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# Historical inferences from traditions of origins of Tarok and some Chadic languages in Central Nigeria

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## Abstract

Contact between the Tarokoid languages of Sur, Yangkam, Pe, Vaghat Cluster, Tarok and some Chadic languages found in southeast Plateau State of central Nigeria and its implications for the sketching of a history for the area is the main thesis of this work. A brief outline of oral traditions of origin of the sub-groupings of Tarok language is presented and interpreted in the light of linguistic data to illustrate how the methodology works. The underlying principles of this paper are based on the theoretical premise that oral traditions can shed some light in the interpretation of linguistic data and vice versa. Lexical items found in secondary sources and an Ngas wordlist I took were examined for cognates between the Chadic languages and Tarok proper.

Keywords: Tarokoid, West Chadic, linguistic geography, oral traditions and history

## 1 Introduction

The overall picture of the linguistic geography of the Tarokoid/Chadic contact reveals that the Plateau area is a convergence zone in the south-westerly and north-easterly movements of Chadic and Plateau languages from their respective homelands. An examination of the data of the sub-groupings of each family further shows that the area has become homeland long enough for Tarokoid to have split into the present daughter languages of Sur, Yangkam, Pe, Vaghat Cluster and Tarok. The absence of Chadic roots common to all Tarokoid languages implies that the break-up was long before the Chadic languages currently in the area became important.

The implication of this for history is that Benue-Congo languages first occupied the southeast portion of Plateau as well as the rest of Plateau state and not Chadic languages. From our rich data, attempts will be made to provide evidence to support these hypotheses and postulations in order to upgrade them to the level that they can be used in theoretical abstractions, comparative studies and teaching. This may turn an academic exercise into an essay that will be perceived by lay people as having some utilitarian value.

The spread of languages and contacts between them is a study that can be undertaken using one of several models. The comparative method for investigating the dispersal of technology such as the bow and arrow, climatic changes and domestication of plants and animals is plausible (Blench *in ed. a.*). For the small but fiercely autonomous societies as the ones that abound in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, oral traditions still largely remains the main source of historical accounts. There are documents in colonial archives that some consider as superior to oral sources given that they have a history of over 100 years. That may not be tenable since the aim of colonial officers in the first place was not to prepare professional history monographs. On the contrary, the priority in the archival mimeographs was to distil as much information as possible to create administrative units that may be coherent. In that sense, the exercises had narrow and non-academic agendas.

A question of a theoretical interest from this paper is whether or not we can decipher linguistic clues in oral traditions that can authenticate this branch of history. Historians received Joseph H. Greenberg's genetic classification of African languages in 1963 with euphoria. The expectations were that historical and comparative linguistics would provide a tool that can confirm or refute such oral traditions. Twenty years after, that level of enthusiasm was still high, as Isichei (1982) suggests. Ballard (1971) was an attempt to apply linguistic insights in making historical inferences on some Middle Belt peoples. Williamson (1988) carried out a similar exercise for the Benue-Congo family. Horton (1995: 203) discussed and sketched the diaspora processes for Niger-Congo using Williamson's (1988) insights. Blench (1995) proposed a history of domestic animals in Northeast Nigeria based on linguistic insights. Blench et al. (1997) looked at the diffusion of maize in Nigeria hinging very much on linguistic evidence.

Historical inferences based on language data have continued to engage the fascination of scholars. James (1997) sketched a history of some southern Kaduna peoples in like manners. Blench (1998a) gave a history of the spread of New World crops in Nigeria on the basis of linguistic evidence. Nettle (1998) used linguistics to postulate a history of Fyem in Plateau state. However, these techniques inevitably will suffer a credibility gap, a squandered hope and sheer spent energy, unless the poor level of documentation on Central Nigerian languages is addressed and the enterprise tackled systematically in order to produce reliable and truly genetic classification schemas or other useful analyses.

Contact between Tarokoid languages and the Chadic languages in southeast Plateau State of central Nigeria and its implications for sketching a history of the area is the main thesis of this paper.<sup>1</sup> Other comparative studies of some languages of the area include Hoffmann (1970), Wolff et al. (1977), Gerhardt (1983) and Blench (2003). A summary of the traditions of origin of sub-groups of Tarok is presented here together with the linguistic evidence in a tabular format. At another level of theoretical abstraction, new language data is used to assess the reliability of some oral traditions. Contact between Ngas and Tarok will be the principal exemplar of the Plateau/Chadic interaction of admixture of languages of different phyla. Lexical items found in Jungraithmayr (1968 & 1970), Burquest (1971), Kraft (1981), Frajzyngier (1991), Jungraithmayr & Ibriszimow (1995), Seibert & Blench (ined), Longtau & Blench (forthcoming) and an Ngas wordlist I took in August 2003 were examined for cognates between Ngas and Tarok proper as well as Tarokoid *in toto*.<sup>2</sup> The underlying motivation of this paper is to find evidence that oral traditions may shed light on the interpretation of linguistic data and vice versa. That approach is enhanced by a comparison of cognates in some Tarokoid, Plateau and Chadic languages.

Classification of West Chadic languages has a long tradition. However, the same cannot be said about Tarokoid. The most recent Tarokoid classification proposal only identifies as members Pe, Tarok,

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1 Some fieldwork for parts of this paper took place within the framework of a project titled "A History of the Tarok Nations" under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, University of Jos.

2 I am most appreciative to Mr. Dakom Yusufu, a 45-year-old man (as of 2004), for being my principal Ngas informant.

Sur, Yangkam (Blench, ined b.). According to Roger Blench (in a personal communication) the Vaghat Cluster is also a member of the Grouping. The cursory look at the comparative wordlist from my own research on the affixes of Tarok and Vaghat Cluster in the Appendix corroborates that position. This new classification of Tarokoid now supersedes the ones in Williamson and Shimizu (1968), Williamson (1971), Maddieson (1972), Williamson (1973), Shimizu (1975), Hansford et al. (1976), Gerhardt (1989), Crozier & Blench (1992) and Williamson (1992).

Longtau (1991), with some element of a hyperbole, described Tarok as almost completely immersed in the sea of Chadic languages. According to oral traditions, many speakers of Chadic languages changed their cultural and linguistic identities and actually swelled up the original Tarok population. Therefore, it is expected that an overwhelming Chadic lingual mark should have been left on the Tarok language. However, there is no such corresponding influence on its lexicon commensurate to what may appear to be a demographic Chadic invasion. Furthermore, the absence of Chadic roots common to all Tarokoid languages implies that the break-up of Tarokoid was long before the Chadic languages came to the area. The implication of this for historical reconstruction is that Benue-Congo languages first occupied the southeast portion of Plateau State as well as the rest of the state and not Chadic languages as posited in Williamson (1988). The West Chadic languages came only recently and created a wedge between Tarokoid and the rest of Plateau. Such incursions, especially by Ngas, led to further separation between members of Tarokoid itself. Discussion on splits as a result of these contacts will be elaborated. Attempts will be made to provide evidence to support these inferences and postulations to upgrade them to the level that they can be used in comparative studies and teaching. This approach seems to be the next logical phase to refine generalisations of earlier scholarly era.

## **2 Tarokoid/Chadic Languages of Southeast Plateau/South Bauchi States**

The Tarokoid/Chadic languages found in the contiguous border areas of Southeast Plateau and Bauchi states, including the immediate vicinity of Tarok constitute the principal examples in this work. How-

ever, the available data on the outlying Chadic language of Ron by the southwest escarpment of the Jos Plateau are considered because it can shed much light on the nature of contacts between Plateau and Chadic and so these too are considered. The Tarokoid languages of the Vaghat Cluster, Sur, Yangkam and the Chadic languages of Zaar and Boghom, and the Jarawa-Bantu languages of Duguri, Jaar and Kantana that border Yangkam delineate the northernmost border of the research area in southeast Plateau and Bauchi States of central Nigeria. The Chadic languages of Ngas, Fyer, Tambes and Tal, and the Tarokoid language of Pe form the western boundary. The Chadic languages of Goemai, Teel (also called Tel or Montol), Yiwom and the Kofyar Cluster form the southern boundary. The Tarokoid language Tarok, Jukun-Wase (Jukunoid), Hausa (Chadic) and Fulbe (Atlantic) demarcate the eastern boundary. These languages are found in Pankshin, Shendam, Langtang-North, Langtang-South, Qua'an-Pan, Mikang, Bokkos, Wase and Kanam Local Government Areas (LGAs), all in Plateau State and Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro LGAs of Bauchi State. Table 1a,b and the map in Figure 1 will help us to make sense of the distribution and geographical of this paragraph.

Table 1a - Distribution of languages in contact of Bauchi state and Local Government Areas (LGAs)

Language	Language family	LGA
Zaar	Chadic	Bogoro and Tafawa Balewa
Vaghat Cluster	Tarokoid	Bogoro
Sur	Tarokoid	Bogoro

Table 1b - Distribution of languages in contact of Plateau state and Local Government Areas (LGAs)

Language	Language family	LGA
Ron	Chadic	Bokkos
Vaghat Cluster	Tarokoid	Mangu
Sur	Tarokoid	Bogoro
Yangkam	Tarokoid	Wase, Kanam
Duguri	Jarawa Bantu	Kanam
Jaar	Jarawa Bantu	Kanam

<b>Kantana</b>	Jarawa Bantu	Kanam
<b>Ngas</b>	Chadic	Pankshin and Kanke
<b>Fyer</b>	Chadic	Pankshin
<b>Tambes</b>	Chadic	Pankshin
<b>Tal</b>	Chadic	Pankshin
<b>Goemai</b>	Chadic	Shendam
<b>Teel (Montol)</b>	Chadic	Mikang
<b>Kofyar Cluster</b>	Chadic	Qua'an Pan
<b>Tarok</b>	Tarokoid	Langtang-North, Langtang-South and Wase
<b>Wase-Tofa</b>	Jukunoid	Wase
<b>Hausa</b>	Chadic	Wase
<b>Fulbe</b>	Atlantic	Wase
<b>Yiwom</b>	Chadic	Mikang

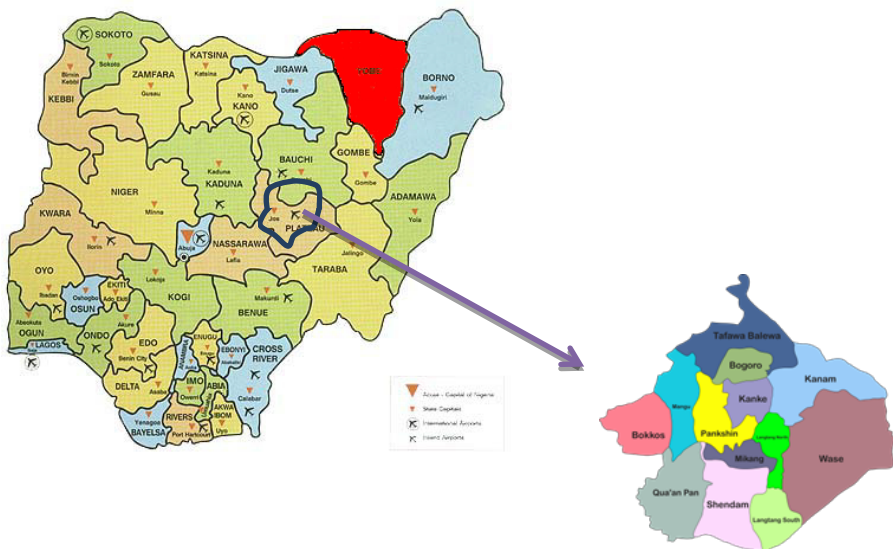


Figure 1 – Distribution of LGAs of languages in contact. Source: Wikipedia, modified by Rev. Saul Samuel.

The historical implications of the linguistic geography of the area are discussed in the next section and in 4.2.

### **3 Languages of the Tarokoid/Chadic contact in Tarok oral traditions**

#### **3.1 Deductions from Tarok names for neighbouring languages**

The first task which will be of a narrative nature is to analyse Tarok oral traditions of origin to illustrate the value of a detailed and holistic study of such sources. Contacts between Tarok and its neighbours seem to have occurred in several phases, as the layers of traditions by the people themselves suggest.<sup>3</sup> Oral accounts of long distance relations both in space and time would have been useful in establishing genetic links or cultural contacts between such languages but such do not exist. What exists are accounts on basically present day neighbours. Written accounts that we have are fragmentary or non-existent or uninformed assumptions based on the scholarship from eras that draw inspiration from early Bantu studies. The inferences proffered here are of two categories: those that agree with the linguistic evidence and so are valid for reconstructing history; and those that do not fit the linguistic evidence and so can only be used provisionally. A review edition of a Tarok History now published as Shagaya (2005) was consulted for oral traditions of origins of Tarok clans in all the governmental administrative units. It records in great details the origins of Tarok clans with names of progenitors as far back as oral traditions can recount. Any oral tradition of origin about a clan that captures its linguistic affiliation/nomenclature as found in the Tarok language becomes incontrovertible evidence for reconstructions. That source, Famwang (1980) and Lannap (2000) are works taken together with my knowledge as a member of the community for more than 60 years to try and make sense of competing Tarok oral traditions of origins. The synthesis without any details on the accounts themselves is given in summary form in Table 2. The Tarok names for neighbouring languages are analysed here as linguistic data.

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<sup>3</sup> I draw highly from my experience as a speaker of the Tarok language of over 60 years.



Table 2. Names given by Tarok to neighbouring languages

Standard Language Reference	Name by Tarok	Linguistic Affiliation
Boghom	Burom	West Chadic
Duguri	Dugri	Jarawa Bantu
Goemai	Lar	West Chadic
Jukun-Wase	Jor	Jukunoid
Kanam	Kanang	West Chadic
Kantana	Kantana	Jarawa Bantu
Ngas	Dúk	West Chadic
Pe	Pe	Tarokoid
Sur	Unknown to Tarok	Tarokoid
Tal	Tal	West Chadic
Teel/Montol	Dwal	West Chadic
Yangkam	Yangkam	Tarokoid
Yiwom	Zhan	West Chadic
Zaar	Zhim	West Chadic

The following deductions can be made from the above ethno-linguistic naming system:

- i. Two Tarokoid languages, Pe and Yangkam, are known to the Tarok people by the names the people use for themselves in standard references.
- ii. The third Tarokoid language, Sur, is unknown to the Tarok people. However, Blench (ined b.) posits it in the Grouping based on linguistic evidence.<sup>4</sup> That gives a clue that the split between Sur and the splinter groups not only took place a very long time ago, so that they do not feature prominently in oral traditions of origin but no contacts have been maintained after the breaks.

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4 It is also instructive to note that Met is a language whose linguistic affinity is yet to be established is a neighbouring language to Sur. Hosea Suwa a speaker of the language in a personal communication said Met is a dialect of Sur and not Ngas. He is of the view that Met share many nouns and verbs in common with Tarok. He speaks both Met and Ngas fluently but he learnt Tarok as an adult.

- iii. Unlike Sur, the speakers of Pe and Yangkam have been in constant contact with Tarok people independently. The Tarok land occupies a vintage position because the speakers of Yangkam perceive that the speakers of the Tarok language are not only their relatives but that their languages have a lot in common. However, the Yangkam people are not even aware that their language is related to Pe in any way. On the other hand the Pe people are aware that sections of the Tarok people are their distant relatives and that the two languages share in common several vocabularies. Cultural contacts between Tarok and the two continue to this day. This can be exemplified by the annual agricultural rites of mPwak-nTung between Yangkam and Nachang of Bwarat in Tarok land; and iMalkan between Ghang of Tarok land and Pe. Both ceremonies mark the beginning of the planting season. Some sections of Tarok outrightly call themselves simply as Pe (apart from Oga Pe who are Pe people who were assimilated by Tarok in living memory). This information may even carry an undertone that can be advanced as a layman's linguistic evidence.
- iv. The Jarawa-Bantu languages of Kantana and Duguri and the Chadic language of Boghom are known by the names the people call themselves. The Dugri and Burom variants are due to Tarok phonological constraints. The use of true names in this case is an indication of very recent contact. Kantana and Duguri featured prominently in local trade with Tarok in pre-colonial times because of their ironware and hand-woven cloths. Therefore, these oral traditions are only of recent origin for them to be easily recalled and even some families can be pointed to who have those ethnic identities. According to the Tarok, Duguri are reputed for powerful medicinal potions as well. Kanam language has been completely eclipsed by Boghom and so the language is unknown to the Tarok. Boghom (Burom) is well known to the Tarok but the language is only preserved in recent folktale songs (Sibomana 1981; Longtau 1997) and by bilingual speakers and families that trace their descent to those directions.
- v. Tal features very prominently in Tarok oral traditions of origins. However, according to Banfa (1985) most Tarok informants do not even know the geographical location of Tal.
- vi. Contacts between Tarokoid and Zaar (Chadic), Yiwom (Chadic), Jukun (Jukunoid), Goemai (Chadic) and more Ngas (Chadic) are

within living memory and predated the coming of the British in 1902 by not more than 400 years.

The above names are the ones recalled in Tarok oral traditions. Almost every single Tarok family today has a member who can trace his descent to one of those non-Tarok groups. Such peoples have been completely assimilated, including immigrants who came in the last 200 years through marriage and initiation into the male masquerade cult. The influx of Ngas to Tarok land in modern times was stopped only around 1970. Today Tarok is a lingua franca even amongst Plain Ngas of Amper in Kanke LGA of Plateau State. Can oral tradition shed more light on the linguistic geography of the area?

### 3.2 Outlines of Tarok oral traditions of origin and prehistoric implications

Tables 3–6 are summaries of oral traditions of probable origins of Tarok clans as found in Shagaya (2005). They reveal that many Tarok clans claim Chadic origins. Tarok land has been divided into 5 major administrative districts, namely Gazum, Bwarat, Gani, Langtang and Langtang-South. The Gazum Grouping comprises three sub-groups called Zini, Ghang and Kwallak.

Table 3 gives the names of clans in the Gazum Grouping and their origins according to oral traditions.

Table 3. Origin of Clans of Gazum Grouping

Name of clan	Chadic affiliation	Name of clan	Plateau affiliation
Dif̄ar	Ngas	Gif̄əng	Pe
Damb̄ər	Ngas	Kullok	Pe
Gantang	Tal	Man (in Ghang)	Pe
Jwakb̄ər	Ngas	Gong (in Kwallak)	Pe
Lagan	Tal	Dangyil/Dangre (in Kwallak)	Pe
Luktuk	Tal	Kurswang (in Ghang)	Pe
Warok	Tal		
Kwangpe (in Ghang)	Goemai		

Nyallang	Goemai		
Dwal (in Ghang)	Tel/ Montol		
So (in Kwallak)	Ngas		
Nan (in Kwallak)	Tal		
Guzum (in Kwallak)	Tal		
Total	13	Total	6

Table 4 attempts to summarise the complex set-up of clans in the Bwarat Grouping.

Table 4. Origin of Clans of Bwarat Grouping

Name of clan	Chadic affiliation	Name of clan	Benue-Congo affiliation
Dangre	Tal	Mer	Pe
Diyani	Tal	Dangyil	Pe
Gbak	Tal	Jat	Pe/Jukun
Ghanghan	Tal	Oga Pe	Pe
Kamtak	Tal	Singnga	Yangkam
Kau	Tal	Nachang	Yangkam
Laka	Yiwom		
Lokmak	Tal		
Nggarak	Yiwom		
Nggum	Yiwom		
Nyinang	Yiwom		
Total	11	Total	6

The oral traditions of origins of the Pe clans in the Gani Grouping of Table 5 together with Nachang in Table 4 hold an important clue to the link between Tarok and Yangkam. Nachang, Wang and Dokos are 'isolated' Tarokoid groups in the Gani District.

Table 5. Origin of Tarok Clans of Gani Grouping

Name of clan	Chadic affiliation	Name of clan	Benue-Congo affiliation
Gwan	Tal	Binding	Jukun
Lyangjit	Tal	Wang	Pe
Mwal	Tal	Dokos	Pe
Piga	Tal	Singnga	Yangkam
Shamot	Tal		
Laka	Yiwom		
Total	6	Total	4

Dokos do not have an elaborate tradition of origin. All they could recall is that they had lived in the Gani area for a very long time and Wang was the next to join them. However, their entire population was almost wiped out because of a plague that followed their eating of a rat. Unlike other clans of the area, they have no ritual site on the Tarok hill settlements because they have been completely assimilated by Piga clan. This may be a clue to the fact that they were one of the earliest constituents of Tarok that moved to the Benue Valley before others as postulated here. It is the consensus of opinion of elders that they must be Pe. It is easy to imagine what happened. Probably Dokos left an intermediate Tarokoid homeland and moved into the Benue trough. Yangkam would have followed. Nachang was left in Bwarat area, and today that constituted strong evidence of the route Yangkam took as they headed for the plains. It could well be that some Dokos joined them as they headed for the Wase Rock enclave. Thus, the population of Dokos was further depleted. A detailed ethno-linguistic and/or archaeological investigation of that proposed route might yield some useful information beyond conjectures.

The Langtang Grouping is the most populated and the major source of the Ngas lexicon that is found in the Tarok language. This Grouping is also referred to as Nimɓər “admixture of peoples”. Table 6 gives a summary of their origins.

Table 6. Origin of Clans of Langtang Grouping

Name	Chadic affiliation	Name of clan	Benue-Congo affiliation
Ce/Gan	Tal	Kangkur*	Pe
Gəli	Tal*	Nyikət*	Jukun
Mbəp	Tal*	Timwat	Pe
Mwanso	Tal*		
Nani	Tel*		
Ritak	Tal (also called Kumbwang)		
Korgam	unknown*		
Total	7	Total	3

\* Now completely assimilated by Gan

Three sub-groups are found in Nimbər, namely Ce/Gan, Ritak (i.e. Kumbwang) and Timwat. Timwat stands out as a sore thumb in this grouping. They claim to be the original speakers of the Tarok language that is spoken today. To buttress their claim, they said when the Ngas/Tal peoples increased in number and were able to speak their language fluently, they had to evolve a speech code called iTimwat in order to be able to communicate freely even in the presence of the immigrants. That oral tradition agrees with the language data that Tarok is not Chadic even though the majority of its speakers today are of Chadic origin.

Tables 2–5 establish a *prima facie* that according to oral traditions, most clans that make up the Tarok people are of Chadic origin today but the language is Plateau. I have spent energy and gone into great detail on oral traditions to illustrate that finding the missing links for the genetic classification of languages should be a holistic task. The resources to undertake such thorough analysis of oral traditions may not be there. However, it has been demonstrated here that it can be a useful tool in the reconstruction of the story of mankind. A further but less obvious point is that speakers of Tarokoid languages already populated the enclave of Southeast Jos Plateau long before the arrival and spread of Chadic-speakers as Ron and Ngas. This is discussed at greater length in 4.3.

What marks has this seeming influx of Chadic peoples, indicated by Tables 3–6, left on the Tarok language in particular and Tarokoid in general according to the synchronic data?

#### 4 Cognates between Tarok and Chadic languages

In this section, cognates between Tarok and some Chadic languages will be analysed. Principal sources for the comparison are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Principal sources of data for lexical comparison

Language or group	Source	Abbreviation
Berom; other Plateau languages	Blench wordlists hard/electronic mss	RMB
Chadic	Jungrauthmayr & Ibrizimow (1995)	JI
Ngas	Burquest (1971), author's field notes	B, SRL
Ron group	Seibert & Blench (ined.)	S&B
Tarok/Tarokoid	Blench wordlists	RMB
	Longtau & Blench (forthcoming)	L&B
	Author's field notes	SRL
	Author's Tarok Grammar	SRL TG

##### 4.1 Tarok/Ngas cognates and historical implications

Tables 8a, 8b and 8c are generated from a comparative wordlist of about 1000 items. The direction of borrowing of Tarok words by Ngas speakers (Table 8a); Table 8b are Ngas cognates by Tarok speakers and Table 8c are borrowings by both languages of miscellaneous nature. The commentary columns give more insights so that no extensive discussion will be warranted. Each cognate in Tables 8a, 8b and 8c is evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Look-alike-ability and identical meanings.
2. Cognates already identified in standard publications as Niger-Congo/Benue-Congo/Plateau or Afro-asiatic/Chadic roots. Therefore, the determination of the direction of borrowing of any cog-

nate that has been identified as a classic root becomes straightforward.

3. Any cognate found in two or more Tarokoid languages but in just that one Chadic language is treated as a Tarokoid root. Similarly, any cognate found in two or more Chadic languages but in just that one Tarokoid language is treated as a Chadic root. If a language has a doublet and one form is cognate with a neighbouring language that has none, then it is the second term that has been borrowed.
4. Morphophonemic considerations such as borrowed sounds, sound-correspondences, compounding of words and weakening of sounds shed light on the direction of borrowing. For instance, the velar nasal in word final position is a widespread Plateau feature and if found in a cognate, Chadic might have borrowed the word. If a cognate appears to be compounded or extended, then the shorter version is more original. Similarly, if a cognate exhibits weakening of a consonant by using a semi-vowel or voicing or prosodies such as palatalisation or labialisation then the plausible direction of borrowing can easily be suggested.



Table 8a. Tarok loans borrowed by Ngas speakers

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	NGAS	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
1.	back	<i>asim</i>	<i>zim</i>	Cf. Sur <i>gim</i> , Yangkam <i>pinza</i> .	SRL, RMB
2.	bow	<i>ijáj</i>	<i>njan</i>	Cf. Pe <i>ì-gigyan</i> , Berom-Foron <i>gbàŋ</i> and Tahoss <i>mban</i> . Cf. Karfa <i>banjáj</i> However, the Tarokoid languages Yangkam and Sur still use the Niger-Congo root <i>-ta</i> ( <i>táá Y. and kita S.</i> ). The other Ngas word for 'bow' is <i>rì</i> .	B, RMB, SRL
3.	cloud	<i>ilitù</i>	<i>lupú</i>	Cf. Sur <i>leri</i> .	SRL, RMB
4.	corn stalk filter	<i>akànjfàt</i>	<i>kaseŋ</i>	The word is simplified in Ngas or a compound found with the Tarok word <i>fák</i> 'to filter' as is the case with Sur <i>fjafak</i> . Cf. Pe <i>u-karjsat</i> .	SRL, RMB
5.	corpse	<i>akúm</i>	<i>kuum</i>	Cf. Sur <i>tukum</i> , Yangkam uses the Niger-Congo root- <i>ku</i> .	SRL, RMB
6.	evil spirit	<i>ijiji</i>	<i>ʒíʒì</i>	Tarok form is in children's speech. The first part in Tarok is derived from the expression: <i>izè iga nri atak</i> 'animal that devours'. The etymology of the Ngas term is <i>izè</i> of Tarok.	B
7.	father	<i>pòn</i>	<i>pup</i>	Burquest (1971) records 'father' also as <i>bàbá</i> .	SRL, B
8.	gourd-bottle	<i>abəŋ</i>	<i>beŋ</i>	Cf. Yangkam <i>boŋ</i>	SRL RMB
9.	grind	<i>kpà</i>	<i>gwak</i>	Cf. Sur <i>gwak</i> , Yangkam <i>gba</i> , Ake <i>kpa</i> .	RMB

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	NGAS	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
10.	house fly	<i>icijcìŋ</i>	<i>n̄j/ñjicil</i>	The root is widespread in Benue Congo.	RMB, SRL
11.	hunger	<i>ayáŋ</i>	<i>ni:n</i>	Cf. Sur <i>yɔŋ</i> , <i>yekwan</i> ‘famine’; very widespread in Plateau.	SRL, RMB
12.	lightning	<i>amilám</i>	<i>màlɔp</i>	Cf. Yangkam <i>milum</i> .	B, SRL
13.	millet	<i>imàr</i>	<i>mar</i>	Cf. Yangkam <i>marak</i> , Sur <i>mər</i> , Pe <i>ime</i> , Mijili <i>amo</i> .	B, S&B, RMB, SRL
14.	mother	<i>ùnà</i>	<i>nin</i>	Cf. Pe <i>na</i> .	SRL
15.	new	<i>-pipe</i>	<i>mpwi</i>	Cf. Sur <i>pi</i> , Pe <i>mpe.pi-</i> is a well-attested Niger-Congo root.	B, RMB, SRL
16.	patch on cloth	<i>abyáp</i>	<i>mbyap</i>	Confirmed by the Ngas informant.	B, L&B
17.	provide space	<i>caŋ</i>	<i>ǰaŋ</i>	Confirmed by the Ngas informant.	SRL
18.	rotten beans brew	<i>mmànàŋ</i>	<i>manana</i>	Confirmed by the Ngas informant that it is a food item of the Tarok.	SRL
19.	shiny	<i>milám</i>	<i>mwalim</i>	Note that the Ngas word means ‘smooth’ and ‘slippery’.	SRL
20.	shoe	<i>akwàp</i>	<i>kap</i>	Cf. Yangkam <i>taxap</i> , Sur <i>tukwa</i> , Pe <i>kap</i> , Horom <i>paksak</i> , Rukul <i>i-kpaksak</i> .	B, S&B, RMB, SRL
21.	skink	<i>adun</i>	<i>ñdú</i>	The nasal has eroded in Ngas.	SRL

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	NGAS	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
22.	sling	ñcwálák	ncwálatɔŋ	A sound shift involving the velar nasal took place in the Ngas form.	B, SRL
23.	small	-yen	yinyin	Cf. Horom ùyèn'child', Rukul a-wyen, Eggon á-wyí (reconstructed *ó-yén in Proto Lower-Cross); Fyem áyin 'mother'.	B, RMB, SRL, JI
24.	stone	ípátɔŋ	pətɔŋ (Hill dialect)	Cf. Ningye mpatɔŋ. The other Ngas word for 'stone' is <i>zwal</i> .	RMB, SRL
25.	stool	itòk	pitotɔŋ	Cf. Pe ì-ten, Yangkam toyom. Sur yizatɔŋ, which is a cognate to Tarok's izan 'wood rack' which falls under the same domain of meaning.	SRL, RMB
26.	strength	ikàm	kám	Confirmed by the Ngas informant.	SRL
27.	sweet (tasty)	cátɔŋ	jatɔŋ	Cf. Yangkam jatɔŋ.	SRL
28.	twist (a rope)	myar	mya:r	Cf. Sur myerkat, Yangkam myar.	SRL, RMB
29.	weave	lòk	lòk	Cf. Sur lòk.	SRL RMB
30.	wooden basket frame	ajwár	jwa:r	Reputed to be a Tarok basket for carrying pots.	SRL
31.	young man	ùyènzèm	gyèmzátɔŋ	The palatal and velar sounds in the Ngas form are widespread in Plateau.	SRL, RMB

Table 8b -Ngas loans by speakers of Tarok

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	NGAS	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
1.	basket (type)	<i>m̄bāndar</i>	<i>bāndār</i>	Cf. Pe <i>m̄bāndar</i> , Sur <i>m̄bandar</i> . All three Tarokoid languages borrowed this item only recently. Generic terms for basket in Tarokoid are: Yangkam <i>nnap</i> , Tarok/Pe <i>anap</i> .	SRL, B
2.	be heavy	<i>tōn</i>	<i>twɔn</i>	The Tarok cognate means 'well built'.	SRL
3.	candle tree	<i>mpét</i>	<i>pet</i>	Widespread in West Chadic 3A.	B
4.	God	<i>iNan</i>	<i>Ne:n</i>	Widespread in West Chadic 3A. Tarok is the only Plateau language that uses the term instead of the 'Sun'.	B, JI
5.	important person	<i>ùdàs-kàm</i>	<i>diskam</i>	Widespread in West Chadic 3A.	B, SRL
6.	local bread	<i>mpàmpám</i>	<i>pempem</i>	The full Tarok name is <i>mpàmpám oDwal</i> of Tel, a relative of Ngas.	L&B, B
7.	scabies	<i>akwat</i>	<i>kwas</i>	In Tarok the syllable final strident is realised as unreleased plosive.	B
8.	small bag	<i>agal</i>	<i>nzwal</i>	Cf. Sur <i>gari</i> . This is a borrowing from Ngas into both Tarok and Sur. The process must have taken place after the split of Tarok and Sur because the Tarok word for 'bag' is <i>akindin</i> .	B, RMB, SRL
9.	spear	<i>ngájik</i>	<i>gafi</i>	This generic Ngas word for 'spear' is a 'special ritual spear' in Tarok. Cf. also Sur <i>gafi</i> Yangkam <i>gəs</i> .	SRL, RMB

Table 8c – Tarok and Ngas borrowings of uncertain/miscellaneous nature

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	NGAS	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
1.	boil	<i>fil</i>	<i>fil</i>	Direction of borrowing is uncertain.	SRL
2.	duck	<i>itílá</i>	<i>tíílá</i>	Direction of borrowing is uncertain.	SRL
3.	grass hut temporary house	<i>apák</i>	<i>púk</i>	Very widespread in this region. Cf. Hausa <i>buka</i> and Berom <i>búk</i> .	B, S&B
4.	hunger	<i>ayátŋ</i>	<i>ni:n</i>	Cf. Sur <i>yyɔŋ</i> , <i>yyekwan</i> ‘famine’, very widespread in Pla-teau.	SRL, RMB
5.	smallpox	<i>nìmìn</i>	<i>girmin</i>	The direction of borrowing can be suggested. If the Ngas form is a compound, it is likely to be a borrowing.	B
6.	speak	<i>là</i>	<i>lə</i>	Direction of borrowing is uncertain.	SRL
7.	twin	<i>-jèn</i>	<i>játŋ</i>	Direction of borrowing is uncertain as the same word is found in Mupun (Frajzyngier 1991) and Kofyar cluster.	B

The criteria listed above form the theoretical basis in reaching the categorical statements made in the commentaries and therefore may be considered subjective outside this work.<sup>5</sup>

Taking widespread cognates together with cultural borrowings, it can be said that an overwhelming number of look-alikes are Tarok loans into Ngas. Tables 8a,b,c clearly demonstrate that the contact between Tarok and Ngas has left a limited mark on the Tarok lexicon. The first implication of this for the history of Tarok speakers is that no wave of Chadic immigrants joined the original Benue-Congo population, but rather the immigrants came in trickles.

## 4.2 Tarok/Ron cognates and historical implications

The evidence of contact between the Chadic language of Ron and the Tarokoid language of Tarok given in Tables 9a and b is even more intriguing because of the geographic distance between the two languages today. The table was generated from an unpublished comparative wordlist of over 1000 items compiled by Uwe Seibert and Roger Blench (ined). In order to determine the direction of borrowing, each item was compared with Tarokoid as a whole, the neighbouring Plateau languages, Benue-Congo and according to the criteria set out in §4.1. For most items, there is no local source of borrowing from neighbouring Plateau languages Horom, Barkul etc. as may be expected. Instead, the loans are from Tarokoid.

The high number of cognates between Tarok and Ron is a pointer to the fact that the Proto-Ron language came under the influence of Tarokoid before their present expansion to the escarpment of the Jos Plateau from their probable nucleus at Fyer/Tambes. The absence of data on borrowing of Ron by speakers of Tarok is an indication that no active contact is going on. However, active contact is ongoing between Tarokoid and Ngas.

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5 Tone markings for the Tarok data and Ngas collected by me are certain. However, tones in the Ron data by Uwe Seibert are provisional.

Table 9a Tarok loans by speakers of Ron

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
1.	agree/answer	<i>máńń</i>	<i>mun</i>	Monguna <i>mu:n</i> Karfa <i>muná</i> forms are same reflexes of Ron.	S&B
2.	antelope (generic)	<i>ńkàr</i>	<i>cakar</i>	Ron added a longer prefix.	S&B
3.	bend (verb)	<i>gan</i>	<i>màgàn</i> Sha	Cf. Pe <i>ngommen</i> , Yangkam <i>gorj</i> .	S, RMB
4.	big calabash	<i>ńgój</i>	<i>igwoj</i> Tambes	Tambes represents the cognate.	S&B
5.	big, large, great	<i>agban</i>	<i>mgbáj</i> Mangar	Benue Congo root.	S&B
6.	body	<i>izár</i>	<i>zík</i> Mangar <i>zàk</i> Sha	Cf. Pe <i>ì-set</i> .	S&B, RMB
7.	bow	<i>ijáj</i>	<i>banjáj</i> Karfa	Plateau root instead of the Niger-Congo root <i>-ta</i> . Cf. Pe <i>igigyanj</i> , and Ngas <i>ńjanj</i> .	S, JI, RMB
8.	buffalo	<i>iyeeet</i> (Yangkam)	<i>yát</i> Daffo	Cf. Sur <i>yjet</i> . Tarok <i>izàr</i> , Pe <i>isat</i> is the more widespread Plateau root <i>za-</i> in BCCW.	S, L&B
9.	crowned crane	<i>ijanjà</i>	<i>jarát</i> Daffo- Butura, <i>jarat</i> Bokkos <i>jarát</i> Monguna	The Chadic suffix is a modification.	S&B

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
10.	deleb-palm	<i>ŋgáŋ</i>	<i>ŋgaŋ</i> Bokkos	Cf. Pe <i>ngan</i> , Yangkam <i>kaŋa</i> , Sur <i>gan</i> . In Fyer <i>ingan</i> refers to 'oil palm'.	S&B
11.	despise	<i>bèt</i>	<i>tíbèt</i> Bokkos	The Ron form is a modification.	S&B
12.	dig, excavate	<i>bok</i>	<i>bor</i> Daffo-Butura, Bokkos <i>bo</i> Mangar	The Ron form is a weakening.	S&B
13.	drink	<i>wa</i>	<i>wó</i> Bokkos	A widespread root, but cf. Pe <i>wu</i> , Yangkam, Sur and Alumu <i>wá</i> .	S&B
14.	drum (generic)	<i>igàŋgáŋ</i>	<i>kingaŋ</i> Bokkos, <i>àŋgəŋgáŋ</i> Monguna, <i>gəŋgáŋ</i> Mundut	Plateau root.	S&B
15.	ear	<i>acwáŋ</i>	<i>atón</i> Sha	Cf. Pe <i>uton</i> , Sur <i>koto</i> , Yangkam <i>ton</i> , Cara <i>kicuŋ</i> , Tahos <i>cuy</i>	S, L&B
16.	fish (generic)	<i>igwàli</i>	<i>gwájé</i> Sha, <i>g<sup>w</sup>ojé</i> Monguna <i>gùjé</i> Daffo- Butura, Bokkos <i>gijé</i> Mangar	Chadic suffix replaces the Tarok liquid <i>-li</i> .	S&B
17.	gazelle (generic)	<i>ifi</i>	<i>fáfi</i> Bokkos <i>fjfé</i> Karfa	The Ron form carries a long prefix.	S&B
18.	grave	<i>awap</i>	<i>wuf</i> Mangar <i>wonv</i> Mundat	A Tarokoid loan into Chadic. Cf. Pe <i>tiwap</i> , Yangkam <i>woop</i> .	S, RMB



SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
19.	hard	<i>kam</i>	<i>kamaán</i> Daffo-Butura	Tarok loan into Ron.	S&B
20.	hare	<i>izum</i>	<i>sumór</i> Mundat, Richa <i>sumbó:r</i> Karfa	A widespread Plateau root and a likely source for Hausa <i>zoomoo</i> . Cf. Pe <i>isom</i> , Yangkam <i>wum</i> , Cara <i>izum</i> . Sur uses the Ngas <i>kafwan</i> .	S&B
21.	liver	<i>anyi/ani</i>	<i>nín</i> Monguna	A widespread Benue-Congo root, but here a likely Tarok loan into Ron.	S&B, RMB
22.	mix (as dry ingredients in soup only)	<i>yír</i>	<i>yèr</i> Sha <i>yíráy</i> Karfa	Chadic is a modification.	S&B, RMB
23.	molar	<i>íbatj</i>	<i>bám</i> 'jaw' Mangar	Platoid loan into Ron.	S&B
24.	remember	<i>riŋ</i>	<i>tsirim</i> Mundat	Cf. Pe <i>leŋkat</i> , Sur <i>lyeŋ</i> , Yangkam <i>ryaŋ</i> .	S
25.	roast (without fat or oil, grill)	<i>wàŋ</i>	'fry' <i>waŋ</i> Daffo-Butura, Bokkos <i>faŋ</i> Monguna	For the semantic shift in Ron see Yangkam <i>waŋ</i> and Sur <i>voŋ</i> , Pe <i>mva</i> .	S&B
26.	roof, thatch	<i>amár</i>	<i>mawár</i> Daffo-Butura, Mundat, Sha <i>awár</i> Monguna	The prefix in Ron is a modification.	S&B, RMB

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
27.	shoot effectively	<i>fár</i>	'hunt' <i>far</i> Daffo-Butura, Bokkos <i>war</i> Monguna, <i>wâr</i> Mundat, Karfa.	The Ron cognate <i>war</i> is a weakening.	S&B
28.	silk-cotton tree (red flower)	<i>ngbyàngbyán</i>	<i>bánàk</i> Mundat <i>bân</i> Karfa	Chadic suffix is a modification.	RMB
29.	skink	<i>adun</i>	<i>ndakúl</i> Daffo- Butura <i>ndakul</i> Bokkos	Cf. Ngas <i>ndu</i> where the nasal is deleted, but in the case of Ron a suffix is added.	S&B
30.	sorghum	<i>ikúr</i>	<i>akúr</i> Mundat <i>ákôr</i> Karfa <i>akutúr</i> Richa	This is a Niger-Congo root.	S&B, RMB
31.	sour	<i>sám</i>	<i>mumwesán</i> Daffo-Butura	The Ron form is a modification.	S&B
32.	sow/plant/transplant	<i>suk</i>	<i>sok</i> Bokkos <i>su</i> Daffo <i>set</i> Fyer	The Tarok synonym <i>ál</i> has Tarokoid support, cf. Pe <i>ɓwak</i> , Sur <i>ɓar/ɓi</i> , Toro <i>ɓya</i> . This points to a proximity that the Ron nucleus was nearer to Tarok than the other Tarokoid languages and at the same time an evidence that the Tarokoid split took place before the arrival of Chadic. Cf. Jili <i>sé</i> .	RMB

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	COMMENTARY	SOURCE
33.	strength	<i>ajij</i> (a giant)	<i>manjey</i> Daffo- Butura <i>njéj</i> Bokkos <i>njey</i> Mangar <i>ngbé:r</i> Karfa	The Ron form is a modification.	S&B
34.	tie	<i>sâr</i>	<i>zar</i> Tambes	Cf. Berom <i>cât</i> , Sur <i>zit</i> , Horom <i>jet</i> Fyem <i>jit</i> , Ayu <i>ryp</i> and Tahos <i>ryz</i> are cognates of the Tarok synonym <i>ran</i> . The Sur word validates a Tarokoid link with Fyem, Horom and the Berom and Ayu/Tahos words establish the Tarok word as not a Chadic loan.	S&B

Table 9b – Tarok and Ron borrowings of uncertain/miscellaneous nature

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	SOURCE
1.	branch (verb)	<i>wòl</i>	<i>wel</i> Daffo-Butura and Bokkos, <i>wél</i> Monguna, <i>wé:l</i> Karfa	S&B
2.	climb high	<i>kúr</i>	<i>kur</i> 'heap' in Karfa	S&B
3.	cobra	<i>ipí</i>	<i>abi</i> Bokkos	S&B
4.	dig, excavate	<i>bok</i>	<i>bor</i> Daffo-Butura, Bokkos, <i>bo</i> Mangar	S&B
5.	ear	<i>acwáj</i>	<i>atón</i> Sha	S, L&B
6.	forge	<i>la</i>	<i>lân</i> Bokkos <i>lá</i> in Daffo-Butura 'melt with heat'	S&B, RMB
7.	frog	<i>izær</i>	<i>nzàrkoy</i> Fyer	S&B, RMB

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	SOURCE
8.	gather, collect	<i>büt</i>	<i>subüt</i> Daffo-Butura, <i>subüt</i> Bokkos, <i>subüt</i> Monguna	S&B, TG
9.	gazelle (generic)	<i>ift</i>	<i>fafi</i> Bokkos, <i>fifié</i> Karfa	S&B
10	god (high)	<i>iNan</i>	<i>Neen</i> Fyer	S&B
11.	gourd	<i>abəŋ</i>	<i>baŋ</i> Tames	S&B
12.	grave	<i>awap</i>	<i>wuf</i> Mangar, <i>wony</i> Mundat	S, RMB
13.	hard	<i>kam</i>	<i>kamaán</i> Daffo-Butura	S&B
14.	hare	<i>izum</i>	<i>sumór</i> Mundat, Richa, <i>sumbó:r</i> Karfa	S&B
15.	heap (verb)	<i>biŋ</i>	<i>hibiŋ</i> Daffo-Butura	S&B
16.	hunger/ famine	<i>ayaŋ</i>	<i>yuy</i> in Mangar	S&B, RMB
17.	in-law (mother, father, daughter)	<i>-ká</i>	<i>ka</i> Bokkos, <i>ákaká</i> Karfa	S&B
18.	in-law (mother, father, daughter)	<i>-ká</i>	<i>ka</i> Bokkos, <i>ákaká</i> Karfa	S&B
19.	knee	<i>iriŋ</i>	<i>arum</i> Monguna <i>aróm</i> Richa	S&B
20.	lay as a huge pile	<i>səp</i>	<i>səm</i> heap in Mundat	S&B
21.	load	<i>dík</i> (to be heavy)	<i>ndík</i> Daffo-Butura	S&B
22.	monkey	<i>ikírám</i>	<i>kerəŋ</i> Monguna, <i>kiir</i> Fyer	S&B
23.	pied crow	<i>igurok</i>	<i>ŋgorok</i> Bokkos	S&B

SRL	GLOSS	TAROK	RON	SOURCE
24.	roof, thatch	<i>amár</i>	<i>mawár</i> Daffo-Butura, Mundat, Sha <i>awár</i> Monguna,	S&B, RMB
25.	send (so. to do sth.)	<i>ré</i>	<i>rut</i> Daffo-Butura, <i>ro</i> Bokkos	S&B
26.	sleep	<i>rá</i>	<i>rák</i> Bokkos, <i>rák</i> Fyer	S&B
27.	sour	<i>sám</i>	<i>mumwesán</i> Daffo-Butura	S&B
28.	sow/plant/transplant	<i>suk</i>	<i>sok</i> Bokkos, <i>su</i> Daffo, <i>set</i> Fyer	RMB
29.	speak	<i>la</i>	<i>là</i> 'voice' in Daffo-Butura	S&B
30.	split, chop into pieces	<i>bwak</i>	<i>bak</i> Bokkos <i>bwáy</i> Karfa, <i>bak</i> Fyer	S&B
31.	strength	<i>ajij</i> (a giant)	<i>manjey</i> in Daffo-Butura, <i>njéj</i> in Bokkos, <i>njey</i> in Mangar, <i>məghé:r</i> in Karfa	S&B
32.	twin	<i>ijèn</i>	<i>nján</i> Daffo-Butura, Mangar, Sha, <i>anján</i> Monguna, <i>jáj</i> Ngas	S&B
33.	vulture	<i>ngùlúk</i>	<i>gulúk</i> Karfa, <i>àngtùlu</i> Mundat	S&B
34.	widen (e.g. a hole)	<i>byàn</i>	<i>bwáy</i> Daffo-Butura, <i>báj</i> Monguna	S&B
35.	with	<i>kǎ</i>	<i>ká</i> Daffo-Butura	S&B

### 4.3 Prehistoric implications from data of the languages in contact

#### 4.3.1 Cognate data

A first historical inference that can be made from the data in Tables 8a,b,c and 9a,b is that the Chadic languages of Ron and Kulere came in contact with Tarokoid at a different period from Ngas. Secondly, as the number of loan words between Tarokoid and Ron is higher than Ngas, this points to more intense contact than with Ngas. It is most likely Ron speakers came in contact with Tarokoid before other Chadic groups moved into the Tarokoid homeland I am postulating as Sur. There are not many loans between Ron/Ngas and Tarok/Tarokoid apart from widespread roots. This is a strong evidence that contacts occurred successively. Blench (2001) actually postulates that Fyer and Tambes are the Ron speakers who 'stayed at home'. Ngas was not present at that homeland.

Curiously enough, the lack of influence of Tarokoid on Fyer and Tambes is least. At the moment, an explanation that can be proffered is that in prehistoric times Ron was in direct contact with Tarokoid unlike her sister languages. We can even suggest a kind of bilingualism between Tarok and Ron but the present geographic distance has masked the phenomenon. Cognates involving several basic vocabularies are even more unexpected since contacts are not supposed to have been intense. The factors that could have triggered the west movement of the Ron speakers to create further distance leaving Fyer and Tambes at the present Ron homeland cannot be accounted for yet. However, it could be argued that it was when the Ron began to expand that they came into close contact with Tarokoid.

Indirect evidence for the conclusion that the Ron came into contact with Tarokoid before contact with Ngas may be the absence of common forms in all the West Chadic languages such as Tel, Goemai, Mupun and Mwaghavul. Major sources such as Jungrathmayr (1970), Kraft (1981), Frajzyngier (1991), and Fitzpatrick (1911) were examined but no special borrowings could be established. The implication for the present-day geographic gap between Tarokoid and Ron is that speakers of Ron parted with Tarok long before the recent arrival of speakers of languages that now constitute the intrusive populations. A deduction that can be made about the disparity in shared cognates between Tarokoid and Ron versus Ngas is that it is Ngas rather than

Ron is the more recent expansion. It is easy to postulate that Ron is thus an older branch of West Chadic that pre-dates the arrival of Ngas. Nettings (1968) gave the year of the arrival of Ngas to the Plateau area as 1300 AD. Their arrival created a gap between Boghom and Yangkam. Sur is the Tarokoid language that ‘stayed at home’. Yangkam split away first and its speakers left along the migration route that would give rise to Pe and Tarok. From this group, Tarok split, leaving Pe approximately where they are today. With the arrival of West Chadic languages in the area, a gap was created between Pe and Tarok. Ron was the first West Chadic language to move into the Tarokoid homeland of Tapshin and Ngas was the next to follow. A further distance was created between Sur and Yangkam with the arrival of Boghom from the Bauchi area (Shimizu 1978). The impacts of these migrations isolated Tarok for a long time. The consequence may have been that Tarok retained more reflexes of proto-Tarokoid than the other languages (Blench ined. b). A further implication of the isolation of Tarok is that a careful examination of its lexicon may reveal that it has preserved some traits of great antiquity (Jungrathmayr 1982). Ngas precipitated the movement of Proto-Ron from the original homeland at Fyer/Tambes. Ngas settlement at that time was at Duk only and Tarok uses that place name for Ngas even today. It is realistic on the basis of Table 8 to postulate that contact between Ron and Tarokoid was longer than the contact between Ngas and Tarokoid.

A more complex speculation is that prior to Tarokoid contact with Chadic, interaction with Adamawa-Ubangian languages could have precipitated the split of proto-Tarokoid. Therefore, the Chadic influence must be considered as a late event. A follow up study to test the hypothesis may be useful.

However, the data here shows only interaction on the Tarokoid/Chadic border area. It has been clearly demonstrated that Southeast Plateau was an area of intensive contact between Chadic and Plateau languages in a phase pre-dating the expansion of West Chadic to the edge of the escarpment. Tarokoid was the farthest flung group of Plateau speakers in East Central Nigeria before the arrival of Chadic. Proto-Tarokoid had been in this area long enough for it to have dif-

ferentiated into Sur, Yangkam, Pe, Tarok and others to be discovered, before Chadic contacts.

#### 4.3.2 Evidence from interpretation of names

Place names preserve interesting historical information.

##### 4.3.2.1 Duk

The Ngas settlement called *Duk* is also the name the Tarok people call Ngas people, *oDúk*. This settlement is in the Ron homeland of Tambes/Fyer.

##### 4.3.2.2 Nyelleng

Nyelleng is a settlement in Ngas land that is about 4 kms to Tapshin the main settlement of the Tarokoid language Sur. A section of the Tarok people who claims descent from the Tarokoid language Pe has a village called Funyallang. An etymology of the name will shed some historical facts. The *nyallang* of *funyallang* is the same *nyelleng* in Ngas area. *Funyallang* is a compound name made up of a verb *fu* ‘to pierce through’ + a noun *nyelleng*, meaning ‘people who migrated through Nyelleng’. The etymology lends credence to a historical link between Sur and Tarok.

##### 4.3.2.3 Dishili/Tapshin

Dishili is the name the Ngas people call the Sur people. An oral tradition of Ngas from Kor claims that they once settled at Dishili which is Tapshin (in Sur language). It is the homeland of Tarokoid ‘who stayed at home’. Kor is the westernmost Ngas settlement today.<sup>6</sup>

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

1. The hilly area from Tapshin, Nyelleng, Duk, Tambes to Fyer has been suggested as a plausible homeland for Tarokoid and Ron languages. The Chadic languages Ron and Ngas came from the

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<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Engr Yusufu I. Gomos of Kor for supplying this information to me on 6th October 2003. He identified the following Ngas villages whose speech forms have changed considerably due to the impact of bilingualism in the last 50 years or so: Kor, Garram, Kulukning, Tayin, Manget, Hikmwaram, Belming, Pangpel, Darang and Jang. Ngas spoken in these remote and almost inaccessible villages have come under the heavy influence of Mupun, Chip and Tal.



northeast to encounter Tarokoid. The area now occupied by Yangkam, Tarok and Pe was a contiguous Tarokoid belt prior to the Ngas expansion.

2. So far, evidence for pre-Tarokoid languages is non-existent. Presumably, there were once Adamawa languages in this area. A comparison of the Plateau languages of Shal/Zwal, Fyem and Jarawa-Bantu and Adamawa-Ubangi may be a helpful research endeavour.
3. The relatively few cognates common to Tarokoid and West Chadic languages such as Mwaghavul and Goemai compared with the numerous cognates between Tarokoid, Ngas and Ron is a pointer to histories of interaction. Ron left the Tarokoid area before the arrival of Ngas and its subsequent expansion.
4. These postulations are made with the hope that more work in the area can shed better light. A recent survey led to the collection of data of a Chadic language that was previously unknown to the scientific community, Dyarum, located between Duguza and Izere (Blench 2004).
5. The linguistic geography of Central Nigeria has remained an unexplored goldmine as far as documentation is concerned. This is an indictment against comparative and historical linguists in Nigeria. The departments of African languages and linguistics of Nigerian universities together with the National Language Institute of Nigeria can easily complete the task of describing these languages if the exercise can be properly planned and coordinated, and survey personnel trained.
6. Recent comments on the state of the classification of Plateau languages contain some elements of despair and frustration. Blench (2000) succinctly stated that the classification of Plateau languages and their place in the larger scheme of Benue-Congo have been more a matter of assertion than demonstration. He concluded that no proof is possible on their genetic classification because there is no published data on many languages. Such fears are justifiable given that it is over a century and a half since Koelle's *Polyglotta Africana* was first published and yet after such a long time the possibility of finding undocumented languages cannot be ruled out. However, not all hope is lost, provided we are able to change the paradigm by investing time and resources in getting good descriptive publications whose data can then be

used to set up sound theories. This so-called bottom-up approach in the terminology of development practitioners is a suggestion worth exploring.

7. The Tarok people themselves have spearheaded much research into their history, culture and language. Other groups in Central Nigeria can be encouraged to emulate this and a synergy will develop if scholars from the North can foster such approaches. This can be a solution to the increasingly difficult insecurity challenges in Nigeria. Outsiders must find new methodologies to circumvent such challenges as well as inaccessibility due to poor infrastructures as roads.

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#### Appendix: Comparative Affixes in Tarok and Vaghat Cluster

Vaghat Affixes	Vaghat	Gloss	Tarok	Tarok Affixes
∅	<i>mát</i>	abundant	<i>mak</i>	∅
∅	<i>pél</i>	animal	<i>i-bíl</i> ‘domestic animals’	<i>i-</i>
∅	<i>nén</i>	bird	<i>ì-níl</i>	<i>i-</i>
-a	<i>púl-à</i>	boil (verb)	<i>fíl</i>	∅
∅	<i>kúp</i>	bone	<i>a-kúp</i>	<i>a-</i>
-i	<i>gán-ì</i>	bracelet	<i>i-kan</i>	<i>i-</i>
<i>a-</i>	<i>àlín</i>	cassava	<i>alín</i> ‘root’	<i>a-</i>
<i>li</i>	<i>lì:fém</i>	chameleon	<i>ità-súm</i>	<i>i-</i>
∅	<i>bér</i>	charcoal	<i>a-bíráj</i> ‘cinders’, <i>m-birij</i> ‘soot’	<i>a-/-vN and N-/-vN</i>
∅	<i>kòk</i>	chest	<i>ikók-sók</i>	<i>i- and -sok</i>
∅	<i>káp</i>	chop (verb)	<i>káp</i> ‘to divide/ share’	∅

Vaghat Affixes	Vaghat	Gloss	Tarok	Tarok Affixes
∅	<i>nák</i>	clan	<i>ùnàl/onal</i> ‘relation(s)’	<i>u-/o-</i>
∅	<i>lúj</i>	cloth	<i>ilùkwàn</i>	<i>i- and -kwaN</i>
<i>gú-</i>	<i>gúrúm</i>	cripple	<i>ùgùrùm</i>	<i>ugu-</i>
<i>-zí</i>	<i>gùn-zí</i>	crooked	<i>gən</i>	∅
<i>-dik</i>	<i>dìmdík</i>	dark (colour)	<i>dín</i> ‘to be black/blacken’	∅
<i>a-</i>	<i>ámè</i>	dew	<i>ìmi-myàŋ</i>	<i>imi-</i>
∅	<i>kū</i>	die	<i>kú</i>	∅
<i>-na</i>	<i>bàná</i>	fasten	<i>bam</i>	∅
∅	<i>mák</i>	fat (verb)	<i>mwal</i> , but <i>mak</i> ‘to be tall’	∅
∅	<i>bēp</i>	fats	<i>ñ-bìp</i>	<i>m-</i>
∅	<sup>n</sup> <i>d'áj</i>	finger	<i>ifàŋ</i>	<i>i-</i>
∅	<i>ná:</i>	give	<i>ná</i>	∅
∅	<i>ʃèn</i>	guest	<i>ùnìm-tʃìn</i>	<i>u-</i>
∅	<i>ʃék</i>	guinea fowl	<i>irú-sòk</i>	<i>iru-</i>
<i>a-</i>	<i>àt<sup>w</sup>ál</i>	hail(stone)	<i>adʔdal</i>	<i>adʔ-</i>
∅	<i>ʃû</i>	head	<i>ifí</i>	<i>i-</i>
∅	<i>gàr</i>	head-pad	<i>akár</i>	<i>a-</i>
∅	<i>dʒh</i>	heart	<i>itun</i>	<i>i-</i>
<i>-let</i>	<sup>n</sup> <i>déplèt</i>	heel	<i>ñdoŋ</i>	<i>n-</i>
<i>-i</i>	<i>lári</i>	hide	<i>lar</i> ‘to disappear/vanish/lose’	∅
∅	<i>pár</i>	hunt	<i>bàr</i>	∅
∅	<i>ʃém</i>	iron/metal	<i>atʃàm</i>	<i>a-</i>
∅	<i>dék</i>	kidney	<i>arùsòk</i>	<i>aru-</i>
∅	<i>góh</i>	ladder	<i>ŋgwàŋ</i>	<i>N-</i>
∅	<i>ján</i>	lazy	<i>naŋ</i> ‘to be lazy’	∅

Vaghat Affixes	Vaghat	Gloss	Tarok	Tarok Affixes
∅	wàrámin	leak + ?water	wàr ‘to leak’	∅
-an	nàrán	lean against	nàr	∅
∅	tám	leopard	ìdà-míη	i-/-CVN
∅	kók	mahogany	ikò	i-
∅	nám	meat	ìjám ‘flesh/muscle’	i-
di-	dìsfár	mend	dfámfi	dfám-
∅	mús	millet	ìmàr	i-
∅	pé	moon/month	ape	a-
∅	dūk	mortar	atúm	a-
a-	àbí	mouse	ìpi	i-
∅	núnη	mouth	anunη	a-
∅	<sup>n</sup> kōm	navel	ìgúm	i-
∅	núnη	noise	anùnη	a-
la-	là <sup>b</sup> át	okra	ìbwàm	i-
-su	pélsù	open (verb)	bòl	∅
zu-	zùzút	owl	izìη	i-
-fá	ò <sup>w</sup> áfá	peel	òwàl	∅
-vi	ηàlví	poison	akàl	a-/∅
-làη	pílàη	porcupine	ikpyá	i-/∅
∅	náp	pull	dàp	∅
∅	l’áj	remember	riη	∅
ka	káfì	room	hézí	N-
∅	líη	root	alèη	a-
-ul	núnùl	smell	nìη	∅
∅	džá	snake	izwà	i-
∅	g <sup>w</sup> ál	snore	kpàl	∅
∅	kōη	sorghum	ikùr	i-
-fì	lètìfì	spoil	làk	∅

Vaghat Affixes	Vaghat	Gloss	Tarok	Tarok Affixes
<i>ki-</i>	<i>kìtáh</i>	stalk	<i>tá</i>	∅
<i>-bila</i>	<i>ǰíbilà</i>	stir	<i>ǰí</i>	∅
<i>-le</i>	<i>váŋlèlè</i>	swing	<i>yìŋgìt</i>	<i>-gìt</i>
∅	<i>ǰól</i>	tail	<i>aswál</i>	<i>a-</i>
<i>di-</i>	<i>dìdém</i>	termite	<i>ìnàntàn</i>	∅
∅	<i>lám</i>	tongue	<i>abílám</i>	<i>abí-</i>
∅	<i>ǰīn</i>	tooth	<i>i ǰīn</i>	<i>i-</i>
∅	<i>pél</i>	uncover	<i>ǰíl</i> ‘not full as before’	∅
∅	<i>mém</i>	wild cat	<i>mim</i> ‘feline’	∅
∅	<i>nòr</i>	wound	<i>a(nú)nur</i>	<i>a-</i>
<i>-di</i>	<i>ǰúmdì</i>	wrap	<i>kúp</i> ‘fold’	∅
<i>bé-</i>	<i>bélàŋ</i>	yesterday	<i>ñlám</i>	<i>N-</i>