

A Phonological Description of Tarok

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the phonological system of Tarok (also known as Plains Tarok, a dialect of the language spoken by the Tarok people, predominantly of the Langtang North and South extraction of Plateau State, Nigeria). The phonological description was based on data collected from the older native speakers in their land of nativity by the researchers (one of whom is a fluent native speaker) though with the help of some literate older native speakers as research assistant who validated the data. Descriptive approach was employed as the analytical procedure of the phonological inventory of the segmental and suprasegmental elements (i.e. vowels, the consonants, and tonal systems) of the language that were sourced as data. The study came up with the following findings: Tarok has twenty-nine consonants, and seven vowels; though no diphthong but there are diagraphs in the language. Our conclusion is that a supportive effort from the State, Federal Government of Nigeria and development partners may spur language experts to develop both standard orthography and literary materials that can drive better pedagogic pursuit of Tarok.

Introduction

The primacy of language is speech (Francis, 1967:173; Sapir, 1962:5), Quirk, 1973:7). In other words, language is primarily speech (spoken); the literary aspect (reading and writing are socio-educational development limited only to a very small group of human being while there are more languages that do not exist in written forms. Each language (whether spoken or written) consists of sounds arranged to form phonemic units, morphemes, words, phrases and sentences in certain agreeable patterns. Speech as a whole is composed of larger drawn from the utterances sound elements; implying that the understanding of the sound system of any language is the resources on which effective communication in the language is based. This is because the ability of a speaker of any language to function communicatively lies in his or her knowledge of its sound components

that allows him to strings together all such discrete phonemic elements to form segmental and suprasegmental units in the language.

It is no doubt that communication is one of the primary functions of human language. All creatures communicate in some way but that of the human is distinctively unique, complex yet it can be parsed and studied from different levels of analysis. The aspect of language study that concerns itself with sound analysis is referred to as Phonology; a branch of linguistics which investigates the ways in which sounds are formed systematically in different languages to perform communicative functions. In order to understand Phonology, one must have a grasp of the basic concepts of Phonetics, the study of inventory of all speech sounds which human beings are capable of producing (Katamba, 1985). Phonology is concerned with (for some linguists) both phonetics and phonemics (analysis). On the other hand, phonemes can be studied in their actual pronunciation (a narrow phonetic transcription) which is called variants of phonemes or 'allophones'. In a view to strengthening the foundation laid for the study of Tarok language, this study intends to give a detailed description of the phonological features of Tarok.

The heartland of Tarok land is located about 190km southeast of Jos in Plateau State of Central Nigeria with an area of about 2,500 square kilometres (Siman, 2006). The Tarok people are found predominantly in Langtang North, Langtang South and Wase Local Government Areas of Plateau State. An appreciable number of Tarok people is also found in Mikang, Kanke, Kanam, Pankshin, Shendam and Qua'an Pan Local Government Areas of Plateau state. A reasonable number is also found in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State. Tarok farming communities are also scattered in Nasarawa and Taraba States. The Tarok call themselves oTárók, their language iTárók and their land iTárók.

According to Longtau (2008), the Tarok are an amalgamation of various peoples who now form a more or less 'homogeneous' group. The constituents were of Pe, Ngas, Jukun, Boghom, Tel (Montol) and probably Tal extraction. The origins of others still remain obscure or unknown. The culture at a micro-level portrays this admixture of peoples within the Tarok nation. Other names have been used for the Tarok such as Appa and Yergam. Yergam is believed to be a corruption of the Tarok phrase *yar i ga*, "take/carry and let's go" as heard by early Hausa and Fulbe traders. The peculiarity of the utterance "carry and

let's go" therefore prompted the Hausa traders to nickname them Yergam. The name 'Appa' on the other hand is used by the Jukun to refer to Tarok as a friendship term.

According to Longtau (2008), the real meaning of the name Tarok itself is not known. However, a popular hypothesis, based on a Tal oral tradition has it that the Tarok came from Tal District, Pankshin LGA. Therefore, the name Tarok may be a description of that migration. In current Tarok, such a migration would be referred to as *Tal lok*, meaning, people of Tal have spread (Longtau, 2008).

The Tarok people are basically farmers. However, hunting is an integral part of their communal life. This has metamorphosed into a 'martial culture' of outstanding warlords, a reputation which has earned them the slogan, 'a land of Generals'. They have a relatively high number of retired and serving military officers in the Nigerian Armed Forces. The people take pride in the fact that they were never defeated by the Usman Danfodio Jihadists of the nineteenth century.

The name Tarok itself has been wrongly spelt by some as Taroh. It is believed that Tarok was a nickname given to the Tal/Ngas immigrants. The name of the original group is lost and has been replaced by this nickname. The term Pe-Tarok is coined to refer to the people who first spoke the pristine (i.e. original) form of the language called Tarok today, the mismatch notwithstanding. The word Pe in the compound Pe-Tarok describes the linguistic affinity of the proto-language. A corresponding nomenclature of Tal-Tarok describes only the direction of migration since there is no genetic linguistic affinity between Tal and Tarok (Longtau, 2008).

Crozier and Blench (1992) classified Tarok as Platoid, Benue Group and sub-group Tarokoid, listing other members of the sub-group as Bashar, Turkwam, Arum-Chesu and probably Pai, (i.e. Pe). Blench (1996) argues that Turkwam and Arum-Chesu, although clearly related to each other, are not part of Tarokoid. He has advanced strong evidence that Pe is a bona fide member of Tarokoid and not just a probable member as suggested in Crozier and Blench (1992). More recent studies by Blench (1998) on Sur (Tapshin) language spoken near Pankshin suggest that it is a member of the Tarokoid group too. The newest member of the grouping is the Kwang cluster formerly considered part of Ninzic. Figure 1 summarizes this classification

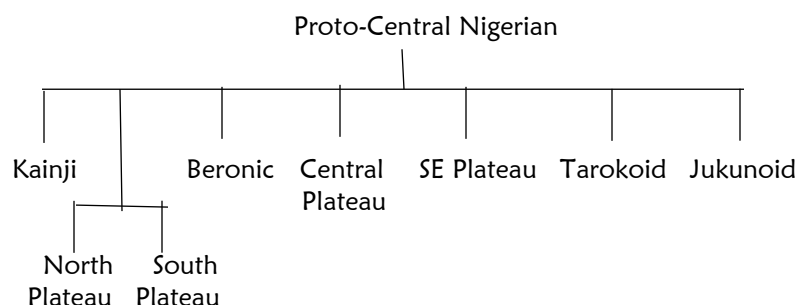


Figure 1. A proposal for the classification of Central Nigerian
(Source: Longtau, 2008, p5)

Segmental Phonology

Segmental phonology is the study of the sounds segments and how they come together to form meaningful utterances. To make it clearer, Roach (2000, p. 44) said: 'it is sometimes helpful to think of the phonemic system as similar to... set of pieces used in a chess... in a similar way, we have a more or less fixed set of pieces (phonemes) with which to play the game of speaking English'. This suggests that the segmental aspect has to do with a set of speech sounds units. We demonstrate the knowledge of segmental phonology when we are asked to judge whether a string of sounds can constitute a possible word in a language. The phonology of a language is also the inventory of its phonemes, i.e. the sum of all those sounds that show distinctive (meaning-differentiating) phonetic differences. The author has also undertaken an in-depth treatment of the segmental and supra-segmental features of language. In trying to distinguish between vowels and consonants, Gimson asserts that:

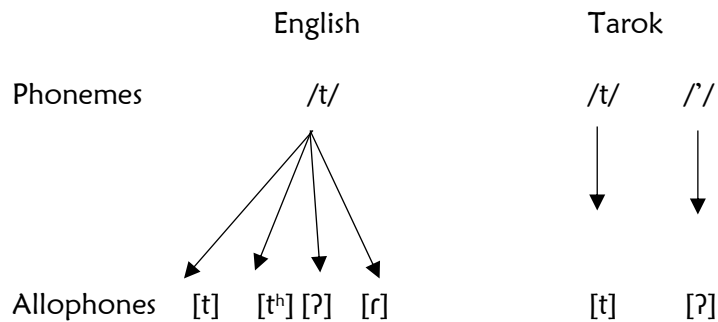
when vowel and consonant have been defined phonetically, the criterion of distinction has generally been one of stricture. i.e. the articulation of vowels is not accompanied by any closure or narrowing in the speech tract which would prevent the escape of the air stream through the mouth or give rise to audible friction; all other sounds (necessitating a closure or a

narrowing which involves friction) are consonants (Gimson, 1980, p. 32).

Phoneme, Phone and Allophone

Phoneme is the smallest meaningful unit of a language which distinguishes meaning; it is the organizational unit of segmental phonology. Sounds and phonemes in a language are referred to as Segmentals. Jones (1967) sees phonemes as a family of sounds in a given language which are related in character and are used in such a way that no member ever occurs in a word in the same phonetic context as any other member. Phonemes are distinct segments that make up the total inventory of sounds. A phoneme is the smallest linguistic unit of a language. Vowels and consonants make up the phonetic inventory of all human languages.

A simple way to define the phoneme, according to Višnja Josipovic, is to say that it is a family of sounds (Josipovic, 1999, p. 25). By way of illustration, let us refer to some English examples. The phonetic quality of the initial consonant of *car* [ka:] is different from that of *key* [ki:] in that the former is produced in the region of the soft palate and is thus a true velar, while the latter is somewhat fronted towards the palatal region under the influence of the following front vowel. Still, everyone would intuitively agree that these two sounds belong to the same English phoneme, /k/. Likewise, the initial [p] of *park* is produced with audible breath (i.e. it is fully aspirated), while with the [p] of *spark*, this is not the case, and still we would all agree that they are both realizations of /p/ in English. These examples illustrate the point that the phoneme can be conceived of as a set of phonetically similar sounds. These different realisations of a phoneme are referred to as its allophones. This could also be exemplified as follows:



In the above illustration, we see how the phoneme /t/ is related to its allophones in English and how the Tarok phonemes /t/ and /ʔ/ are related to their allophones. In English, [t], [tʰ], [ʔ], and [ɾ] are allophones of the same phoneme, which we can label /t/. In this way, we can say that in English the phoneme /t/ has the allophones [t] as in *stop* [stɒp], [tʰ] as in *tap* [tʰap], [ʔ] as in *kitten* [kiʔn], and [ɾ] as in *little* [lɪɾn]. On the other hand, in Tarok, [t] and [ʔ] are allophones of different phonemes. Note that symbols representing phonemes are written between slashes (/ /); this distinguishes them from symbols representing allophones, which are written between square brackets.

The phones that contribute to meaning differences in a language are called distinctive sounds. These distinctive sounds that contribute to meaning in words are called phonemes. Phones refers to actual sounds that we produce while phonemes as abstract mental representations of phones. An allophone has two basic meanings: (a) the realization of a phoneme and (b) the non-distinctive variants of a phoneme. Examples of allophones are written in square brackets []. An English example of allophones is provided by the alveolar [tʰ] and bilabial [pʰ] as in *tin* [tʰɪn] and *pin* [pʰɪn].

Supra-Segmental Phonology

Supra-segmental phonology is an aspect that functions above the individual sound units. This is supported by Hyman (1975, p. 187) that supra-segmental is used to “refer to both phonological and grammatical units larger than the segment.” Supra-segmental is

element of sound system which gives a language characteristic quality, so that the listener can identify the language even though he/she cannot distinguish individual word.

Syllable

Syllables is a unit of phonological organization and smaller than words. Alternatively, think of them as units of rhythm. Although they may contain several sounds, they combine them in ways that create the effect of unity. Thus *splash* is a single syllable but it combines three consonants, a vowel, and a final consonant /spl+æ+f/. Some words have a single syllable – so they are *monosyllable* or *monosyllabic*. Others have more than one syllable and are *polysyllable* or *polysyllabic*.

According to Yule (2010), a syllable must contain a vowel or vowel-like sound, including diphthongs. The most common type of syllable in language also has a consonant (C) before the vowel (V) and is typically represented as CV. Technically, the basic elements of the syllable are the onset (one or more consonants) followed by the rhyme. The rhyme (sometimes written as “rime”) consists of a vowel, which is treated as the nucleus, plus any following consonant(s), described as the coda. Syllables like *be*, *to* or *go* have an onset and a nucleus, but no coda. They are known as open syllables. When a coda is present, as in the syllables *on*, *cap*, *of* or *rat*, they are called closed syllables.

The syllable in Tarok is defined as a tone-carrying unit whose nucleus can be a vowel or syllabic nasal. Each syllable carries one and only one tone. The nucleus of the syllable may be preceded or followed by marginal consonantal units. On the basis of the different syllable margins and tones, 4 basic syllable types are established for Tarok: V plus tone, N plus tone, CV plus tone, and CVC plus tone (Longtau, 2008). This implies that in Tarok, unlike English, every syllable carries a tonal distinction. Tarok also has consonants that constitute syllable on their own. Tones are marked in this way: /' / for a high tone; mid tone is not marked; /ˌ / for a low tone; /ˋ / for a falling tone; and /ˊ / for the rising tone.

Tone and Intonation

Intonation pattern describes how pitch at the sentence and word levels can convey meaning or alter the emphasis of the communication. Intonation is also pitch of voice which plays an important part as it constantly changes during speech. Analysing intonation refers to listening to the speaker's pitch and recognising what it is doing. Tone languages also have intonation, a gradual increase or decrease in pitch over an utterance as well as an increase in general volume of sound on various parts of the utterance to indicate emotion.

Crystal (1975, p. 1) asserts that... "intonation is not a single system of contours and levels but the product of the interaction of features from different prosodic systems-tone, pitch-range, loudness, rhythmicity and tempo in particular" but Jowitt (2007) regards intonation as referring principally to the sequence in continuous speech of fluctuating pitch contours.

Description of Tarok Phonology

1. Vowel Phonemes

Tarok has seven (7) vowel systems and few other complex sounds (Longtau, 2008). These complex vowels are discussed separately in for better description and understanding. The table below gives some descriptions (tongue position, graphemes or possible spellings and contextual examples) of Tarok vowel phonemes.

Phoneme	Description of Vowels	Graphemes	Contextual Examples	Meaning
[i]	Close front vowel	i, ì, í	ikùr ìpí ìpì	sorghum rat cobra
[ɪ]	Half-close central vowel	ə, è, é	ìkən mbèn izér	gizzard to brew body
[ɛ]	Half-open front vowel	e, è, é	Le lèn kén	to return to respond to climb
[a]	Open central vowel	a, à, á	m̀mak pà kál	muchness to cut to cook some dough
[ɔ]	Half-open back rounded vowel	o, ò, ó	Ovàn afò bop	children animal pen to finish
[u]	Close back rounded vowel	u, ù, ú	but asù akúp	to gather earthen bowl bone
[ə]	Half-open central vowel	a, à, á	izar m̀mak pál	frog flour to exchange

Fig. 2. Table showing the vowel phonemes of Tarok

Source of Data: Longtau, 1993, p. 25-26; 2008, p. 16-17

From the above table, it is obvious that Tarok has fewer vowels than English. One of the obvious reasons will be that English borrowed sounds from many more languages than Tarok. Tarok lacks vowel length as present in English. Duration is not a feature for describing vowel phonemes in Tarok. This obviously account for the reduced number of vowel phonemes in Tarok. Thus, English has vowel sounds like /i:, a:, ɔ:, u:, and ɜ:/ that are obviously absent in Tarok.

Note that there are no phonetic symbols for diphthongs in Tarok. However, Longtau (2008) presents a number of complex vowel sounds which do not have a univalent vowel sequences. These complex vowels which he refers to as glides do not carry two separate tones but rather identical ones and have the same duration as segments with non-complex vowels. These glides have straightforward interpretations and they constitute single sound units, not sequence of two sounds.

Examples:	[iá]	/yá/	(to see)
	[ií]	/yí/	(to steal)
	[abai]	/abay/	(locust beans cake)
	[agbai]	/agbay/	(outside)
	[ugoi]	/ugoy/	(Hausa man)
	[nzau]	/nzaw/	(leather bowstring)
	[mbau]	/mbaw/	(a type of fruit tree)

2. Description of Tarok Glides (Diphthongs)

Longtau (2008), identify a number of complex vowel sounds. These are presented, grouped and interpreted accordingly. He further states that:

...the absence of univalent vowel sequences and the fact that there is no lengthening of the syllable due to the presence of the 2 vowels of the complex and since they do not carry 2 separate tones but rather identical ones and have the same duration as segments with non-complex vowels, their interpretation is straightforward. These glides constitute single sound units and not sequences of two sounds. (2008, p. 13)

According to Longtau (2008), three interpretations are given in order to describe these glides:

- i. There are phonetic segments that may be consonant or vowel. The high vowels [i] and [u] occurring in the onset marginal slot of the syllable function as consonants because they are not the highest point of sonority. The interpretation

of resultant utterances will therefore conform to the basic syllable types CV and CVC as in:

[iá]	/yá/	to see
[íi]	/yí/	to steal
[ièp]	/yèp/	to seep a thick liquid a little at a time
[ui]	/wi/	it is so!
[uáp]	/wáp/	to cultivate

- ii. Similarly, if these high vowels form the margin of the syllable in the coda slot then they too are functioning as consonants as in:

[agbai]	/agbay/	outside
[ugoi]	/ugoy/	Hausa man
[nzáù]	/nzáw/	leather bowstring
[m̀bòù]	/m̀bòw/	jumble beads
[b́fú]	/b́əw/	to finish

- iii. Lastly, the occurrence of the high vocoids in combination with consonants filling the onset slot of syllables needs to be interpreted. In that position, they occur as a consonantal release and are treated as syllable features. The high front vocoid occurs as the release palatalization, and the high back vocoid as the release labialization of CV or CVC basic syllables as in the following examples:

[m̀iàng]	/myàng/	to pinch
[v́iát]	/vyát/	to snatch
[bièt]	/bèt/	to despise
[biù]	/byu/	manner of fast movement of wind
[gíók]	/gyók/	to shave to style
[viu]	/vyu/	manner of movement of an object with a whistling sound
[akuàp]	/akwàp/	shoe

3. Consonant Phonemes

The English phonological system is made up of twenty-four consonants, whereas Longtau (2008) identifies twenty-nine consonants in Tarok language. The table below gives some descriptions (articulatory description, graphemes or possible spellings and contextual examples) of English consonant phonemes alongside those of Tarok.

Phoneme	Description of Consonants	Graphemes	Contextual Examples	Meaning
[p]	Voiceless bilabial plosive	P	pá pwát	to wear to insult
[b]	Voiced bilabial plosive	B	bá bwát	coarse grinding to peel off
[t]	Voiceless alveolar plosive	T	tán twat	to shiver to be thick
[d]	Voiced alveolar plosive	D	adák dán	Dirt to sew
[k]	Voiceless velar plosive	K	kak kàp	to break open to share
[g]	Voiced velar plosive	G	gà gár	to go to preserve
[f]	Voiceless labiodental fricative	F	fà fák	to go out to pamper
[v]	Voiced labiodental fricative	V	va vat	to have a dirty habit to peel off
[s]	Voiceless alveolar	S	sàp sám	to belch to chew

	grooved fricative			
[z]	Voiced alveolar grooved fricative	Z	zap zar	to add much water to shred
[ʔ]	Voiceless glottal plosive	,	ó'ó n'n	No no
[ɣ]	Voiced velar flat fricative	Gh	ghak ghap	to split open to raise up
[ʃ]	Voiceless palate-alveolar grooved fricative	Sh	shar shám	to dry up a bit to dress well
[ʒ]	Voiced postalveolar fricative	Zh	izhar azhám	buffalo dumpiness
[tʃ]	Voiceless palate-aveolar affricate	C	ca úcár	to scribble/dra w woman
[dʒ]	Voiced palato- aveolar affricate	J	jàng ìjar	to carry a heavy load/ portion a white striped rat
[m]	Voiced bilabial nasal	M	ma mar	to measure to give birth
[n]	Voiced alveolar nasal	N	nà nàr	to give to lay down
[ŋ]	Voiced velar nasal	Ng	angá nyáng	miskate to become/ grow
[l]	Voiced alveolar lateral	L	lan lár	to rejoice to live

[h]	Voiceless glottal fricative	H	há nhàdàp	for a while type of mat
[w]	Voiced labio-velar semi-vowel	W	iwú wáng	Eye to sharpen
[r]	Voiced postalveolar approximant	R	ran tár	to tie to enter
[j]	Voiced palatal semi-vowel	Y	ya yáng	to see to refuse
[b]	Voiced bilabial plosive with ingressive pharynx	b	bá ban	to come to be red
[d]	Voiced velar plosive with ingressive pharynx	ɗ	ɗák adéɗal	to try well hailstone
[ŋ]	Voiced palatal nasal	Ny	anyang nyan	Laziness to out-run
[kp]	Voiceless labio-velar double plosive	Kp	kpá kpán	Also to hold/ catch
[gb]	Voiced labio-velar double plosive	Gb	gbá igban	to speak figuratively traditional wooden tool

Fig. 3. Table showing the consonant phonemes and Tarok

Source of Data: Longtau, 1993, p. 28-230; 2008, p. 18-22

From the above table, it could be deduced that the obvious reason for the outnumbering of English consonant phonemes is due to the ample presence of labialised, velarised and palatalised consonants in many African languages, of which Tarok is one.

4. Tarok Consonant Clusters

Just as in English, a word in Tarok can begin with a vowel, with one, or two consonants. No word in Tarok begins with more than two consonants, thus the maximum number of segments in the word-initial consonant cluster is two (Longtau, 2008). The cluster sequence of Tarok is exemplified below:

Initial CC Cluster

The only instance of consonant cluster in Tarok occurs with the feature of labialisation as its cluster is barely with the bilabial semi-vowel /w/, and it is primarily followed by the vowels /a/ and /i/ only (Longtau, 2008:33-35)

Examples:

/bw/	as in	bwák	to remove flesh and leave only bones
/dʒw/	as in	ajwar	basket-like framework of twigs
/fw/	as in	fwa`	describes blowing quickly
/gw/	as in	gwanɡ	to meet
/mw/	as in	mwà	to pay
/pw/	as in	pwá	to leak a secret
/rw/	as in	rwam	to be tired
/sw/	as in	swáp	to pound and remove covering of grain
/tʃw/	as in	cwan	to break
/zw/	as in	zwar	to be confused

Instance of Phonological Interference

When the second language learner learns English there are two kinds of possible transfer that might occur. The first is when the transfer makes learning easier, and this occurs when both the native language and the target language have the same form. For example, both French and English have the word *table*, which can have the same meaning in both languages. Second, negative

transfer, (also known as interference. It is also called linguistic interference or cross-linguistic interference). This is the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language.

In this study, phonological interference is not so obvious in the learner's pronunciation of English words because the two languages seemingly have close identity in their phonological system (especially on their consonants collection). The obvious mispronunciation of words is seen in loanwords like Jos and Bulus which are pronounced by a Tarok person as aJòt and ùBulùt respectively. Longtau, (2008) describes this as a realisation of an unreleased /t/ in loanwords with final /s/. He further states that all syllable final plosives in Tarok are unreleased.

Tarok Phonological Processes

Tarok is not left out of languages that undergo phonological processes. The major phonological processes or juncture features, as referred to by Longtau, (2008) in Tarok that will be discussed here are vowel elision, consonant deletion, vowel assimilation and tone perturbation.

1. Vowel Elision

Vowel Elision is not a very common phonological process and is not always predictable (Longtau, 2008:45). Elision always takes place when the prepositional particle *ká* causes the elision of the initial vowel (a) of the following word (Longtau, 1993). Due to frequent use, the resulting combination is perceived as one concept as in the following:

<i>ká ashé</i>	(at inside)	→	<i>káshé</i>
<i>ká awó</i>	(on palm)	→	<i>káwó</i>
<i>ká apal</i>	(at top)	→	<i>kápal</i>
<i>ká akùm</i>	(at beneath)	→	<i>kákùm</i>
<i>ká anyín</i>	(on farm)	→	<i>kányín</i>

2. Consonant deletion

Deletion of liquids and nasals occur in some words and word combinations as a result of frequent use which leads to the blending of the words as a single word.

Examples:

apál akún (up wood)	→	apákún (elision as well) (dish rack)
atak awap (place grave)	→	atawap (graveyard)
apál mǐbín (up ground)	→	apámǐbín (earth)
dǎrkən (to erase)	→	dǎkən (to erase)

3. Assimilation

The open vowel of the first word (which may be a conjunction, pronoun, genitive or possessive particle) always assimilates to the first vowel beginning the following word.

Examples:

ùnəm ká ùyèn	→	ùnəm kú ùyèn (person and child)
ùnəm ká ívǎ	→	ùnəm kǐ ívǎ (person and dog)
ùnəm ká ován	→	ùnəm kó ován (person and children)
ùzǎ́ i	→	ùzǐ́ i (he/she will)
ùzǎ́ á	→	ùzǎ́ á (he/she should)
ìzhè ijǎ ozǎ́	→	ìzhè ijǒ ozǎ́ (their meat)
onəm pǎ oshát	→	onəm po oshát (three people)
íbǎ́l pǎ ipàrəm	→	íbǎ́l pi ipàrəm (two goats)
ashé onəm	→	ashé onəm (midst of people)

4. Tone Perturbation

The commonest type of tone perturbation in Tarok has to do with compound word formation and reduplications. Compound nouns can consist of verb plus noun, noun plus noun or noun plus verb. When the compound consists of a verb plus "noun, both parts remain unchanged, but if they consist of noun plus noun, the second noun remains unchanged (Sibomana 1980 cited in Longtau, 2008).

Examples:

zhíp (to dip) *plus* nìdəŋ (water) → *izhíp-nìdəŋ* (crocodile).
 aci (egg) *plus* ñnyil (bird) → aci-ñnyil (bird's egg)
 anùŋ (mouth) *plus* nìzhí (house) → anung-nìzhí (door)
 akpáp (hair) *plus* ishí (head) → akpap-ishí (head's hair)

Suprasegmental Phonology of Tarok

In this section, we shall explore some aspects of phonology bigger than the single sound (the segment). These are called suprasegmentals, and they include syllables, stress, tone and intonation.

1. Tarok Syllable Pattern

The syllable in Tarok is defined as a tone-carrying unit whose nucleus can be a vowel or syllabic nasal. Each syllable carries one and only one tone. The nucleus of the syllable may be preceded or followed by marginal consonantal units (Longtau, 2008). On the basis of the different syllable margins and tones, Selbut Longtau, in his book *The Tarok Language: Its Basic Principles and Grammar*, outlines four basic syllable types that are established for Tarok: V plus tone, N plus tone, CV plus tone, and CVC plus tone. Tones in Tarok are marked thus: /' / for a high tone, /˘ / for a low tone, /ˆ / for a falling tone, /˜ / for the rising tone, and mid tone is marked by an absence of a tone mark. These, in Tarok, are known as *tonemes*.

Longtau (2008:28) puts it that, given the criteria for setting up Tarok syllable types, there are twenty forms of syllable structure in Tarok because of the lexical tonemes. These are: V́, Ń, CV́, CV́C, V, N, CV, CVC, V̀, Ǹ, CV̀, CV̀C, Vˆ, Nˆ, CVˆ, CVˆC, V˜, CV˜, CV˜C and N˜.

Examples:

Toneme	Example	Gloss		Toneme	Example	Gloss
V̌	í	we		CV̌	Pà	to slaughter
Ň	ň	should I		CV̌C	Shang	to plough
CV̌	pá	to wear		V̌	î	we
CV̌C	shak	to abort		Ň	ňda	today
V̌	a	he/she/it		CV̌	úvâ	the one who...
Ň	nalap	Elephants		CV̌C	awol	local kitchen (with grinding stones and brewing pots)
CV̌	ma	Fitting		V̌	õ	he should
CV̌C	ndang	Water		CV̌	...adè tẽ	whose?
V̌	â	yes/indeed		CV̌C		
Ň	ňda	Sleep		Ň	m̌/ň	what!

Fig. 4. Tarok tonemes (syllable structure)

2. Tone and Intonation

Tone, in Tarok, brings about a change in lexical meaning while in English, a change in tone does not change the meaning of lexical items. So, while Tarok is a tonal language, English is an intonation language. Crosswhite and McDonough (2000:25) affirm this when they said “Chinese is a tone language while English is an intonation language.” Tarok assigns tone on both lexical and phrasal levels while English assigns an intonation only on phrasal level in order to achieve a change in meaning.

Like most Nigerian languages, Tarok is tonal. There are three level or static tones (high, mid and low) and two kinetic or gliding tones (falling and rising). The tones are marked as follows:

High (H) (´)

Mid (M)	(marked by the absence of a tone mark)
Low (L)	(˘)
Falling (HF)	(ˆ)
Rising (LR)	(ˇ)

Tones have a very high functional load in Tarok both at the lexical and grammatical levels (Longtau, 2008).

Examples:

L	M	H	HF	LR
n̄ (yes)			n̄ˆ (what?)	n̄ˇ (what a surprise!)
cak̄ (correctly)	cak (to branch off)	cak̄ (to gather up a scanty remnant)		
nyam̄ (to be squashed)	Nyam (to grind wet grain)	nyam̄ (to show)		
	suk (to sow)	suk̄ (to vomit)		
	lyanḡ (to stretch)	lyanḡ (to mix)		
	panḡ (to be tight)	panḡ (to pluck/cut)		
nyap̄ (not to bother about something)		nyap̄ (to break)		
war̄ (to pass watery stool)		war̄ (to bear fruit)		
shin̄ (to sob)	shin̄ (to demolish)			

Fig. 5. Tarok tones in monosyllabic words

Note that if a language uses a less common sound, one of its more common counterparts will usually also be included in that language's inventory of contrastive sounds. In terms of the chart

presented in (1), this means that any language that uses [ã] will also use [a], any language that uses [ã] will also use [a], any language that uses [d] will also use [t], and so on. This type of observation is called an implicational law (Dawson and Phelan, 2016:230) because the presence of the less common sound implies that the more common sound will also be used in the language.

Implicational laws can be stated for natural classes of sounds in addition to individual pairs of sounds. For instance, the class of voiceless consonants is relatively more common than the class of voiced consonants. In other words, if a language makes use of voiced stops, it will also make use of voiceless ones. The reverse is not true; there are some languages that have only voiceless stops. Thus, the presence of voiced stops implies the presence of their voiceless counterparts, while the presence of voiceless stops does not imply the presence of voiced ones.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to describe the phonological systems of Tarok for communication and pedagogical aims. The study commenced with brief historical background of the Tarok people and language. The consonants, vowels, stress, tones and intonation of the language in question are described using the same model – taxonomic phonology. Tarok has twenty-nine (29) consonant phonemes and seven (7) vowel phonemes. These thirty-six phonemes of Tarok are described as the study aimed at examining the segmental and supra-segmental phonology of Tarok. From the data here presented, this work has confirmed that, in some Nigerian languages, a change in Pitch does not only result in a change in the meaning of the lexical item but a change in its plurality status, the word changes from being singular to its plural form. Tarok is an example of languages that exhibit such characteristics.

The study shows that dental phonemes are absent in Tarok sound system whereas labio-velar phonemes are present in Tarok. The presence of labialised, palatalised and velarised consonants /b, d, ɲ, ɣ, kp and gb/ makes it obvious for Tarok to have more consonant phonemes than English. Implosives /ɓ and ɗ/ are present in Tarok but absent in English. Tarok lacks vowel

length as present in English. Duration is not a feature for describing vowel phonemes in Tarok. This obviously account for the reduced number of vowel phonemes in Tarok. Thus, English has vowel sounds like /i:, a:, ɔ:, u:, and ɜ:/ that are obviously absent in Tarok.

In the same way, the presence of fricatives in a language implies the presence of stops with the same place of articulation as the fricatives in that language. Thus, if a language has alveolar fricatives, it therefore implies that the language will have alveolar stops. For example, if a language uses an [s], then it also uses a [t] (alveolar fricative and alveolar stop respectively). Comparing English and Tarok in terms of tonality, we find that both (languages) use tone in one way or the other and this is because centrally, no language is spoken without the fluctuation of pitch across various levels, but the way in which English language uses tone and its resultant effects varies from the one that is obtainable in Tarok. In contrast to the operation of tone in Nigerian languages, a change in tone nearly always changes the meaning of the word entirely. Tarok does not have final clusters such as VCC and VCCC which are found in English, because of this reason, the Tarok speaker may find it very difficult to pronounce words of these categories. Also note that segments which may appear to have the syllable structure CVV have been treated as diphthongs. No univalent CVV words have been recorded in our data.

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