

# However did Ywom become so strange?

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# Background to Ywom I

- ❖ The Ywom language is part of West Chadic, but generally classified as an isolate. However, this is not the consequence of any extensive descriptive work
- ❖ Ywom, also spelt Yiwom, Yioum, is known as Garkawa, Gerkawa in earlier sources, the Hausa name for their main town
- ❖ It is spoken in Plateau State, in Shendam, Langtang and Mikang LGAs, essentially in one large town, Hyel Ywom and associated hamlets
- ❖ How many speakers? Very difficult to assess, but perhaps around 10,000
- ❖ Importantly, Jukun and Tarok are second languages to many Ywom, and Goemai [Ankwe] is also spoken by some clans

# Background to Ywom II

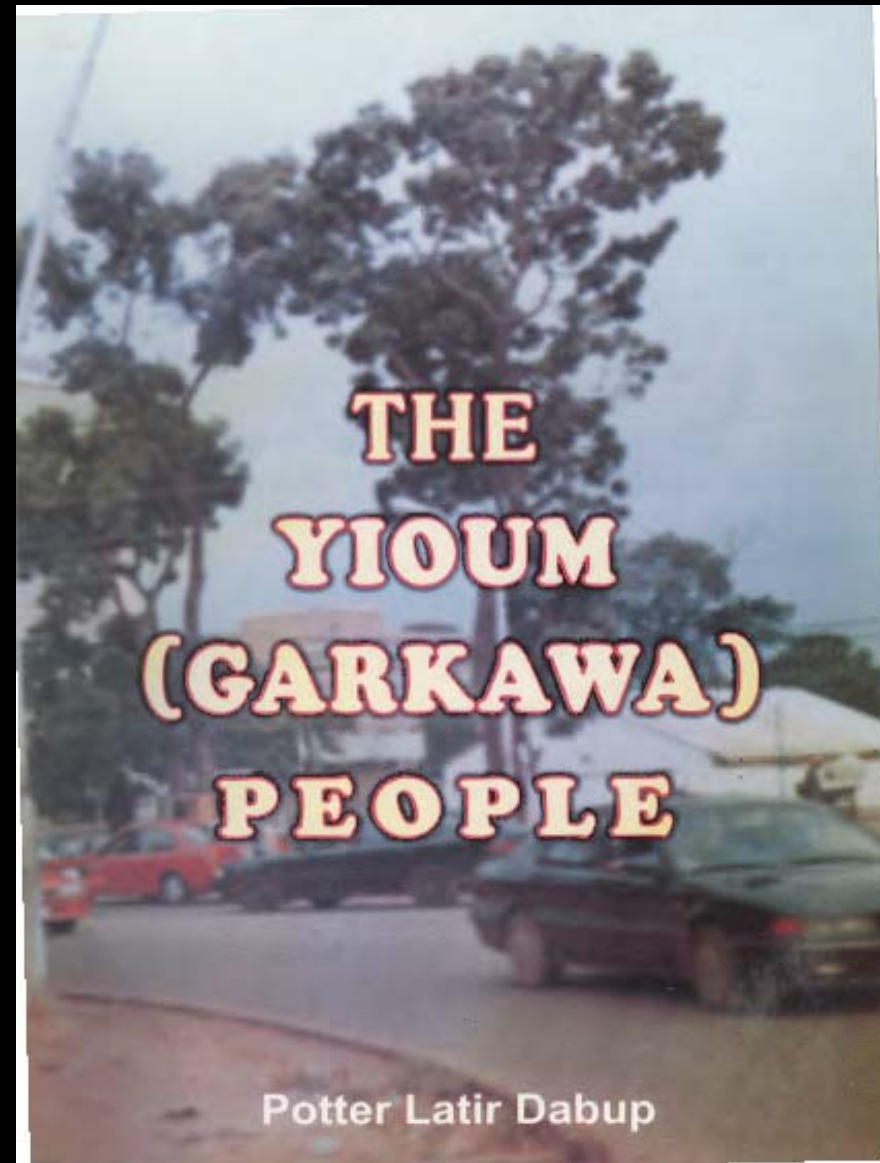
- ❖ The Ywom are divided into ten clans and their oral traditions suggest that they came together from other peoples in the area
- ❖ The clan generally acknowledged to be the first, the Pitop, is said to have come from Goemai
- ❖ The second clan to come was Rokta, who maintain ritual links with the Montol
- ❖ Varied traditions link clans with Ngas, Tal, Boghom and others.
- ❖ However, none explicitly link the Ywom with Tarok. Yet many southern Tarok place names are of Ywom origin, and it is likely their inhabitants are in part assimilated Ywom.

# Where are the Ywom?



# Background to Ywom III

- The only significant publication on Ywom history and culture.
- It has a section on language, which is culturally interesting but linguistically ill-informed
- According to this author the Ywom have 'an adulterated spoken dialect of their own'



# Ywom literacy

- ❖ The only previous study of Ywom I know of is the 1964 short sketch of Gerkawa by Hermann Jungraithmayr
- ❖ Ywom has been the subject of a literacy study and a booklet has been published on reading and writing (2011). However, it is not based on a comprehensive phonology and that is undoubtedly required for an effective orthography

## Comparisons with neighbouring languages

- ❖ The main languages with which Ywom should be compared are Goemai, Jukun and Tarok
- ❖ For Goemai we have the published grammar by Birgit Hellwig (2011). There is no substantial published lexical data, but Sirlinger left nearly 1000 pages of lexical and grammatical material, in a fairly effective orthography, though without tone
- ❖ For Jukun, we have the grammar of Shimizu and the lexical data in Comparative Jukunoid
- ❖ For Tarok we have the unpublished dictionary by Selbut Longtau and the present author and significant grammatical sketches plus a published phonology

# Ywom Phonology I

- The basic consonant phonemes are;

	Bila- bial	Labio- dental	Dental	Alve- olar	Pala- tal	Velar	Uvu- lar	Labial velar	Glot- tal
Stop	p b			t d		k g	ɠ	kp gb	ʔ
Implosive		ɓ		ɗ					
Nasal	m			n	ɲ		ŋ		
Fricative		f v	θ	s z	ʃ ʒ	ɣ			h
Rhotic				r					
Lateral				l					
Approximant					y			w	

- The labial-velars are of course highly unusual for a Chadic language and presumably derive from interaction with Plateau.



# Ywom Phonology II

- Examples of labial-velars

to know	kpèn
to smoke fish	kpan
gravel	kpàár
to shave	kpar
hatred	kpaŋ

leg	gbák
taro	gban
unripe	gbàán
press	gbàŋ

- The voiced labial-velar /gb/ is not very clearly articulated and appears to be in free variation with ʙ.



# Ywom Phonology IV

- i.e. the source for labial-velars is no obvious despite some similarities with Tarok. Ywom must have interacted with another Benue-Congo language now disappeared or displaced
- A consonant that only appears once is the voiceless dental fricative /θ/;
  - to bathe tìp θ ík
- The obvious source of this should be Jukunoid, but 'bathe' is \*vwog in Central Jukun
- Ywom has a voiced uvular plosive, /g/, which is probably not contrastive with the velar fricative /ɣ/, and is transcribed this way in Ywom Project (2011)

Stone	ègák
Ground	gél
Medicine (generic)	gèn
Neck	gě

# Ywom Phonology V

- A single example of a problematic sound is the vibrating /v/ in:
  - Black vwu
- The lower lip vibrates when the fricative sound is produced. ? Mentioned by Jungraithmayr
- Possibly related to the labio-dental flaps found in this region, but more examples would be required

# Ywom Phonology VI

- Ywom permits labialised and palatalised consonants. Labialised consonants with a low central vowel are definitely contrastive. Otherwise labialised consonants occur before mid back vowels and may be phonetic

bw	bwan	useless person
ɸw	ɸwat	dirt
fw	fwap	to squeeze
gw	gwal	crab
kw	kwat	tick
mw	mwàt	to hide
tw	twàl	to discuss
yw	Ywom	name of people

ɸwon	young
ɸwot	meat stock
dwop	what
fwol	to grow
kwom	bird sp.
mwòt	woman
vwut	dry season
Ywom	Ywom people

# Ywom Phonology VII

- Ywom also has a small number of palatal consonants, almost entirely focused on the stems with a low central vowel

ky	kyan	front
ɲ	ɲal	scar
ʃy	ʃyep	tree sp.

- A single case of a palatal-labial;
  - chin gywàm

# Ywom Phonology VIII

- More prevalent that palatals and labials are stems initials with rhotics and laterals. Rhotacised initials are as follows;

br	mbram	thunder
	mbrombro	eight
pr	pro	four
	pra	to chase
tr	tra	ten
	troŋ	liver
dr	drok	drop of water
	dra	tenth
kr	kɪm	person
	krom	plantain
	kram	difficult
gr	gra	to grind
	grum	placenta
gbr	gbraŋ	to grind roughly
	gbrip	to close forcefully

# Ywom Phonology IX

- Almost all stems have the low central vowel and or a back vowel. Consonants followed by a lateral are rare;

fl	flu	two
	flak	carelessly
pl	plan	young
	plok	to debark
kl	klak	?

- Again there is a strong tendency to favour the low central vowel and the back vowels in the stem.



# Ywom Phonology X

- Doubled consonants can arise from assimilation at morpheme boundaries. For example;

fwollə	old
gaŋŋi	task [ʔ]
kurri	to bend
tettə	to despise

- Final vowels in Ywom can be sounded with glottalisation or an unreleased –k, exactly as in Tarok. Examples of final glottals are as follows;

làʔ	cow
lèʔ	give birth
máʔ	farm
màʔ	mother
pyáŋmùʔ	six
sùwáʔ	mortar (wood)
táʔ	arm, hand
yìtméʔ	tear
tá <sup>k</sup>	drink

# Ywom Phonology XI

- Ywom has a seven-vowel system with three central vowels;

	<b>Front</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>Back</b>
<b>Close</b>	i	ɨ	u
<b>Close-Mid</b>	e	ə	o
<b>Open</b>		a	

- This resembles both Goemai and Tarok
- However, there are also some example of the high back unrounded vowel, possibly not phonemic

Salt	kùɨn
When?	nùɨ
Goat	gùɨ

# Ywom Phonology XII

- There are long/short contrasts for three vowels, /a/, /e/ and /i/, as in;

yáán	child
dèèr	road
kìn	salt

- Goemai has similar but more extensive length contrasts, but Tarok has none
- There are no nasalised vowels

# Ywom Phonology XIII

- An intriguing morphological process in Ywom is the deletion of vowels, leaving tones or consonant clusters. Examples recorded so far include;

Dog	zyát
Hunger	k`tím
Knee	fím
Ten	t`rá
Two	f`lù

- The writing system does not recognise this process and inserts a largely random vowel between the two adjacent consonants

# Ywom Phonology XIV

- Ywom Project (2011) claims that Ywom has three level tones, but does not present an example of three-way contrast. Although many other languages in Chadic A3 do appear to have three tones, such as Mwaghavul, Ywom almost certainly has two tones and occasional mid-tones are almost certainly phonetic. Minimal pairs are as follows;

wón	song	tún	sit down
wòn	to wash	tùn	ant-hill
mí	one	túk	soup
mì	relation	tùk	to kill

- There are surface glide tones, rising and falling, but there are almost certainly the output from sequences of level tones.

# Ywom Phonology XV

- An important analytic point is whether these cases are to be distinguished from lateralisation and rhoticisation, both of which are common in Ywom. Where the syllable does not show any tone contrast, i.e. there is no tone evident for the missing vowel, is this just a case where the tones of the two syllables were identical?
- We don't yet have examples of speaker variation, so not yet clear whether this is uniform between speakers. But we don't see this in Tarok and Goemai, though intriguingly in the remoter Mada. Perhaps just coincidence?
- The complexity of the phonology suggests that we will need a very lengthy wordlist to be sure of all the possible phones and prosodies

# Ywom Morphology

- Ywom nominal plurals have a small number of suppletives or irregulars

Gloss	sg.	pl.
person	nìywòm	ywòm, mùkùrùm
woman	m <sup>w</sup> òt	térèp
young person	yáán	yáárón
house	kélúk	lúk

# Ywom Syntax

- Basic word order is SVO;
- nì      í.sò              ɓwòn
- He    IMPF.drink    porridge
- 'he is eating porridge'

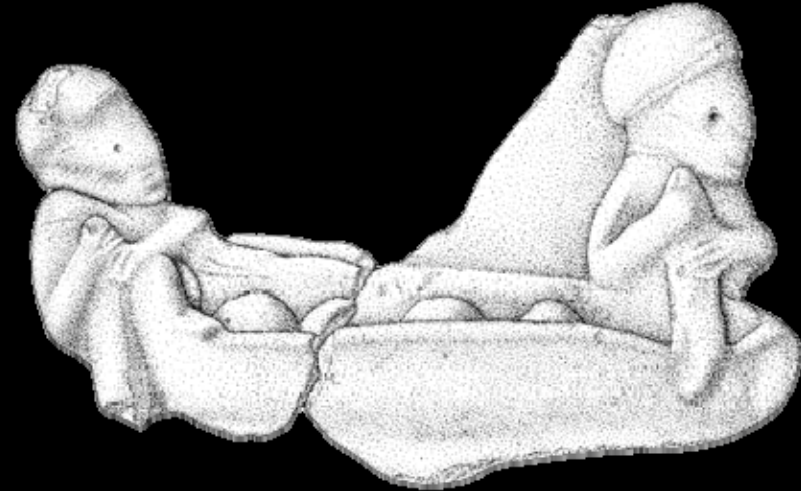


# Conclusions

- ❖ Ywom has developed a highly unusual phonology for a West Chadic language
- ❖ Ywom oral traditions suggest that the language ought to be a relation of Goemai with strong influence from Tarok and Jukun
- ❖ But this can't be the whole story, as there are aspects of the phonology and morphology of Ywom that don't seem to resemble either language
- ❖ For example, the labial-velars in Ywom strongly point to influence from a Plateau language. But...so far they show few correspondences with Tarok labial-velars
- ❖ My suggestion is that the linguistic geography of the region must have been quite different during the formation of the language. But it undoubtedly reflects an elaborate mixed heritage.

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