

# Issues in African Languages and Linguistics:

## Essays in Honour of Kay Williamson

**Abe Abine Abua Abure Acholi Adangme Adele Adyukru Afar Afawa Afitti Affade Afo Afusare**  
Agatu Ahlo Akan Akoiyang Akpafu Akposo Akunakuna Akye Aladian Alaba Alawa Alur Amadi  
Amap Amar Amharic Anaguta Andoni Anfillo Angas Ankwe Anuak Anyi Anyimere Arabic  
Arbore Argobba Ari Asiga Asua Aten Auen Auni Auyokawa Avatime Avikam Avukaya  
Awiya Awuna Ayu Bachama Baditu Beditu Badyara Baga Bahrmi Bai Baka Bako Bakwe Balante  
Balda Bamanga Bambara Bama Bana Bani Banda Bangha Bantu Banyun Barambo Barawa  
Barea Barein Bargu Bari Bariba Basa Basar Basar Basar Basar Basar Basar Basar Basar  
Baule Baygo Baza Bedanga Bedauye Bede Beir Beja Belj Benesho Berber Berta Berti Bete  
Biafada Bidyogo Bilin Binga Bini Birifor Birked Birom Bira Bitare Bogo Boki Bolewa Bongo  
Bor Boritsu Borvili Bua Bubalia Buduma Buji Bulea Bulon Bura Burji Burun Burungi Busa  
Butawa Bute Bviri Bwamu Bwol Cassanga Chala Cham Cham Chamba Chamba Chara Chawai  
Cheke Chibak Chip Chiri Chongee Cobiana Daba Dadiya Daga Daga Dagomba Dagu Dair Daka  
Dakakari Dama Damot Dan Darasa Daza De Degha Dek Delo Dera Dendje Dera Didinga  
Dilling Dime Dnuk Dinka Diryawa Disa Djerma Dodoth Doghosie Dodhsie Dogon Doko  
Dollo Donga Dongola Dorno Dukawa Durru Dyalonke Dyan Dyirini Dyula Dyula Efe Efik  
Eggon Egyptian Ekuri El Eliri Eregu Ewe Fadidja Fajulu Fali Fali Fali Fali Fazoglo Ferge  
Fiome Foro Fulani Fulse Fur Ga Gabere Gabin Gade Galla Gamba Gammegu Gan Ganawuri  
Ganza Gao Gardula Garko Garo Gaua Gayi Gayi Gbandi Gbanziri Gbari Gbaya Gberi Gbunde  
Ge'ez Geleba Gengle Gerawa Gerka Gerumawa Gezawa Gidder Ghole Gimira Gio Gisiga Gofa  
Gola Golo Goram Goroa Gouin Gowaze Grebo Guang Gude Gulo Guerze Gulai Gule Gulei  
Gulfan Gulfei Gumuz Gurage Gure Gurma Guro Gwa Gwandara Hadya Harari Haruro Hatsa  
Hausa Heiban Hiechware Hiji Hina Hinna Holma Hona Horo Hotte Hot Huela Ibibio Idoma Igala  
Igbira Igbo Ijo Indri Ingassana Iraqw Iriqwe Ishan Iyala Jaba Jajero Janji Jarawa Jen Jera Jie  
Jimo Jorto Jukun Jur Kaba Kaba Kabre Kadacheri Kadara Kadaro Kadugli Kafa Kagoro Kahugu  
Kaje Kakwa Kaleri Kam Kamantan Kambani Kambata Kambang Kamir Kamu Kamuku Kana  
Kanakuru Kanderma Kanembu Kaninkwom Kanjaga Kanu Kapsiki Kara Karamojong Karbo  
Karekare Karondi Kasele Kasena Katab Katcha Katla Kawana Kayla Kebu Keiga Keliko Kemant  
Kenga Kentu Kenuzi Kerre Khamta Khasonke Khomani Kilba Kirifawa Kissi Koslib Kobochi  
Koke Kolbila Koma Kono Konso Konyagi Korana Koranko Koro Korop Kotoko Kotopo Kpelle  
Kpere Krawi Kreish Krongu Kru Kudawa Kuka Kukuruku Kulango Kulung Kumba Kunama  
Kundugr Kung Kurama Kuri Kurumba Kusasi Kuseri Kutev Kutin Kweni Kwolla Kyama Kyan  
Laka Lakka Lame Landoma Lango Lafofa Laro Lefana Lekon Lendu Lese Libo Ligbi Liguri

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INLAN BOOK  
SERIES

## Tarok Ophresiology: an Investigation into the Tarok Terminology of Odours

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**Abstract:** The paper presents data on terminology of odours in Tarok, a Berue-Congo language spoken in east-central Nigeria. It shows that although it is generally possible to determine the etymological source of these terms they are not regularly derived. They do not show concord and do not fit into the usual grammatical categories of the language. The impoverished literature on this type of lexical item suggests that odour terms would be a fruitful area for further research.

### 1. Introduction

The terminology of odours is generally poorly developed in European languages. Smells are often described by analogy or terms are shared with the vocabulary of taste. This has led to the assumption that a similar situation prevails in African languages. However, recent research suggests that a much richer vocabulary of odours exists in Africa. Almagor (1987) may have been the first author to point to the importance of these in the ethnography of the Dassanetch people of south-west Ethiopia. Almagor emphasises the importance of conceptual structures in underlining social differentiation. Van Beek (1992) has described the smell terminology of Kapsiki, a Chadic language of North Cameroon and situated it within the caste system. Hombert (1992) gives a summary of recent work on a long-term project to uncover the ophresiological terminology of the Bantu languages of Gabon. Koops (n.d.) describes the extremely rich terminology of the Kuteb, a people speaking a Jukunoid language in S.E. Nigeria.

These studies have two salient features; the specificity of odour terminology and the unusual grammatical status of the words in this category. Kuteb well illustrates the precision with which odour terms are applied. One term, *asag*, is applied to the smell of fresh fish and raw dog-meat (Koops, op.cit.). The terms in question do not usually fit into existing grammatical categories

neatly. African languages would most commonly use ideophones to describe this type of physical experience but it seems that these words most commonly resemble nouns, although they do not show concord.

With this in mind, this paper sets out to investigate the situation in Tarok. Speakers of Tarok live primarily in the region around Langtang in south-east Plateau State, Nigeria. Tarok was first described by Fitzpatrick (1911). The principal 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. More recently, Longtau (1991, in press) has analysed the implications of the classification of Tarok for the interpretation of oral tradition and elaborated a formal phonology.

The following paper uses the phonological analysis proposed in Longtau (in press) but not the standard Tarok orthography, which has a rather misleading use of IPA symbols. The examples in this paper are written phonemically giving IPA symbols their conventional (1989) values.

IPA	Tarok orthography
i	ə
ə	a
ŋ	n

Three level tones are noted with mid-tone unmarked. The falling tone does not occur in the examples.

### 2. Data

The principal verb used in Tarok with odours is *nŋ* 'to smell' and the usual construction is similar to English. There are nine specific odour terms in Tarok. These are given below in Table 1 in the usual sentence-frame.

Table 1. Main Tarok odour terms

1. a nŋ pə shíníni	it smells damp
2. a nŋ abfɾɛŋ	it smells of cinders
3. a nŋ ñgù	it smells smoky
4. a nŋ shíshí	it smells burnt
5. a nŋ vuvón	it smells rotten egg or wet flour paste
6. a nŋ cícaŋ	it smells sweet (any good smell)
7. a nŋ múmwan	it smells 'off' (not so bad it can't be eaten)
8. a nŋ vivyap	it smells spoilt (general; past the point of edibility)
9. a nŋ sísam	it smells sour (fermented, such as overnight porridge or old beer)

The Tarok *nínj* 'to smell' is almost certainly cognate with the Kuteb *nun* which has the same meaning.

Etymologically speaking, the roots of many of these words can be identified. Table 2 shows the terms, their probable etymological source and the part of speech they most resemble, morphologically.

Table 2. Etymology of Tarok odour terms

No.	Term	Source	Apparent Part of Speech
1.	<i>shíníní</i>	?	adverb
2.	<i>abírəŋ</i>	?	noun
3.	<i>ngu</i>	<i>ngu</i> 'smoke'	noun
4.	<i>shíshí</i>	<i>shí</i> 'to burn'	verb
5.	<i>vuvón</i>	<i>vón</i> 'to be rotten'	verb
6.	<i>cicəŋ</i>	<i>cəŋ</i> 'to be sweet'	verb
7.	<i>múmwán</i>	<i>mwán</i> 'to be off'	verb
8.	<i>vivyap</i>	<i>vyap</i> 'to spoil'	verb
9.	<i>sisam</i>	<i>sam</i> 'to be sour'	verb

Commentary

1. *shíníní* is the only odour term to take the preposed morpheme *pa* which is usually a marker of an adverbial form. There is no evident etymology for this term, a common feature of ideophonic adverbs. In addition it has the tone pattern, common to this type of word. Compare, for example, *shíríní* 'slowly'.

2. *abírəŋ* appears to be a noun with a *a-* class prefix, although such a noun does currently exist in Tarok.

3. *ngu* is the usual noun for 'smoke'. Interestingly, three of the Kuteb odour terms appear to be noun-like and show prefix alternation. The noun-like odour terms in Tarok may well have previously had functioning prefixes.

4. *shíshí* represents a regular reduplication of *shí* 'to burn', except that in normal reduplication the tone pattern would be High-High. High-Low usually only occurs in CVCVC reduplications.

5. *vuvón*. Although this is a reduplicated form, Tarok already supports a different reduplication of *vón* i.e. *-vonvon*, the usual adjective.

6. *cicəŋ*. The usual reduplication of *cəŋ* 'to be sweet' is *-cəŋcəŋ*, the adjective meaning 'sweet'.

7. *múmwán*. The verb *mwán* is not usually reduplicated. However, nouns when reduplicated to form a possessive usually have /u/ where the stem

vowel is /a/. For example;

*akwap* 'shoe'  
*akukwap* 'his shoe'

8. *vivyap*. The usual reduplicated form is *-vyapvyap* 'spoil'.

9. *sisam*. The usual reduplicated form is *-samsam* 'sour'.

The striking feature of these terms is their diversity. Most are verb-derived, but the first three are not. Most are partially reduplicated, but the reduplication does not follow the usual pattern in other parts of speech. The quality of the reduplicated vowel is not obviously determined by the stem. The majority of the odour terms have a mid-tone first syllable where they have undergone partial reduplication but even this is not predictable.

In Tarok, the principles of concord are broadly applied and agreement between nouns, adjectives, numerals, demonstratives and verbs is quite general. The odour terms do not show concord, behaving more like adverbs or ideophones. However, adverbs and ideophones are not usually derived so clearly from other lexical items. This suggests that the processes of derivation for odour terms are presently opaque because these processes occurred in an earlier phase of the language.

The application of odour terms in Tarok is much less specific than in the other languages cited. Apart from the smell of rotten eggs, most of the terms are rather general. In addition, there is apparently no social differentiation attached to smell terms; Tarok society has no internal occupational groups corresponding to castes.

Conclusion

Three conclusions can be drawn from this study of Tarok odour terms. Primarily, odour terms form a quite distinctive grammatical category, behaving differently from both nouns and adjectives. Secondly, the sources of odour terms are grammatically quite diverse, although the great majority are derived from reduplicated verbs. Thirdly, the Tarok do not use odours as part of social differentiation but simply as a description as the experienced world.

The investigation of the ophresiology of African languages is just beginning. An absence of basic data makes cross-language comparison problematic. Just as with ideophones, which are all too often ignored both because they are more difficult to elicit, odour terms are another area where languages are notably richer than European languages.

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