

# A TAROK GENDER REGISTER IN CONTEXT



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## ABSTRACT

Tarok is a Plateau language, a branch of Niger-Congo, spoken in Central Nigeria and does not regularly mark sex-gender morphologically. However, there is a women's register marked by phonological, morphological and lexical shifts, comparable to Japanese, Yanyuwa and others reported elsewhere in the world. Other distinctive Tarok registers are summarised and the paper then describes the specific linguistic features of the gender register. It argues that this unusual characteristic may have arisen through interaction with neighbouring Chadic languages, which do mark sex-gender and considers the relevance of this finding for orthographic practice. An appendix includes tables of sex-marked personal names and also male/female distinctions in animals, also unusual for this region.

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## ACRONYMS

AUX	verbal auxiliary
DM	discourse marker
FUT	future marker
INT	interrogative
PM	politeness marker
QM	question marker

## 1. Introduction

Informal differences in male and female speech registers are often noted across the world, reflected in both choice of topics and semantics. Phonological and morphological marking of a gender register is much rarer, although it is reported sporadically in many language phyla, notably Sumerian, Thai, Chukchi (Dunn 1999, 2000) and Garifuna (Munro 1998). Japanese has a large repertoire of lexical variants used by women that are distinct from the politeness register, known as *onna kotoba* (女言葉 ‘women's words’) or *joseigo* (女性語 ‘women's language’) (Reynolds 1990; Schonfeld 1999). The Australian language Yanyuwa has separate sociolects for men and for women at the morphological level (Bradley & Kirton 1992). The only time Yanyuwa men use the women's dialect is when they are quoting someone of the opposite sex, and vice versa. Dako (2002) describes how Ghanaian Pidgin, which has no inherent morphological marking of gender is gradually acquiring such markers.

In African languages, there are very few reports of such registers. The Bendi languages, a subgroup of Bantoid spoken in Southeast Nigeria, are notable for having one language (Ubang) that has male and female speech-forms, although documentation for this comes from a newspaper feature (Umoh 1989), which does, however, include a wordlist. Comparisons are often made with the women's ‘respect’ languages in Southern Africa, the Hlonipha, found among the Zulu, Xhosa and related groups. This is essentially a tabooing language, avoiding the open enunciation of lexical items in relation to the names of senior people (Dowling 1988; Herbert 1990; Finlayson 1995; Rudwick & Shange 2006). This is not the function of the female register in Tarok and is not a comparable phenomenon. Similarly the Tarok phenomenon is only peripheral to the extensive literature of ‘gendered discourse’ concerned about patterns of linguistic behaviour in the broader society (e.g. Letsholo 2007 for a Southern African language). No other Nigerian language is reported as having such a register, although the poor level of documentation of most languages does not preclude the discovery of one.

Tarok, a Plateau language of East-Central Nigeria, has a morphologically marked gender register, which is somewhat surprising, as Plateau languages, like most of Niger-Congo, do not mark sex-gender. Tarok is part of a group of five languages, the Tarokoid cluster, and its closest relative is Pe. Tarok itself has six recognised dialects, **iGyang**, **iKwallak**, **iZini**, **iTárók ogá asol'yír**, **iTárók ogá aSá**, **Tárók ogá aNímǎár**, but these are all very close to one another and easily intercomprehensible.

Greenberg (1963) classified Tarok as Benue-Congo belonging to the sub-group Plateau 7. Gerhardt (1989) made Tarokoid co-ordinate with Jukunoid while Crozier and Blench (1992) classified Tarok as Platoid, Benue Group and sub-group Tarokoid. Tarokoid consists of Tarok, Sur, Yangkam, Kaḍung [=Kwang] and Pe. Virtually nothing has been formally published on this language grouping, although wordlists and a draft comparative Tarokoid are available for download<sup>2</sup>. The first attempts to write Tarok date from the early twentieth century, and the language now has a fairly well established written form, a New Testament translation and an active literacy programme (Blench in press).

The typological profile of Tarok is similar to other Plateau languages. The underlying word order is S(Aux)V(O), although a complex pronominal system allows Tense/Aspect to be marked on pronouns. As such verbs have no morphological marking for tense and aspect. Tarok also permits complex serial verb constructions. Clauses can be transitive, ditransitive, intransitive or stative. Intransitive clauses are limited in scope as Tarok prefers cognate objects or intransitive copy pronouns to generate dummy objects. Tarok is a noun-class language with an array of prefixes, which mark number and can be assigned limited semantic content. These show alliterative concord with a small set of adjectives and numerals.

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Blench website <http://www.rogerblench.info/RBOP.htm>

This paper<sup>3</sup> begins with an overview of the sociology of male/female relations in Tarok and then describes the main linguistic features of the register. It gives examples of the use of these forms in context, for example occasions when it may be appropriate for a man to utter them. The paper also considers their significance for methods in language description and the consequences for decisions about literacy. On the basis of historical and sociological data, it puts forward a hypothesis for the origin of such a register. Finally, it considers the historical evidence for the priority of marked sounds, which may give an idea of their evolution within Tarok. The data derives from a larger dictionary project (Longtau & Blench in progress).

The term ‘gender’ is something of a minefield in the regional literature. Especially in Bantu studies, there is a tradition of calling the paired nominal affixes which mark the noun classes ‘genders’, although these have nothing to do with male/female distinctions. Claudi (1994) which discusses the origins of ‘gender-marking’ concerns only noun-class affixes. Benue-Congo languages typically have no morphological marking to denote the gender of speakers, but paired nominal affixes are typical of Tarok. The Chadic languages, which interpenetrate Plateau languages geographically and have influenced them linguistically, do mark the sex of referential pronouns and sometimes nouns and other parts of speech morphologically. This is sometimes called ‘sex-gender’ (in the fashion of feminine, masculine and neuter of traditional grammar), in contradistinction to noun classes. However, the morphological marking of gender described here is clearly not part of the underlying lexical structure of Tarok, but a culturally constructed register, evolving to reflect aspects of Tarok society.

## 2. Tarok language and society

### 2.1 Background

The Tarok people live mainly in Langtang-North, Langtang-South, Wase, Mikang and Kanke Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Plateau State in central Nigeria. Their main town, Langtang, is about 180 kilometres southeast of Jos, the state capital (Map 1). The Tarok call themselves **oTárók**, their language **iTárók** and their land **iTàrok**. Other names have been used in the literature, such as **Appa**, **Yergam** and the variants **Yergum** 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 likely etymology of the name ‘Tarok’, is the nickname ‘Talok’ ‘spread from Tal’ or ‘immigrants from Tal’ (Jemkur et al. 2005).

Until the colonial era, the Tarok lived in inaccessible hill settlements, partly as a defence against endemic slave-raiding. After the establishment of British rule after 1900, most villages moved to the plains, between Dangang in Kanke LGA and the Benue Valley. The ‘Hill Tarok’ are those who have remained in the upper hill settlements and have a reputation for maintaining their culture. Despite its relative ethnic and linguistic homogeneity today, oral traditions suggest the Tarok incorporated clans from the neighbouring Pe, Jukun, Ngas, Ywom, Boghom, Yangkam, Tel (Montol) and Tal peoples. Pe, Yangkam and Jukun are Benue-Congo languages, but the remainder are Chadic and ultimately Afroasiatic. The complex admixture of peoples from different stocks mentioned here may be relevant to the historical origins of the gender register. Although Tarok could not be described as a mixed language, it has undoubtedly assimilated grammatical structures and lexicon from neighbouring Chadic languages, which may underlie the evolution of a gender register.

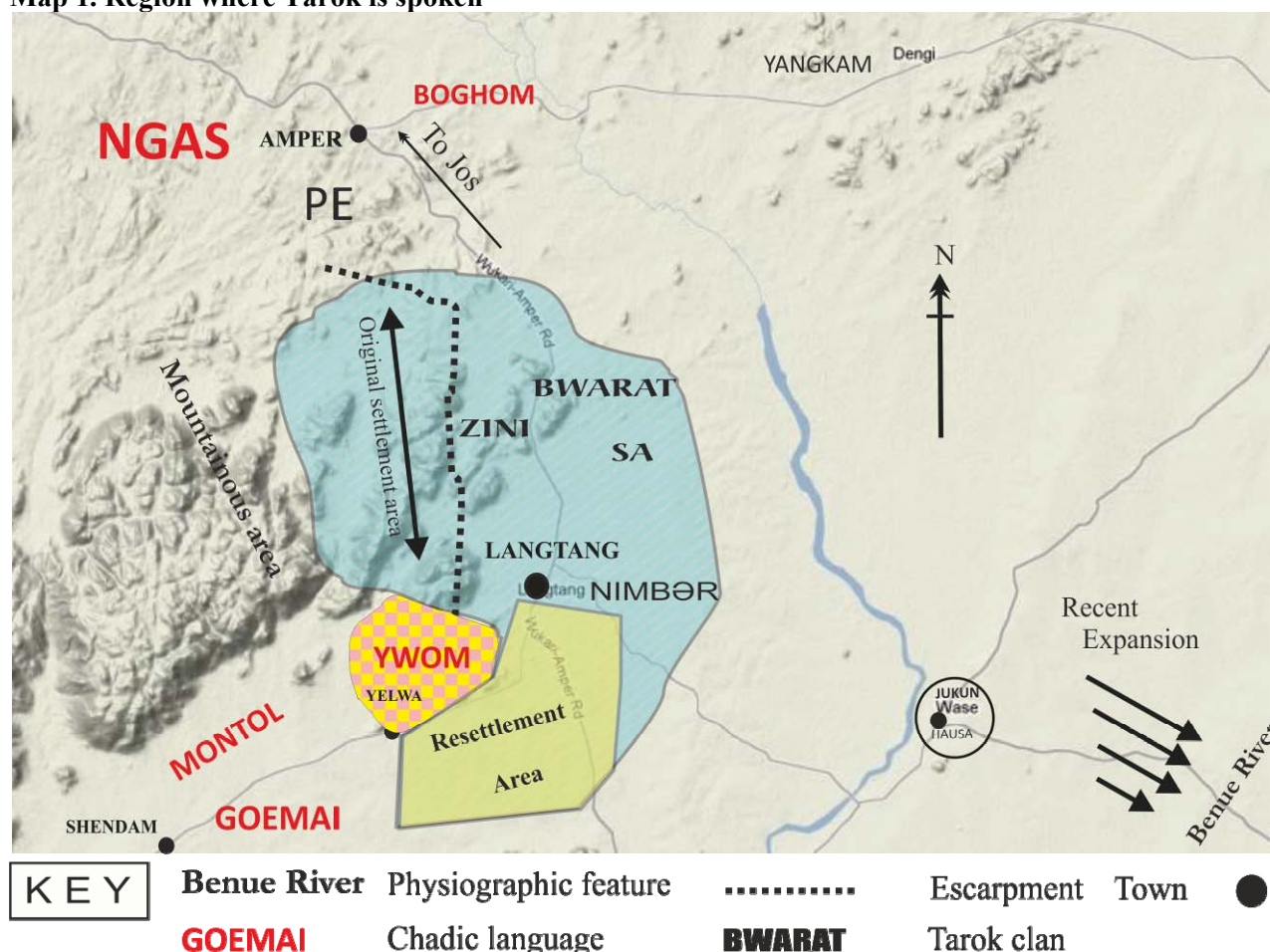
The Tarok have been poorly served by ethnographers. Fitzpatrick (1910) represents an early sketch, while Smith et al. (1990) focus on an aspect of kinship. Some local Nigerian publications deal with particular aspects of Tarok history and society, e.g. Famwang (1998); Lannap (2000); Vongdip (2000); Shagaya (2005) and Lamle (2010). The principle underlying Tarok social organisation is a segmentary lineage system, based around extensive exogamous clans. Although there is an overall Tarok chief today, this is largely a colonial creation. Each clan has an earth-priest, the **Pònzhi Mbín**, and one of these is assigned a notional headship to make sacrifices in times of crisis. Order is kept in the society by the **orim**, or ancestors, a cult controlled by men, which has the function of punishing those who transgress social norms. Women and uninitiated males are forbidden to reveal the secrets of these cults. Christianity is well-established in

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<sup>3</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was first given by Selbut Longtau at the 2nd University of Uyo Conference of African Languages (UCAL), September 19th-22nd 2010, Nigeria and we would like to thank the audience for their constructive comments on that occasion.

urban centres, but up to the present, male cults remain strong through the incorporation of politically powerful Tarok figures. The instability which has affected the whole region since the late 1990s seems to have stimulated a resurgence of traditional beliefs, despite the apparatus of modernisation.

Map 1. Region where Tarok is spoken



## 2.2 Male/female relations

Tarok society is strongly marked by the social separation of the sexes, although post-menopausal women are classified as male, and can, for example, be admitted to certain **orim** ceremonies. The layout of a compound is marked out as an arena for social discourse in the evening (Lamle 2005). For men and boys initiated into the **orim** cult, discussion takes place in the **anungbwàng** 'outer courtyard' or the **ashé ñkilang** 'main entrance hut'. On the farm during communal farming parties, **acipir**, men sit separately from women to eat. Men bathe at the stream separately from women. At the **iwu ñding**, 'water point', men take their turn before women. Women and younger boys must use the **ashé amulok** 'inner courtyard' or **ashé agilàn** 'private courtyard'. At funerals women sit separated from men who are in turn arranged by age group (Longtau 2000a).

The **orim** are ancestral spirits with whom initiated older males maintain contact. Women and children are in principle not allowed to know anything about the **orim**, and must stay inside the house when the **orim** are about. The **atak orim**, 'place of **orim**', a shrine in a specially conserved sacred woodlot, is an exclusive domain of men. Formerly, boys were initiated at around eighteen years, but pressure from schooling and urban migration in recent years has caused this to fall, and initiates are now often in the 12-15 age range.

Part of the initiation process is the intensive instruction of boys in public conduct to show that they are now men (Lamle 2001). Training takes place over 3-7 days at the **atak orim**. In particular, there are specific lessons on language behaviour considered appropriate to men. Young men are drilled in the arts of using proverbs, idioms and figures of speech to enrich their language skills and how to avoid speech behaviour

classified as feminine, characterised as **iTárók ocár** ‘Tarok language of females’. A man is expected to be economical with words and not to be repetitive. Women are meant to only use proverbs and figurative language sparingly in traditional society, as these forms of language art are the preserve of adult males. However, women (and not children) *are* permitted to use a genre known as miniature stories that provoke laughter, and include mimicry, cultural and historical allusions and joking relationships (Longtau in press a). Women can teach their female children folktales and a repertoire of songs that recall the names of maternal relatives. Interestingly, the only time when men use female forms in the traditional setting is in the retelling of folktales and in similar genres when women are the speakers; to make effective use of such forms is considered part of the skill of a narrator.

Even before initiation, the culture of boys marks them off from women and female children. The Tarok have extensive herds of cattle and other livestock, and these are managed by young boys during the daytime. The Tarok, however, are not a pastoral people like the nomadic Fulbe herders who range through their area. These herdboys not only have a society called **nggarì** that mimics the real **orim** but also a specific repertoire of songs, **nnàp-nshì ován gi íbíl**, ‘songs of herdboys’, and a type of drum unique to this context called **apóggóng**. The songs feature obscene references which can only be tolerated outside the world of the village. Herdboys also rehearse male speech practice more generally, including the use of proverbs, riddles, enigmatic folktales and other orature. Further detail on these subjects can be found in Longtau (1997, 2010), Lar (2005), Zwaltchir (2007) and Longtau (in press a). It is clear from this that ‘being male’ in Tarok society involves a whole complex of speech acts and not merely the avoidance of women’s forms. The function of such a register is to mark social boundaries and to dramatise the transition of male children as they move away from the language of girls and their mothers to that of initiated male adults.

Much of the literature on gender and speech concerns the subtle or not-so-subtle process of reinforcing male dominance in society (e.g. Lakoff 1975; Coates 1986; Graddol & Swann 1990). Tarok society has a rather explicit patriarchal social structure and it is hard not to conclude that the whole repertoire of male speech behaviour is intended to reinforce inequality. The Tarok have a very substantial diaspora in towns and cities across Nigeria, which developed early due to a strong cultural preference for joining the army and contact with western education in the early 1920s. A general effect of moving away from the rural community is to improve economic access for women, through better education and more opportunities. Among the speech of urban Tarok the gender register is disappearing, as most members of the family use a set of common lexical forms, usually adopting male register items.

An intriguing additional strategy for marking gender occurs with personal names and names for animals (Longtau 2007c). Some names given to children have paired male/female equivalents. A comparative table is given in Appendix Table 1, together with the interpretation of the name or the circumstances of the birth implied by it. Appendix Table 2 gives paired names for animals, both domestic and wild. Unlike personal names, the animal names seem lexically unrelated, although it is clear from external cognates that the female forms are primary. These paired names represent another strategy for underlining gender distinctions without developing morphological markers.

The gender register in Tarok is far from the only speech register. Children and young people have distinctive ways of speaking, and there are also registers concerned with the **orim**, with the language of concealment for the Tumwat, a type of code-speech formally used by young people and the ‘language of display’ created by younger girls to draw attention to themselves. This suggests the importance of speech as a social marker in Tarok society, not delineating class, but rather social and gender subgroups. To this extent, women’s speech is one element in an intricate structure of competing speech conventions. §3 gives examples of the operation of these other registers to provide a comparative frame for the material in the remainder of the paper.

### 3. Other speech registers

#### 3.1 Acú orim

An important Tarok register is *acú orim* ‘the language of *orim*’ (Blench 2005). When discussing matters to do with the *orim* a code composed of a variety of expressions and circumlocutions intended to conceal the

real subject matter of utterances is used. Storch (2011) describes the operations of this type of manipulated speech among neighbouring Jukun subgroups. Since the *orim* cult plays a strong role in expressing male dominance in Tarok society, this register is in some way complementary with women's speech. There is a tradition that the *orim* cult was originally 'owned' by women but fell into the hands of men<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.2 iTùmwàt

The Tarok have another major but so far undocumented social speech variety, **iTùmwàt**, 'language of Tumwat clan'. This register is said to have evolved in response to the realisation that incoming peoples to Tarok land were becoming proficient in the use of the language of the host community (Longtau 1991). It involves changes in word order and structures to confuse new users of the Tarok language. Up to the end of the 1960s it was said to be the basic language at the Tumwat hill enclave settlements of Ladu, Mabe, Pək and Timot, northwest of Langtang town. This register is no longer generally used by Tumwat clan members and what remains of iTùmwàt today may be a retrospective restructuring of a more vibrant system. However, iTùmwàt is still the language of the rituals of the crop sowing festival iMalkan. It is the only language that can be used at any Tumwat meeting held at a sacred doorless hut called **ñKàngtàng** at Ladu. The language is still used in market places for private discussion by speakers while bargaining over prices with non-speakers so that traders do not cheat them. At the Tumwat settlements of Ladu, Mabe, Pək and Timot near Langtang town, a few older men and women; and children can still speak it. As can be seen in these examples of **iTùmwàt**, the key element is reversal, which can apply to syllables, lexemes or word order as a whole;

Tarok	<i>N</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>pe</i>	<i>ré</i>
English	I	say	that	QM

Tumwat	<i>Pi</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>ré</i>
English	That	say	QM

Did I not say that?

The pronoun is deleted, 'that' is fronted with the vowel centralised.

Tarok	<i>Í</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>ñzhí</i>
English	We -should	go	home

Tumwat	<i>Í</i>	<i>zhìŋ</i>	<i>gá</i>
English	We -should	home	go

Let's go home

The order of the verb and the object are reversed, but the noun-class prefix is also moved to final position, driving up the tone of the auxiliary.

Tarok	<i>Wór</i>	<i>ùLongtau</i>	<i>á</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>ká</i>
	call	Longtau	for	me	PM

Tumwat	<i>Ná</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>wór</i>	<i>tàulón</i>
	For	me	call	Longtau

Please call Longtau for me

<sup>4</sup> Such 'reversal' traditions are not uncommon in Africa. The Tuareg maintain the tradition that women originally wore veils and this custom passed to men following a shameful incident. Clearly these express tension between the sexes, and are a residuum of guilt felt by men for the domination of women.



Word order is turned around but also the two syllables of the personal name Longtau. In addition the dative marker *á* is given the alternative realisation *ná*.

The differences between these examples are not easy to formulate because a variety of transpositional processes are at work. It employs not only change in word order, but phonological and tonal changes, sound and word deletion, use of focus pronouns and shortening<sup>5</sup>. Users speak quickly to further confuse the listeners. ITùm wàt is not a sociolect but has a social and communicative function like *acú orìm*. It lacks the negative stereotypes associated with *iTárók ocár*, the gender speech described in this paper.

### 3.3 Acú-m̀b̀erèrè

The Tarok people have a variety of other speech practices<sup>6</sup>. *Acú-m̀b̀erèrè* ‘upside down language’ was a style in vogue among young men in the 1970s. The code substitutes Tarok syllables with the names of letters in the English alphabet as taught in class and was intended to impress hearers with evidence of sophistication. It was created by young people who were transitioning to literacy in English and used to conceal information in public discourse. In contrast to many registers and codes it was used equally by both sexes. Examples are;

*Áb a í b.*  
You-fellow you this come.

which in standard Tarok would be;

*ábàng a tá bá.*  
You-fellow you this come  
You fellow come!

[Note the loss of the implosive, as this sound does not occur in English phonology]

or;

*Ùc a í i gè ìp.*  
Woman she this will go tomorrow.

i.e.

*ùcár a tá i gà ìpín.*  
Woman she this will go tomorrow.  
This woman will go tomorrow.

*Ùdád ḱ c.*  
Father died already.

<sup>5</sup> We would like to thank Mr. Napfa Kamzam, a student of the Plateau State Polytechnic, Jos Campus for supplying the examples of this register on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Mr. Kamzam suggested that the intonation of iTumwat is similar to that of Pe, a related Benue-Congo language and that iTumwat is the language the Tumwat people were speaking before other Tarok people started arriving. The coding aspect of iTumwat suggests this cannot be more than partly true.

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs, idioms, figures of speech, parables, riddles, folktales, songs and discourse styles are excluded from the language manipulation analysed in this paper.



i.e.

*udidá kú cít.*  
 Father died already.  
 Father has died.

### 3.4 *Acu ñzàm*

*Acu ñzàm* ‘language of display’ is a class of lexical creation, akin to the catchphrase, used by both men and women irrespective of status. It is most often created by assertive young girls of marriageable age, i.e. 15-18. It usually consists of word, phrase or clause with an oblique meaning known only to close associates, family members, clans or those in the neighbourhood. Basically, the creator desires to be noticed in society and uses an idiosyncratic expression with the meaning she has assigned to it. Very soon sympathisers join her and the expression gains currency in the immediate family and neighbourhood but seldom beyond that. This is very close to the English notion of a catchphrase, namely an ephemeral expression associated with an individual and not a proverb. Proverbs are usually much longer sentences, usually with two balanced parts separated by a discourse marker. These have separately described, for example in Nansoh (1992) and Lar (2005).

Examples of *Acu ñzàm* are;

*İ́Ş tí, ı́Ş,* lit. ‘S is S’.

This expression is used by members of the **ı́Sa** clan for the purpose of identification and a show of solidarity within clan members. The *S* is pronounced like the name of the English alphabet letter. The full expression is **ı́Şá té, ı́Şá**, meaning ‘join in the defence and promotion of **ı́Şá** clan’.

*Ñzhí yí ikàm,* lit. ‘house ours strength’.

This expression was created by a young girl and is used by the family members to boast that it may not have boys but there are plenty of girls to attract rich men as suitors. The word for ‘strength’ is temporarily assigned the meaning ‘rich’.

*Ñkpang á tá lúkút,* lit. ‘porridge it this it-is-soft’.

This expression was created by a young girl and is used by the family members to describe a well prepared meal. ‘Soft’ is used metaphorically to mean ‘nice’. Similar expressions used in that family as *acı ñzàm* are:

<i>Akiri á tá lúkút</i>	‘soup it this it-is-soft’.
<i>Ikaba á tá lúkút</i>	‘rice it this it-is-soft’.
<i>İzhè á tá lúkút</i>	‘meat it this it-is-soft’.

*Mbin té, mbin,* lit. ‘land is land’.

This expression was created by a young prince to draw attention to the fact he ought to be recognised and treated as royalty. The Tarok Chieftaincy is a creation of the colonial administration beginning in 1903 and the Tarok do not have royal families as such. The saying has acquired the meaning ‘chieftaincy should be an important affair through out the land’ where chieftaincy ‘*mbin*’ and importance ‘*mbin*’ are assigned new meanings. Very soon this meaning became widespread but with its meaning reversed and it became a taunt for whoever demanded respect as their right.

These usages are triggered by a social context that principally draws attention to the language skills of individuals and subgroups and provides social correction, humour and entertainment. They allow individuals to express their oral creativity and bypass the limitations imposed by socially approved speech and decorum.

A further example is provided for the sake of completeness. The way of speaking attributed to outsiders being incorporated into Tarok is a culturally stereotyped speech-form. Recent arrivals can be heard speaking Tarok with strong ‘accents’. The Ywom people live southwest of the Tarok (Dabup, 2009) and the term *izhàn* has the primary meaning of ‘Ywom language’, but also the figurative meaning ‘slavery’. This in turn is transferred to ‘speaking the Tarok language as a new learner’. This is rather unexpected since it is usually

considered that clans of Tarok origin were important in the formation of Ywom along with Goemai and Jukun; and the Laka, who are an offshoot of the Ywom, are an integral part of the Tarok nation. There can be no doubt this polysemy reflects the history of slavery in the region in some way, but there is no clear evidence for the Ywom being enslaved by the Tarok on a massive scale. In many ways, Ngas would be a more likely candidate in the light of extensive intermarriage with the Plains Tarok in historic times. But an Ngas accent is not stereotyped negatively, as Tarok clearly saw relations with the Ngas as with equals.

#### 4. Lexical elements of the female register

##### 4.1 Interrogatives

Interrogatives represent a major linguistic expression of the gender difference between Tarok men and women. Examples are given in Table 1:

**Table 1. Gender differences in Tarok interrogative markers**

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>àdà..yà</i>	<i>àdè..yà</i>	whose? Lit. of-who...question-marker
<i>bai</i>	<i>ba, be</i>	contraexpectation question marker
<i>izə yà</i>	<i>ize yà</i>	what? Lit. of-what...question-marker
<i>dò</i>	<i>rò</i>	polar question marker
<i>dakwa</i>	<i>rakwa</i>	emotional uncertainty question marker
<i>dakbó</i>	<i>rakbó</i>	uncertainty question marker
<i>dá</i>	<i>ra</i>	what about? (implying surprise or frustration) question marker

The following are glossed examples of utterances using the male form;

*àdà..yà àdè..yà*

*ipiri àdà tɔ yà?*

horse who this QM

Whose horse is this?

The female version has two forms: *ipiri àdè té yà?* and *ipiri àdè tɛ?* The shortening in the second form results in tone perturbation.

*bai ba, be*

*ùzə le cí tɔ bai?*

he return already truly

So he has (truly) returned?

*izə yà ize yà*

*ú bá kí izə yà?*

you come by what QM

You came by what means of transport?

*dò rò*

*í gà dò?*

we go QM

Should we go?

*ḍakwa rakwa*

*i gā ká pa ḍakwa?*  
we go it like-that QM  
Should we take a risk on this trip?

In the women's form there is a further variant between *ká* and *kó*: *i gā kó pa rakwa?*

*ḍakbó rakbó*

*n yá ùpò bú vá kát té, á lé cít gā ḍakbó?*  
I see father you that not DM he return already go QM  
I haven't seen your father, could it be that he's gone back?

*ḍa ra*

*ú le ka azùmò tá ḍa?*  
you sg. return at when this QM  
When is it that you returned?

These are mostly interrogative markers with a subset marked by the phonological shift  $d \rightarrow r$ . The other items do not seem to have anything in common.

#### 4.2 Verbal auxiliary

The polite imperative marker *ḍak/rak* is a verbal auxiliary following the main verb and exhibits the same  $d \rightarrow r$  sound shift as the interrogative markers (Table 2).

**Table 2. Tarok polite imperative auxiliary**

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>í gā ḍak</i>	<i>í gā rak</i>	let us go, lit. we go <u>PM</u>
<i>bá ḍak</i>	<i>bá rak</i>	[you] can come, lit. come <u>PM</u>
<i>le ḍak</i>	<i>le rak</i>	[you] may return, lit. return <u>PM</u>

#### 4.3 Locative pronouns and particles

Tarok has three deictic locative pronouns: *tá* 'this', *tà* 'that' and *có* 'yonder'. Of these, only *tá* 'this' has a gender difference (Table 3);

**Table 3. Examples of the Tarok deictic *tá***

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>bá tá</i>	<i>bá tó</i>	come <u>here</u>
<i>nnà tá</i>	<i>nnà tó</i>	<u>here</u> it is!

In a sentence context this is as follows;

Male: *n là pə ó bá í gā tá,*  
I say that you should come we go DM

*pə m̀màwo kà nnim sáy tà á?*  
that you pl. PROG doing INT that QM of surprise

i.e. I said, 'you should come and let's go, but what are you doing?'

Female version: *n là pe ó bí í gā tó, pe m̀màwo kà nnim sáy tà á?*

#### 4.4 Reduplication of noun stems

Tarok nouns typically mark number with Benue-Congo type nominal class affixes and tones. Partial or reduplication of initial syllables of the root is a common pattern in Tarok and can be used to mark third person possession (Robinson 1976). The vowel of the reduplicated prefix usually copies for front or back qualities, so a back stem vowel or a labialised vowel results in a –u- prefix and a front vowel an –i- prefix. Partial reduplication is the rule for monosyllabic stems. Table 4 shows some examples of a gender-specific reduplication involving a syllable insertion;

**Table 4. Gender-specific reduplication of nominal syllable stems**

Male	Female (speaker)	Gloss
<i>izwà</i>	<i>izùzwà</i>	snake
<i>izù</i>	<i>izùzù</i>	thorn
<i>izùl</i>	<i>izùzùl</i>	chaff
<i>akwà</i>	<i>akùkwà</i>	straw
<i>ìgór</i>	<i>ìgùgór</i>	bag
<i>ìjáŋ</i>	<i>ìjùjáŋ</i>	bow

In the above examples there is some overlap for these features between Tarok female, youth and children's speech. Reduplication of Tarok nouns can be used for focus marking. An example is: *ivínávíná vâ rí iván irúgú mi* (his-dog his-dog it-is-one-that eat children chickens mine, i.e. It is his dog (and not another dog) that ate my chicks. The type of reduplication in Table 4 can be explained as akin to this type of noun focus marking. Speakers perceive the longer form both as emphatic and characteristic of women. Male youths in particular have to be corrected over and over until they drop this speech form considered offensive to adult males. In Chadic languages this is a common plural marking strategy (Newman 1990) A search has not been made for this feature for diachronic equivalence in genetically related languages. However, a plausible suggestion is that it may well be an innovation resulting from interaction with .

A unique case is syllable copying in the adverb *dĩ* 'again';

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>kà dĩ</i>	<i>kà dĩdĩ</i>	again, lit. at again-again

#### 4.5 Lexical variation

Another low-frequency strategy is a switch from a central vowel to a front vowel of corresponding height in noun stems, either *i*→*i* or *ə*→*e* as shown in Table 5;

**Table 5. Central vowel fronting in noun stems**

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>ìpíri</i>	<i>ìpíri</i>	horse
<i>alàr</i>	<i>alèr</i>	intestines
<i>ndât</i>	<i>ndèt</i>	remnant

Syllable deletion is characteristic of a small set of words (Table 6);

**Table 6. Syllable deletion**

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>kpáktíkát</i>	<i>kpákták/cátcát</i>	all
<i>datkulung</i>	<i>dat</i>	near
<i>ùnimgbàk</i>	<i>ùgbák</i>	elder
<i>ùbwákàn</i>	<i>ùbwân</i>	small (thing)

There seems to be no consistency about the part of speech these represent, as they include nouns, locatives and invariant adjectives. They are not ideophones, which are marked with an introducer particle in Tarok (Longtau 2008:177).

#### 4.6 Lexical differentiation through suppletion

A small but puzzling set of verbs show suppletion or idiosyncratic alternation to mark the gender register (Table 7);

**Table 7. Marking gender through verb suppletion**

Male	Female	Gloss
<i>búr</i>	<i>mín</i>	to nearly happen
<i>wáci</i>	<i>máci</i>	to close tightly (esp. with a string)
<i>nim inók</i>	<i>pak inók</i>	to do something repeatedly

Tarok has a complex system of plural verbs which also uses suppletion to mark pluractionals (Longtau 2008:155), and it may be that this is a re-interpretation of plural verbs characteristic of a more established morphological pattern.

#### 4.7 Which forms are primary?

A question that emerges from this data is whether it is possible to detect whether male or female forms are ‘primary’. In some cases, particularly when suppletion, lexical substitution or minor vowel shifts are involved, both are clearly equally valid, and therefore ‘female’ forms cannot be said to be derived from ‘male’ forms. However, in cases such as reduplicated forms, it is possible to say that the longer, female forms are secondary. The other types of reduplication in Tarok are used for numerous morphological processes which are unrelated to marking the sex of the speaker and these processes are applied not only to the words cited here but an unrestricted set of noun roots.

None of the forms recorded with the  $d \rightarrow r$  shift have clear external cognates in related languages, so it is difficult to be sure which is the primary phoneme. However, /d/ is extremely rare in Tarokoid outside Tarok itself and  $d \rightarrow r$  is not a recorded correspondence, so it is quite likely that the /d/ is secondary, adopted by men to distinguish themselves from women. Similarly, Tarok is the only language in its family to have three central vowels, and the examples in Table 5 make use of these vowel distinctions. So it is likely that the female register retains the original vowel (Longtau 2007b) and the male register uses the ‘new’ vowel to underline the separateness of their speech. Interestingly, Ywom, uniquely among West Chadic A3 languages, also has three central vowels, which may not be a coincidence. It can be suggested that the  $d/r$  alternation might be connected with interference from Fulfulde, which has a similar mutation in one of its nominal classes. However, the Tarok communicate in Hausa with the Fulbe who pass through their region and very few ever learn Fulfulde, so this is unlikely to be the source of the alternation.

### 5. Orthography issues

The general principles behind Tarok orthography are described in Longtau (2000b, 2007a, 2008). However, these papers do not consider the issue of representing a gender register. The data in this paper raise the question of whether or not the speech forms of women should be used in written texts. Since women and children constitute more than half of the population of the society. There is therefore clearly an important argument in favour of the use of their speech forms. In the alphabet proposed by Mary Lar in 1977, male forms were to be the norm for standard texts, hence the formal decision in 1988 by the translators of the Tarok New Testament to use only adult male registers throughout. This decision was based on the principle of acceptability (Williamson 1984), something of a moving goalpost in Nigeria. Nonetheless, it violates the principle of naturalness, since when women read aloud they are represented as using a male register. Sometimes they read with the correct female forms but have to repeat the text to get the ‘correct’ male forms. Under all circumstances, the issue should remain live when reading materials are prepared and significant narrative texts are published. If the principles of speech among the urban diaspora spread to rural areas, the issue will resolve itself. However, increasing economic equality for women may well produce the

opposite result. Furthermore, bridging the social divide between men and women is very slow to come in spite of modernisation.

Dunn (1999) discusses a similar issue with respect to Chukchi women's language, which was excluded from all discussions of the language during the Soviet era and was never represented in orthography documents. Indeed when mentioned at all it was said to be dying or extinct. Dunn found that, to the contrary, not only was it thriving, but in some ways had been retained more effectively than men's speech for reasons related to relative mobility of the sexes.

## 6. Interpretation

On the face of it, Tarok has a gender register which is strongly marked phonologically and morphologically. It shares this feature with only a very few languages globally and is thus of considerable typological interest. Tarok has a strongly male-focused society with a social structure that privileges men, and has a variety of strategies to impress upon women this division in society. However, this is true of many societies in this region and indeed globally, so this can hardly account for the evolution of a gender register in itself. However, sound innovations as a result of borrowing by the male cult forced a preservation of proto-forms of some of data presented above as a gender register. Another plausible explanation especially with regards to the reduplicated forms, the origin of the implosive /d/ and central vowels is Chadic influence on Tarok as a result of clan migration and assimilation. At a minimum, Chadic languages mark gender on pronouns and typically distinguish pronominal forms and sometimes nouns according to sex, hence they do not need a specific gender register. Unfortunately, we do not have very comprehensive documentation of the language that would have influenced Tarok most directly, Ngas, although more is known about Mwaghavul/Mupun, its close relative (Jungraithmayr 1964; Frajzyngier 1993). Longtau (2012; in press b) provides lexical evidence from cognates for the interchange between Chadic and Tarokoid but comparative grammar studies are clearly also desirable.

The most likely scenario is thus as follows. Although the core of Tarok is undoubtedly a Benue-Congo language, the incorporation of Chadic-speaking populations has resulted in considerable influence on both lexicon and syntax. Tarok society is strongly male-dominated and traditional religion uses a secret register to hide topics of discussion from women. The break with childhood is dramatised through the initiation of males and it may be that past bilingualism in a Chadic language, probably Ngas, suggested to Tarok speakers a linguistic strategy for marking maleness. Instead of borrowing morphemes, the idea was superimposed on a language that underlyingly makes no structural suppositions about the gender of speakers. This would account for what seems to be a rather haphazard set of rules sporadically applied. If this is the case, then it would imply that there are few generalisations that can be made about the evolution of gender registers globally. Japanese has not been in contact with a language marking gender morphologically for a long period, if ever. Yanyuwa is in a sea of languages which do mark gender, a characteristic of all Australian languages.

Another issue concerns how we describe languages and design orthographies. Informants, educators and literacy committees making decisions in relation to unwritten languages have an overwhelming tendency to be male-dominated, globally speaking. Even if a language does a gender register, speakers may well not produce it during elicitation or offer to use it in written materials. It may well be that such registers are more common than the literature suggests, and that we should at least be more careful to check for them when describing a language.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a courtesy marker, since the paper has been in press for some eight years and has recently been revised for the eighth time.

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**APPENDIX. Personal names and animal names showing gender distinctions**

The Tarok have a very large repertoire of personal names, all of which can be etymologised and in some way refer to the circumstances of the birth of the child. However, a small subset of these have male and female versions, as shown in Appendix Table 1. Many these appear to have an unpredictable relationship between the male and female forms, although the Mò- prefix is the most common device to mark female names, while other pairs are unrelated. There is also a trace of d- for male and n- for female, for example in Dàshé/Nishé. This gender symbolism is extremely common in Ngas and Mwaghavul, neighbouring Chadic languages.

**Appendix Table 1. Tarok personal names**

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Sense</b>
Bàlì	Káí	Senior of the set of twins
Dàdi	Nàtí	Mother conceives while she was still menstruating
Dàdam/Ñdam	Mimì/Mì	Baby
Dàshé	Nishé	Name given to a child on consulting a diviner
Dida	Niná	Father/Mother
Dùl	Yikèn	Name given to a child on consulting a diviner
Lár	Mòbái	One sickly at birth
Lóngbap	Mòbap	Posthumous child (death of father only)
Miri	Yiri	Timid one, came with a mark on the ear
Ñdæn/Zəta	Mòdæn	One with six fingers
Nimmèl	Mòmèl	Name given to a child on consulting a diviner
Sèlcúm	Mòdí	Born while mother was returning from the farm
Táí	Pài	Junior of the set of twins
Tèm/Kèm	Mòkèm	Name given to a child on consulting a diviner
Vənjèn	Mòjèn	Child born after a set of twins
Wúyép	Wàyép	Wise one, a very small infant

Appendix Table 2 shows paired male/female names for wild and domestic animal species. In no case is there an obvious link between the two words, and they are apparently formed on different principles to the personal names. In every case where a wider etymology can be traced, for example, ‘cow’, ‘dog’, ‘rat’, ‘patas monkey’, it is always the female form which is cognate. This suggests that the male terms are culturally constructed. Distinct lexemes for certain species, notably the baboon and the buffalo, are widely reported in Niger-Congo languages, but this Tarok example appears to be exceptional.

**Appendix Table 2. Tarok animal names**

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>English gloss</b>
adaŋga	ìzhàr	buffalo
ajiŋ	ìdàmìŋ	leopard
akut	ìnà	cow
asiŋkpà	ìlìr	lion
ayoŋ	isəm	Patas monkey
ìbàŋ	ìpí	rat
ìfír	ŋgei	red bishop
ìkimkyák	irùgu	chicken
ìnàgàm	ìtám	sheep
m̀bák	ìkəmbəl	roan antelope
m̀bàŋ	ìvá	dog
m̀bit	ìfíl	goat
ndùkù	ìcaŋ	python
ndur	nnaŋlit	antelope sp.
ndùret	ìŋàu	antelope species like a cow
ñkaŋshi	ìkpyá	porcupine
ñkpàl	ñlálàp	elephant
ñkùrcì	ìb̀yáp	cane rat
nsòŋcì	ìká	baboon
ñzaŋ	ìlyám	bushbuck
ngàŋbit	ìkiràm	colobus
ngàtár	ñkar	antelope sp.
ngèrták	ñnwâr	antelope sp.
ngòk	ishil	wild cat