

TAROK REDUPLICATION AND SYLLABLE REPETITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Reduplication in different parts of speech	1
2.1 Verbs	1
2.1.1 Verb Reduplication following object omission	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.2 Adjectives.....	3
2.2.1 Adjectives derived from verbs.....	3
2.2.2 Ophresological adjectives.....	3
2.2.3 Insultative adjectives	4
2.3 Adverbs and ideophones.....	4
2.4 Nouns.....	5
3. Conclusions	5
References	5

1. Introduction

Reduplication is a topic that has attracted much attention, especially in African languages, largely because the rules are less than transparent. A paper by Robinson (1976) drew attention to a curious phenomenon in Tarok [=Yergam], a Benue-Congo language of east-Central Nigeria, the reduplication of nouns to express possessives in the third person. However, this is one element in Tarok reduplication which surfaces in many areas of the grammar and operates according to a diverse set of rules. This paper describes the main uses of reduplication in Tarok and their grammatical contexts.

The Tarok [=Yergam] people live primarily in the region around Langtang in south-east Plateau State, Nigeria. Tarok was first described by Fitzpatrick (1911). Robinson (1976) is a brief exploration of the morphology of possessives which involves an unusual type of reduplication. The principle scholarly publications on the Tarok language are by Leo Sibomana (1980, 1981a,b) who provides a useful summary of the phonology, noun-classes and verbal system. Longtau (1991, 1993, 2000, 2007, 2008) describes Tarok phonology and orthography as well as an overview of Tarok grammar and the implications of the classification of Tarok for the interpretation of oral tradition and elaborated a formal phonology.

The paper uses the phonological analysis proposed in Longtau (1993) but not the standard Tarok orthography, which has a misleading use of IPA symbols. The examples in this paper are written in a phonemically giving IPA symbols their conventional (2005) values.

IPA	Tarok orthography
ɪ	ə
ə	ɔ
ŋ	ñ

Three level and two contour tones are noted with the mid-tone unmarked. Word order in Tarok is SAuxVO with verbs not morphologically marked for tense/aspect. Tarok has a limited number of noun-classes showing alliterative concord with adjectives.

2. Reduplication in different parts of speech

2.1 Verb Reduplication following object omission in responses

In a Tarok question requiring an affirmative answer, the verb is repeated, bracketing the object.

Question: **uza li icu va li do?** did he indeed bury the black plum?

or

Question: **uza mandar alay va mandar do?** did he indeed throw away the talisman?

In a reply, the object pronoun is implied, but the repeated verb then has a reduplicated form.

Reply: **à, uza lili** indeed, he buried (it)

Reply: **à, uza mandarmandar** he indeed threw (it) away

Any verb, even the longest, can be reduplicated in this way. All verbs longer than one syllable, except those with a CVV structure, reduplicate exactly. Monosyllable verbs reduplicate according to the following rules;

Central vowels reduplicate as /ə/

Front vowels reduplicate as /i/

Back vowels reduplicate as /u/

All vowels following a labial or labialised consonant reduplicate as /u/ regardless of the stem vowel

All vowels following a palatal or palatalised consonant reduplicate as /i/ regardless of the stem vowel

All verbs with CVV structures reduplicate on the basis of the quality of V₁

Table 1 shows examples of reduplication in all possible monosyllabic and CVV verbs;

Table 1. Patterns of verb reduplication in Tarok			
Simple		Reduplicated	Gloss
là	→	ləlà	to speak
mān	→	məman	to agree
dəŋ	→	dədəŋ	to sprout
le	→	lile	to return
kér	→	kíkér	to prick
li	→	lili	to bury
píí	→	pípíí	to insist on
pím	→	pípím	to gnaw
mó	→	múmó	to deflate
yu	→	yuyu	to turn mouldy
kwí	→	kúkwí	to discuss secrets
lway	→	lulway	to wilt
pwa	→	pupwa	to reveal
myar	→	mimyar	to twist
nyi	→	ninyi	to know
pyep	→	piypyep	??? Not in dictionary

Tarok verbs usually have numerous meanings, so only a sample gloss is given in the table.

Verbal nouns are also reduplicated to indicate emphasis, usually in clause-final position.

o **goŋ** **acwaŋ** **goŋ** **ki** **iyam** **vá** **uza** **ka** **nləla**
 you give ear give what thing that he does saying
 you should pay attention to what he is saying

This isn't very satisfactory. We should have examples of reduplicated and non-reduplicated verbal nouns and the contexts of use.

2.2 Adjectives

2.2.1 Adjectives derived from verbs

There is an extensive class of adjectives derived from CV(C) or CVV verbs by exact reduplication with a concord prefix (V- or N-). The prefixes agree with the noun they qualify. Although the verbs have a fixed tone in citation form, the tone becomes underspecified when they become reduplicated adjectives. In most cases such adjectives also exhibit tonal concord with the noun they qualify. **Table 2** gives examples of the common reduplicated adjectives with their glosses;

Table 2. Common pattern of reduplicated adjectives

Verb	Gloss	Derived adjective	Gloss
ḃán	to be red	-ḃanḃan	red
caŋ	to be sweet	-caŋcaŋ	sweet
ḃək	to be heavy	-ḃəkḃək	heavy
ḃín	to blacken	-ḃinḃin	black
fá	to germinate	-fafa	germinated
fər	to be faint, to lose colour	-fərfər	white
ken⁺	to be cut off	-kenken	maimed
mai	to be wayward	-maimai	wayward
mwal	to be fat	-mwalmwal	fat
nəŋ	to smell	-nəŋnəŋ	nonsensical
re	to send	-rere	sent
sat	to cease	-satsat	infertile, barren
ta	to drop	-tata	dropped
tár	to enter	-tartar	hidden

In most cases there is a transparent relationship between the meaning of the verb and the corresponding adjective, but occasionally the primary meaning of the CVC verb has disappeared, as in the case of **sat**, which no longer has the sense of ‘to be infertile’. In other examples, the meaning of the reduplicated adjective can only be deduced through a knowledge of Tarok culture, for example in the case of **nəŋ** ‘to smell’.

Examples of how reduplicated adjectives show tonal concord

Longer complete reduplications are also possible, as shown in **Table 3**;

Table 3. Reduplicated adjectives other than CV(C)

Verb	Gloss	Derived adjective	Gloss
ḃiləŋ	to be dislocated	-ḃiləŋḃiləŋ	dislocated
gáli	to be watery	-galigali	watery
guluk	to be deep-set	-gulukguluk	deep-set
kukkuruk	to be thick	-kukkuruk	thick
pərək	to be foolish	-pərək	foolish

2.2.2 Ophresological adjectives

Tarok has a range of terms describing odours, all of which are reduplicated and all of which are complements to the verb **nəŋ** ‘to smell’ (Blench & Longtau 1993). The exact grammatical category these terms should be assigned to is unclear. They do not have nominal prefixes and follow the reduplication pattern of verbs given in §2.1. Table 4 shows the set of ophresiological terms and the commentary that follows describes their specific properties.

Table 4. Prefix reduplication in Tarok odour

Reduplicated

a nɛŋ shíshì	it smells burnt
a nɛŋ ɓɛɓɛŋ	it smells bad
a nɛŋ vuvón	it smells rotten egg or wet flour paste
a nɛŋ cìcàŋ	it smells sweet (any good smell)
a nɛŋ múmwán	it smells 'off' (but not so bad that it can't be eaten)
a nɛŋ vivyàp	it smells spoilt (general; past the point of edibility)
a nɛŋ sisám	it smells sour (fermented, such as overnight porridge or old beer)

Source: Blench & Longtau (1993)

Unlike the verbal reduplication in §2.1, the tones are not copied exactly between the two syllables.

Commentary on individual items

1. **shíshì** represents a regular reduplication of **shì** 'to burn', except that in normal reduplication the tone pattern would be High-High. High-Low usually only occurs in CVCVC reduplications.
2. **ɓɛɓɛŋ** is from the verb **ɓɛŋ** 'to be bad' but the tone is usually mid on the verb.
3. **vuvón** Although this is a reduplicated form, Tarok already supports a different reduplication of **vón** i.e. -**vonvon**, the usual adjective.
4. **cìcàŋ**. The usual reduplication of **càŋ** 'to be sweet' is -**càŋcàŋ**, the adjective meaning 'sweet'.
5. **múmwán**. The verb **mwán** is not usually reduplicated.
6. **vivyàp**. The usual reduplicated form is -**vyápvýàp** 'spoilt'
7. **sisám**. The usual reduplicated form is -**sámsám** 'sour'.

2.2.3 Insultative adjectives

Some of the most characteristic insults in Tarok use special adjectives that have a pejorative sense. These are usually placed before the noun and do not show concord with it. A corresponding reduplicated adjective usually exists and this shows concordial agreement with the noun as far as the prefix goes. However, they have a distinctive tone-pattern, HH(H)LL(L) which is applied regardless of the tone of the verb. These reduplicated concordial adjectives follow the noun they qualify and are considered purely descriptive. For example;

Qualifier	ɓáláp anùñ	thin mouth	insulting
	anùŋ aɓálápɓáláp	thin mouth	descriptive

They can also be used in the adverbial construction;

e.g. -**gúlúkgùlúk**

-guluk	describes a cavity that is deeper than expected
acwáŋ agúlúkgùlúk	ear with a deep cavity
acwáŋ pə gúlúk	ear with a deep cavity

2.3 Adverbs and ideophones

Some ideophones, usually those with simple CVC structures, can be optionally repeated as many times as the speaker wishes. For example;

bétbét... often

uzi	i⁺	ɓa	nzhi	yi	bétbét...
he	hab.	comes	house	our	often
he often comes to our house (unfortunately)					

bít... describes blackness

ngbət	nkpañ	a	dīn	pa	bítbít
pot	cook	it	black	introd.	very black

The cooking pot is very black

dúkdúk describes planting of seed very close

dùkdùk describes insisting too much

2.4 Nouns

Robinson (1976) has described the use of reduplication to indicate third person possession in Tarok. For example;

gəl	ishíshí	ba ka
cut off	his head	and bring [it]

Where the stem vowel is /a/, /u/ is the reduplicated vowel. For example;

akwap	shoe
akukwap	his shoe

bwàm v. 1. to hide 2. to conceal 3. to bury the dead

mbwàm — v.n. hiding

mbwàmbwàm — v.n. hide-and-seek (children's game)

Tarok nouns may also have reduplicated prefixes that result from compound words in fused forms. The meanings of the separate stems can be recovered in context. Examples are shown in Table 5;

Table 5. Initial stem syllable reduplication in Tarok nouns

Tarok	Gloss	Etymology
imimyang	dew	'something of pinched water', a compound derived from ' mi ' a Niger-Congo root for water ¹ plus ' myang ' meaning pieces
nlàláp	elephant	'something with ' lap ', i.e. floppy ears
ndadapyàt	house-bat	'something with bald head like old father', dada is old father, pyat 'scraped'
ashishiri	sand	'something with tiny particles'
anúnur	sore / wound	'something with burnt/warped surface', derived from the verb nur 'burnt/warped'
ađúđúr	heaven	'something that is far away/unreachable', derived from the verb đúr 'blowing/open'

3. Conclusions

Tarok makes extensive use of reduplication in a wide variety of grammatical contexts.

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¹ Cf. Horom, Rukul, Ura and C'Lela

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