

A comparative morphology of non-productive Tarok affixes and stem cognates for suggested Proto-Tarokoid reconstructions¹

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Abstract

Longtau (2007a) alluded to the existence of Tarok CV and NV prefixes in the light of cognate evidence in the Plateau language family of East Benue-Congo. This can be used as a basis to determine what could be regarded as the affix and stem of polysyllabic cognates in Tarok, Tarokoid and Plateau. A look at Blench's (ined a) Tarokoid reconstruction and classification shows clearly that there are non-productive noun prefixes in Tarokoid. Their presence in Tarok demands a more in-depth diachronic discussion² using the frame that canonical shapes of Tarok noun and verb stems are basically monosyllabic. Tarok polysyllabic cognates are interpreted using the frame and the deductions are applied in setting up the theoretical basis for an initial step towards a Proto-Tarokoid reconstruction. Our methodology is simple. A search is made of Tarokoid cognates in Sibomana (1980, 1981b), the Plateau Language Survey Wordlists by Roger Blench³, his drafts of dictionaries of Plateau languages and the reservoir of mother language knowledge of Tarok to provide evidence that the Tarok noun class affixes are not just productively reconstructed but are relics of a very elaborate and stable system before the break-up of the sub-family.

Cognate evidence for fossilised –CV- and –NV- affixes in both nominal and verbal stems are used to postulate also that some of the synchronic N- and V- prefixes are the result of erosion of longer segments that have become fused. The presence of fossil or unproductive affixes in Tarok provides an opportunity for a comparative study of how the reduction in the length of diachronic prefixes took place. It shall be shown that the non-productive affixes may not be the products of mere re-invention of lost noun classes of Bantu types, but are *bona fide* relics. If so, we can forge ahead in better understanding of East Benue-Congo and not be tied to the notion that Bantu is the canon for its noun classes. Evidence from both Tarokoid and Plateau is adduced for the interpretation of data in tables. The commentary columns are the main discussion and analysis of this paper.

¹ A paper initially presented at a Symposium organized by the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt in Honour of Prof. Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, held March 12-14, 2014, Ebitimi Banigo Hall, University of Port Harcourt. I appreciate Dr. Roger Blench's comments on an earlier version of this paper, which is from far from being an endorsement by him.

² Tarok is regarded as the most conservative in terms of noun classes in the Sub-family.

³ <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/PIOP.htm>