TAROK VERB MORPHOLOGY:

RELIC VERBAL EXTENSIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

1. Introduction

The morphology of verbs in Niger-Congo languages has been the subject of some discussion and reconstructions have focussed on an 'ideal type' usually assumed to be CVCV. Synchronically, verb forms are extremely diverse both within and between individual languages. This is assumed to be the end-result of a process of erosion from the right combined with suffixing of sometimes multiple extensions. Although it is almost certain that verbal extensions should be reconstructed to Proto-Niger-Congo, few groups outside Bantu and Atlantic show highly productive systems (see Williamson & Blench 2000 for review by families). In Plateau languages in Central Nigeria in particular, no language has yet been reported with a functioning system, although traces of such a system appear to be widespread. This paper sets out to investigate the verbal morphology of Tarok, a Benue-Congo language of east-central Nigeria, which currently shows a wide variety of forms, to explore whether it isd reasonable to reconstruct a series of extensions based on synchronic forms.

The Tarok people live primarily in the region around Langtang in south-east Plateau State, Nigeria. Tarok was first described by Fitzpatrick (1911). The principle scholarly publications on the Tarok language are by Leo Sibomana (1980, 1981) who provides a useful summary of the phonology, noun-classes and verbal system. More recently, Longtau (1993) has presented a formal phonology.

The following paper[1] uses the phonological analysis proposed in Longtau (1993) but not the standard Tarok orthography, which has a rather misleading use of IPA symbols. The examples in this paper are written in a phonemically giving IPA symbols their conventional (1993) values.

IPA	Tarok orthography
ɨ	ə
ə	a̲
ŋ	ñ

Three level tones are noted with mid-tone unmarked.

2. Canonical Shapes of Verbs

Compared with many other Benue-Congo languages, Tarok verbs are highly diverse in their morphology. **Table 1** shows the shapes of verbs so far recorded with an estimate of their frequency in the lexicon;

Table 1. Canonical shapes of verbs

Shape	Example	Gloss	Frequency
V	a	to take	Unique
CV	bá	to confuse	Frequent
CVC	bàt	to postpone	Predominant
CVN	bám	to claim	Frequent
CVV	máí	to be useless	5 cases
CVCV	bɜ̀shí	to aggravate	Rare
CVCVC	gálák	to be thin (of drinks)	Rare
CVCCV	dàpcí	to pull	Average
CVCNV	shérmá	to nearly commit suicide	Unique
CVCVN	ɓəla̲ñ[+]	to come off	Average
CVCCVC	ɓoplak[+]	to finish	Frequent
CVNCVC	cəndər[+]	to roll up	Frequent
CVNCVN	ɓə́ndəñ	to roll	Frequent
CVCVCV	gìgìrì	to mark out, to demarcate	1 case
CVNCVCV	dɜ̀ñkɔ̀lì	to mould into balls	Unique
CVCCVCVC	shâkshílák	to put a strain on	3 cases
CVNCVCVN	gbəmtɜ́rɜ́ñ	to strip a shoot of its leaves	4 cases

Tarok has an estimated xx verbs in the lexicon as a whole (calculation based on Longtau and Blench forthcoming). There are restrictions on central vowels in CV verbs; only -a is permitted in the V slot. No restrictions have been identified for longer forms. The presence of a nasal in morpheme-final position has no effect on the frequency of a verb-shape. Although sequences of dissimilar vowels occur throughout the Tarok lexicon, often associated with falling tones, suggesting that they arise from intervocalic consonant deletion, in verbs they occur only in the shape CVV.

3. Relic morphology

Tarok verbs have a number of elements that are persistent but appear to be no longer productive. It is most likely that these were originally verbal extension that have become fused to the stem. The most important of these are -**ci**, -**dar** and -**ri**.

3.1 Verbs with -ci extensions

The most common extension is –**ci,** always occurring in verbs of CV(C)CV shape. The tone on the **-ci** is highly variable. In some cases a corresponding simple CVC verb without –**ci** exists although the semantic link is often less than transparent. **Table 2** shows all the **-ci** verbs so far identified with their CV(C) equivalents where these exist;

Table 2. Verbs with -ci extension

Non-extended	Gloss	Extended	Gloss
bwat[+]	to bruise many times	bwatcí	to bruise once
		bwàtci	to be over the top (Hill Tarok)
byáp [?]	to press down	byacì	to press, to compress
		ɓɔ́kcí	to snap (single object)
dàŋ	to cover	dàŋcì	to cover completely
dàp	to pull	dàpci	to pull sharply, to inhale
		ɗemci	to insist on
		ɗə́ŋcí	to thank
ɗɔ̀ŋ	to roll, to push	ɗɔ̀ŋcì	to roll over
		fɔ́kcí	to embrace
gɔ̀l	to cut	gɔ̀lci	to cut once, to cut down
ghám	to cry out loud (anyone)	ghá̱mcì	to cry out intensely and suddenly (babies)
ká	to make a fence around	kácì	to entangle, to trap
kak[+]	to crack	kàkci	to tear off, to rip off
kà̱p	to bite	ka̱pci	to take a single bite
		kucì	to bend down
		kùcì	to be constipated
kúm	to gore repeatedly	kúmci	to hit a person with a horn (used of animals)
kwat[+]	to break off pieces of brittle material to form a specific shape (as a snail-shell, calabash), to scoop out something (e.g. water) in small quantities	kwatcí	to take absolutely everything out of a container (only used for liquids and grains)
		lapci[+]	to feel weak
		lapci[+]	to bring down a vessel and serve a liquid (arch.)
lwaŋ	to smear	lwaŋcí[+]	to stamp on, to mash
lìm [?]	to sweat	limcí	to cover completely by water
má	to be tight	máci	to strangle, to close tightly
		máŋcí	to keep watch (s.t. immobile)
		məcí	to scrape off hairs (as in tanning)
mɔ̀k	to sip several times, to lick several times	məkci[+]	to sip s.t. once
mɔ́m	to be inarticulate	mɔ́mcì	to keep quiet
		myàŋcí	to pinch
		myaŋci[+]	to take a small piece
		nakcí	to sprint
		namci[+]	to be slim

Non-extended	Gloss	Extended	Gloss
nan[+]	to squash repeatedly	**namci**[+]	to squash
nyam[+]	to grind wet grains	**nyamci**	to crush once [dictionary?]
		páŋcí	to keep watch (s.t. mobile)
paŋ[+]	to be tight	**pàŋcì**	to become trapped
r<u>a</u>m[+]	to bite repeatedly (as a dog)	**r<u>a</u>mci**[+]	to bite on something hard unexpectedly
		sokci	to shake food with oil
		soŋci[+]	to be sitting down (only of a large person)
súŋ [?]	to set in ground	**súŋci**	to perform jumping dance
		tàtci	to be piled up, to lie prone
tat[+]	to kick	**tàtci**	to slap
		tatcí	to scoop up a little quantity of s.t., to spare
tók	to pour out	**tókci**	to pour out in small quantities
toŋ[+]	to trample	**toŋcí**	to step on
vat	to come off in pieces	**vatcí**	to rip off (lid of sealed container, bark of tree)
		wací	to take everything
wat[+] [?]	to make a final action	**wácì**	to strangle, to close tightly, to conclude
wur[+]	to gather many objects	**wúcí**	to take everything
		yapcì	to squat
yèp	to take in small mouthfuls	**yepci**	to gulp down
		yící	to stretch out
yì	to rest	**yici**[+]	to reach a satisfying stage
zəp[+]	to overturn many objects	**zə́pci**	to overturn, to brood eggs, to cover completely

Some **-ci** verbs form singular/plural verb pairings, but wherever they occur they represent a singular meaning. The meanings of verbs with **-ci** are highly variable, but in some pairs **-ci** functions as an intensifier. For example;

ɓún	to break multiple objects or a single object in many places to harvest	**ɓə́kcí**	to break in two, to snap
kak[+]	to break	**kàkci**	to tear off, to rip off
vát	to come off in pieces	**vátcí**	to rip off
wur[+]	to gather objects	**wúcí**	to take everything

The tone on **-ci** is not stable and it is possible that more than one extension was originally involved and that the distinction has been neutralised. It is most likely that **-ci** was once a productive verbal extension that has now become fossilised.

3.2 Verbs with a -dar extension

The case for a **-dar** extension in Tarok is less clear-cut as its forms are more variable. However, the formula dental + central vowel + lateral links **-dar, -d<u>a</u>r, -dər, -tar, -t<u>a</u>r, -tər** and corresponding forms with final -l. It should be noted that of the languages in its subgroup, only Tarok has three central vowels; Pe and Yaŋkam have only /ə/. It may therefore be that the **-dar** extension was productive at a time when pre-Tarok still had only one central vowel. **Table 3** lists all the verbs so far identified with a **-dar** extension;

Table 3. Verbs with -dar extension

Verb	Gloss
bandar[+]	to attempt a task beyond your capacity
cəndər[+]	to roll up, to fold
kandar[+]	to twist
kond<u>á</u>l	to pour out completely
kundur[+] *	to wrap, to make a fist
kwàñtàl	to bend down, to hang head loosely
mandar[+]	to throw away
myandar[+] **[anùñ]**	to twist the lips in an expression of displeasure

myàndàr [ìjìli]	to walk or run with an exaggerated buttock movement, implying great effort without actually moving fast. Used by a speaker to insult someone moving away from them.
pàntàl	to hang across the shoulder
pə́tár	to pluck, to break off, to tear off
pətər[+]	to slip off, to escape
vɔ̀ntɔ̀r	to unearth
vɔ́tár	to tumble down, to fall from above
wand<u>a</u>l	to pour out a small portion
wátár	to overtake, to pass by
yend<u>a</u>l[+]	to wake up
zàñtàl	to ruffle
zwantar[+]	to stuff up

*This may not form part of the set

Nouns in brackets following the verbs are obligatory complements. Synchronically, the verb **dar** 'to be superior to' may be the source of the extension. See Blench (forthcoming) for a more extended discussion.

3.3 Verbs with a -ri/-li extension

There are also verbs with an apparent **-ri/-li** extension but except in one case no corresponding CV verb exists to justify the analysis CV + extension (**Table 4**).

Table 4. CV verbs with -ri extension

Tarok	English gloss	Related Tarok word
càrì	to scribble	**ca**[+] to draw
gálí	to be thin (of drinks)	**gálák** to be thin (of drinks)
kalí	to be late	?
mírí	to tickle	?
piri[+]	to stare in the dark	**piripirì** adverb describing dusk
wálí	to be playful	?
wálí	to delay	?

There are two examples of longer verbs with a **-li** extension;

ɓɔ̀ñɓɔ̀lì	to play around with s.t. lying on the ground
ɗɔ́ñkəli	to mould into round shapes

The etymologies of these have been identified (Blench, forthcoming).

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Appendix:

Tarok underived trisyllabic verbs;

Appendix Table 1. Underived trisyllabic verbs in Tarok

Tarok	Gloss
ɓamtəlañ[+]	to be very close to
ɓàtɓòlàñ	to be droopy
ɗə̀ñkə̀lì	to mould into balls
gbəmtə́rə́ñ	to strip a shoot of its leaves
gìgìrì	to mark out, to demarcate
kukkuruk[+]	to be thick (gruel)
kùmtùluñ	to do things in a disorderly way
shâkshílák	to put a strain on
tambə́ráŋ	to run all over the place