upper East Ghana
Mvokanye Nab-Interview June 10, 2014 Pelungu, Upper East Ghana
Nmabon Dogumdeni-Interview June 2 and 17, 2014 Sakote, Upper East Ghana
Pitomso Yamigla-Interview June 7, 2014 Nyobok, Upper East Ghana
Ponka Paul-Interview May 30, 2014 Kongo, Upper East Ghana
Samare Patrick Pasure-Interview June 10 and 18, 2014 Pelungu, Upper East Ghana
Yenbelung Gulugmo-Interview June 2, 2014 Sakote, Upper East Ghana

Alphabet Workshop June 21, 2014, Sakote, Upper East Ghana

2012
Vida Yakong-Interviews May 9, 16, 23, and 30, June 8, and 13, July 25, October 2, 2012,
Kelowna, BC Canada

Alphabet Workshop August 7, 2012, Kelowna, BC Canada
Appendix D: Swadesh Word List

Nabit Language Project

SWADESH 100 WORD LIST

1. I
2. thou/you (sg)
3. we (inclusive)
4. this
5. that
6. who
7. what
8. not
9. all
10. many
11. one
12. two
13. big
14. long (not wide)
15. small
16. woman
17. man
18. person
19. fish (noun)
20. bird
21. dog
22. louse
23. tree
24. seed (noun)
25. leaf
26. root
27. bark (of a tree)
28. skin (of a person)
29. flesh
30. blood
31. bone
32. grease
33. egg
34. horn (of an animal)
35. tail
36. feather
37. hair (human)
38. head
39. ear
40. eye
41. nose
42. mouth
43. tooth
44. tongue
45. claw
46. foot
47. knee
48. hand
49. belly
50. neck
51. breast(s)
52. heart
53. liver
54. drink (verb)
55. eat (verb)
56. bite (verb)
57. see (verb)
58. hear (verb)
59. know (verb)
60. sleep (verb)
61. die (verb)
62. kill (verb)
63. swim (verb)
64. fly (verb)
65. walk (verb)
66. come (verb)
67. lie (lie on side)
68. sit (verb)
69. stand (verb)
70. give (verb)
71. say (verb)
72. sun
73. moon
74. star
75. water (noun)
76. rain
77. stone
78. sand
79. earth
80. cloud
81. smoke (noun, from fire)
82. fire
83. ash
84. burn (verb)
85. path
86. mountain
87. red
88. green
89. yellow
90. white
91. black
92. night
93. hot
94. cold
95. full
96. new
97. good
98. round
99. dry
100. name
Appendix E: Ethics Certificate

The University of British Columbia Okanagan
Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
3333 University Way
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7  Phone: 250-807-8832
Fax: 250-807-8438

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</th>
<th>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</th>
<th>UBC BREB NUMBER:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Christine Schreyer</td>
<td>UBC/UBCO IKE Barber School of Arts &amp; Sc/UBCO Admin Unit 1 Arts &amp; Sci</td>
<td>H14-00214</td>
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INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

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CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):  
Robyn Giffen

SPONSORING AGENCIES:  
Foundation for Endangered Languages - "We Begin to Write: Creating and Using the First Nabit Orthography"

PROJECT TITLE:  
We begin to write: Creating and using the first Nabit orthography

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: March 24, 2015

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:  
DATE APPROVED: March 24, 2014

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The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board Okanagan