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Tera is the Hausa and English name for the Nyimatli [ɲimáɬi] people as they call themselves, and their language. Their communities lie principally in the north and east of present-day Gombe State and in the adjoining area of Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria. There are approximately 100,000 people who speak the language as their mother tongue (Gordon & Grimes 2005: 175), many of whom also use Hausa as the local lingua franca; increasing numbers are trilingual as the result of the growing importance of English in commerce and education.

Linguistic work on Tera, a Chadic language (Biu-Mandara sub-branch A, see Crozier & Blench 1992: 101), is principally associated with Newman (1964, 1968, 1970, 1980); see also Odden (2005: 287–290). However, an orthographic system was established with the publication of *Labar Mbarkandu nu Yohanna Bula Ki*, a ‘tentative’ translation of the Gospel of John (British and Foreign Bible Society, 1930). This publication can be attributed to a Canadian missionary, Gordon Beacham (see Fuller 1995, under *Yamaltu*). The issue of orthography has recently been re-visited in an orthography workshop held in Gombe State in June 2004 and the Introductory Course in Applied Linguistics, NBTT, Jos; their recommendations have been considered, and adopted, by the language committee of the *Tera Forum*.

Newman’s phonological studies were based on data collected in the town of Wuyo in the eastern part of the Tera area. The present description is based on data collected in 2004 from native speakers from the towns Deba and Hinna (south and east central, respectively), where the current high chieftancies are based, and from the towns Difa, Zambuk and Lubo (central, west central and north, respectively). It reflects what these consultants regard as the standard form of the language as it is used in radio broadcasts of the news. Newman (1968: 514; 1970: 2) drew attention to a small number of differences between the Wuyo and Zambuk accents and a tendency in the Zambuk accent to affricate /t, d/ before front vowels, viz. [xàtin] to [xàtʃin] ‘his brother’, [ti] to [tʃi] ‘to stir’, [dere] to [dʒere] ‘cap’, and [kudi] to [kudʒi] ‘chief’. A generation or so later, this change has spread and established itself, since the affricated forms have now become standard amongst all Tera speakers of the middle and younger generations.

## Consonants

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar/palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		k g		
Affricate				tʃ dʒ			
Implosive	ɓ		ɗ		ɠ		
Prenasalized	m̥b		n̥d	ɲdʒ	ŋg		
Nasal	m		n	ɲ	ŋ		
Trill			r				
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ	x ɣ		h
Lateral fricative			ɬ ɮ				
Lateral approximant			l				
Approximant				j		w	
Glottalized approximant				ʔj			

The labial consonants ɓ, m, v undergo palatalization: ɓ<sup>j</sup>, m<sup>j</sup>, v<sup>j</sup>, and the velar consonants k, g, ŋg, x, ɣ undergo labialization: k<sup>w</sup>, g<sup>w</sup>, ŋg<sup>w</sup>, x<sup>w</sup>, ɣ<sup>w</sup>.

p	paʒa	<i>padla</i>	‘patting’
b	bala	<i>bala</i>	‘escort’
ɓ	ɓala	<i>ɓala</i>	‘to talk’
ɓ <sup>j</sup>	ɓ <sup>j</sup> ax	<i>ɓyakh</i>	‘to tear’
m̥b	m̥ba	<i>mba</i>	‘my stomach’
t	taɗà	<i>taɗa</i>	‘heavy’
d	dàrí	<i>dari</i>	‘picking up’
ɗ	ɗàna	<i>ɗana</i>	‘safe’
n̥d	n̥dà	<i>nda</i>	‘to explain’
tʃ	tʃéré	<i>chere</i>	‘moon’
dʒ	dʒere	<i>jere</i>	‘cap’
ɲdʒ	ɲdʒa:bi	<i>njaabi</i>	‘kindling wood’
k	ka:ri	<i>kaari</i>	‘home’
g	gà:ri	<i>gaari</i>	‘bush’
ɠ	ɠandi	<i>qaandi</i>	(greeting)

k <sup>w</sup>	k <sup>w</sup> á:ri	<i>kwari</i>	‘thinking’
g <sup>w</sup>	g <sup>w</sup> á:ri	<i>gwari</i>	‘prosper’
ŋ̄	ŋ̄gá	<i>ngga</i>	‘to cast’
ŋ̄ <sup>w</sup>	ŋ̄g <sup>w</sup> à	<i>nggwa</i>	‘maybe’
m	mà:và	<i>maava</i>	‘slave’
m <sup>j</sup>	m <sup>j</sup> á:si	<i>myasi</i>	‘eight’
n	nà:nà	<i>nana</i>	‘my mother’
ɲ	ɲakti	<i>nyakti</i>	‘saliva’
ŋ	ŋà	<i>nga</i>	‘I’
f	fà:ra	<i>fara</i>	‘there’
v	và:ra	<i>vara</i>	‘my body’
v <sup>j</sup>	v <sup>j</sup> à:ŋ	<i>vyang</i>	‘red’
s	sà:ri	<i>sari</i>	‘gathering (of clouds)’
z	zà:ri	<i>zari</i>	‘drinking’
ʃ	ʃó:ka	<i>shoka</i>	‘squirrel’
ʒ	ʒò:ka	<i>zhoka</i>	(hopping game)
x	xà:ra	<i>khar</i>	‘hand’
ɣ	ɣà:ra	<i>ghar</i>	‘to collect’
x <sup>w</sup>	x <sup>w</sup> á:ri	<i>khwaati</i>	‘small opening’
ɣ <sup>w</sup>	ɣ <sup>w</sup> á:ri	<i>ghwaari</i>	‘dry’
l	láb:ti	<i>labti</i>	‘searching’
l̥	l̥è:bi	<i>tleebi</i>	‘side’
l̥ʒ	l̥è:pti	<i>dlepti</i>	‘plaiting’
r	rè:mtà	<i>remta</i>	‘to subside’
j	jè:ma	<i>yema</i>	‘place’
ʔj	ʔjè:ma	<i>ɖyema</i>	‘beer’
w	wà:ri	<i>wari</i>	‘leaving home early’
h	hà:ŋkal	<i>hankal</i>	‘gently’

The voiceless plosives are lightly aspirated, but unreleased before another consonant. /t, d/ do not precede front vowels; /tʃ, dʒ/ rarely precede anything but front vowels, but cases like /tʃòrò/ ‘anvil’ and /dʒù/ ‘Stand!’ exist, thus establishing an independent phonemic status for the two pairs of consonants. This is clearly a case of phonemic split (Trask 1996: 78): former /t/ with allophones [t] and [tʃ] and /d/ with allophones [d] and [dʒ], have now split into current /t/ and /tʃ/, and /d/ and /dʒ/, respectively (see the remark on the Zambuk accent’s tendency to affricate in the introduction, above).

/h/ is a newcomer, not indicated in Newman’s studies. Evidence for its existence is the stability of nativized loan words from Hausa and English in contemporary speech: examples include /hàŋkal/ *hankal* ‘gently’ from Hausa *hankali* ‘carefulness’, /hawa/ *Hawa* ‘Eve’ from Hausa *Hawwa*, /hausa/ *Hausa* ‘Hausa’ (language), /harmíndí/ *harmundi* ‘harmony’ from English (displayed prominently on the town gate of Deba), /há:lílújà/ *haliluya* ‘hallelujah’, /jòhanà/ *Yohana* ‘John’ from Hebrew via English.

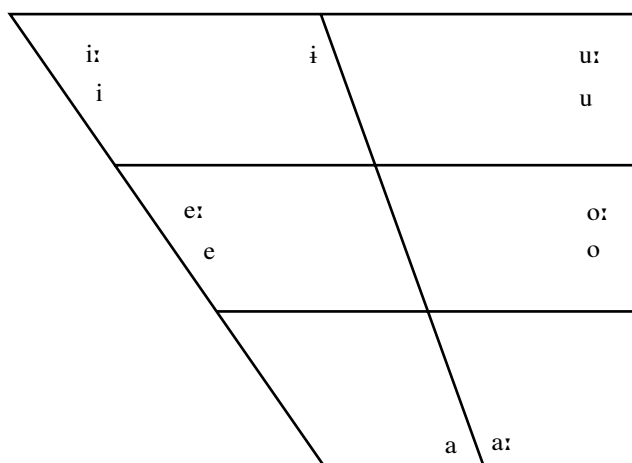
/ʔj/ is evidently a weakening of an earlier palatalized alveolar implosive [dʒ̥]; the alveolar contact is now lost in the middle and younger generations, but the palatalization and the glottal action have been retained. This process is exactly parallel to the process reported for Hausa (Schuh & Yalwa 1999: 92). It now appears to be the same as the Hausa /ʔj/, but Tera convention in orthography prefers to keep reference to its original alveolar contact: the old 1930 orthography

represented this consonant as <ɖy> (= [dʲ]), and the new recommendation has <ɖy>.

The nasal element in prenasalization is not always strong. (One consultant consistently ignored it in his transcriptions.) Medial sequences of nasal and plosive/affricate were interpreted as a sequence of two independent consonants. (This is how Schuh (in preparation) handles such cases in Bole, a neighbouring Chadic language.)

## Vowels

### Monophthongs



Vowel qualities are displayed in the following set of words:

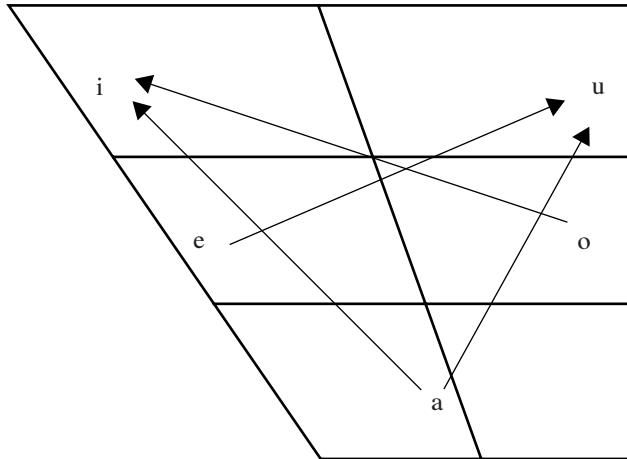
zi:	<i>zi</i>	‘to speak’	za:	<i>za</i>	‘to drink’
zè:	<i>ze</i>	‘spoke’	zù:	<i>zu</i>	‘Speak!’
zì	<i>zu</i>	‘said’	zo:	<i>zo</i>	‘rope’

Vowel length contrast is neutralized in monosyllabic word-final position, although it should be noted that /i/ never occurs long. Length contrasts occur word-medially, as in the following pairs of examples:

píli	<i>pili</i>	‘table mat’	kimbí:lì	<i>kimbiili</i>	‘pepper’
jela	<i>yela</i>	‘to melt’	be:la	<i>beela</i>	‘infant’
ká:ri	<i>kari</i>	‘feeding’	ka:ri	<i>kaari</i>	‘home’
zuri	<i>zuri</i>	‘fried’	zù:ri	<i>zuuri</i>	‘damp’
yò:ri	<i>ghori</i>	‘crying’	bo:ri	<i>boori</i>	‘head pad’

The non-low vowels show a more open quality in closed syllables, e.g. [tʃít] ‘black’, [kɛp] ‘to plait’, [vír] ‘to give’, [xór] ‘to cook soup’, [jóp] ‘to sink’. The vowel /a/ tends to show a front quality following palatalized consonants, e.g. [ɬʲæx] ‘to tear’, [mʲæsi] ‘eight’, [vʲæx] ‘relaxed’.

## Diphthongs



The diphthongs have approximately the same length as long vowels. They could alternatively be interpreted as vowels followed by either /w/ or /j/, since the second element of the diphthong does not have a separate tone. However, the Tera orthography team decided to interpret them orthographically as diphthongs.

beu	<i>beu</i>	‘sour’	ɬàu	<i>dlau</i>	‘sickle’
ɣàì	<i>ghai</i>	‘town’	woi	<i>woi</i>	‘child’

A thorough check on sequences of vowels within words indicates that there is no vowel harmony.

## The syllable

CV	zi	‘said’	wa.la	‘to pass by’	jok.pa	‘to rinse’
CV:	wa:	‘like’	màrvà	‘slave’		
CVC	ɟiɓ	‘to wash’	ɟok.pa	‘to rinse’	xum.bur	‘monitor lizard’

Occasionally, syllables without an initial consonant occur:

V	i	‘yes’	a.jím	‘ring’	a.pɔ	‘continue’
VC	aɲ.dʒiɲ.dʒa	‘star’				

A number of exclamations begin with a vowel:

á:ya, ú:yu	(sense of fear)	ɔɲa	'Carry on!'
áwo	'No; I refuse'	áɲɲa	(sense of uncertainty)
ó.o	'No; I don't think so.'		

Cases of palatalization and labialization were presented as single units in the 'Consonants' section above but could alternatively be interpreted as CC, since /j/ and /w/ exist as independent consonants and the degree of frequency of the two 'prosodies' is relatively low, as is their functional load. This alternative interpretation would yield additional syllable structures:

CCV	mja 'my mouth'	kwà:yi 'raven'
CCVC	bjax 'to tear'	gwà:ɲ.dʒi 'big'

This alternative interpretation would also allow for a case of labialization with a non-velar consonant, as in /ʃwa:ta/ 'help' in some Tera accents, e.g. Difa (elsewhere the word is pronounced /ʃa:ta/).

It should also be noted that there are cases of open transition in CVCCV(C) when the final consonant of the first syllable is a fricative, e.g. [ʃaxǝla] 'to cut across'.

## Tone

The tone system of Tera has not been described before. What follows is a preliminary analysis of mono- and disyllabic lexical items; no attempt has yet been made to investigate tone in discourse. Tone is not generally marked in the new orthography, since no contrasts exist in 'minimal trios' and those in 'minimal pairs' can be distinguished in context. However, the distinction between present progressive (*á*) and present perfect (*a*) markers needs to be indicated.

There are three contrasting level tones: high (H [´]), mid (M, unmarked) and low (L [˘]). There appear to be no contour tones, even in syllables with long and diphthongal vowels. The three tones can be illustrated first with the following monosyllabic words:

H	mé <i>me</i> 'mouth'	lé <sup>m</sup> <i>lem</i> 'net'
M	vi: <i>vi</i> 'to enter'	zum <i>zhum</i> 'warthog'
L	vì: <i>vi</i> 'iron'	zùm <i>zhum</i> 'dark'

Disyllabic words display the following seven patterns; there appear to be no sequences of HL or LH. Mid tone is partially assimilated to a neighbouring H or L, producing either mid-high or mid-low.

H H	tʃélém <i>chelem</i> 'giraffe'	ʃédék <i>shedek</i> 'hut'
H M	kálau <i>kalau</i> 'dust'	tútuɲ <i>tutung</i> 'soot'
M H	lefún <i>lefun</i> 'cotton'	ʃiʃi <i>ʃiʃi</i> 'breast'
M M	kuka <i>kuka</i> 'baobab'	roma <i>roma</i> 'rain'
M L	kizàp <i>kuzap</i> 'cloud'	joɣà <i>yogha</i> 'ant'
L M	gàwu <i>gawu</i> 'river'	yùmndi <i>ghumndi</i> 'rat'
L L	gà:ʃà <i>gaʃa</i> 'hoe'	jùrvù <i>yurvu</i> 'fish'

In most cases there seems to be some sort of interaction between voicing and tone with voiced obstruents favouring L tone while voiceless obstruents and implosives can be followed by any tone, but there is not enough evidence for a categorical statement at this point.

## Transcription

The transcription that follows is of the story of ‘The North Wind and the Sun’, as translated by three Tera speakers. Tone is marked as above. The transcription is followed by an orthographic version using the newly recommended alphabet.

xìxe:ṭí na víkí kìn zan ndí fíḍa a kélé ʔjine kí dúkkí ðìmbìr tjele baṁda. a mbi kélé ku, tina xuski ṅgur á sa luktá taḍakandi a pé:tar jiti ṅḍzivi ti gín mé jen ku zà, ṅḍzib ní sakí xuskinaṅ ti fét luktá niyà, tjin dukti ðìmbìri. ní xìxe:ṭí na víkí kìn zan g̀r̀kí, tí pi xuskjáj maʔjí kime kí fét luktá bar venda tí xuskjáj xub luktá tʃip ní ve nda. tí xìxe:ṭá jí tí jí kime kí fét luktá bar venda tí kina. ní kìnáki tí tʃiṅ ya. ga:ṅḍze ní xixé:ṭí na víkí kìn zan kìnáki tí fíḍarà vi bwa, tí má:rà jí g̀r̀g̀r̀. ní g̀r̀g̀r̀ má:rà b̀g̀l̀ki nda, tí xuskjáj damta tí fét lukti taḍakanda niyà. na:ḍó, tí xìxe:ṭá ʔoyan ʔjine fíḍa wa dukṭinda ðìmbìri.

Khukheeti na viki kun zan, ndu fuḍa a kele dʔyine ki dukki dumbur chele baanda. A mbu kele ku, tu na khuski nggur á sa lukti taḍakandi a peetar yiti njivi. Tu gun me yen ku za, njib nu saki khuskinang tu fet lukta nugha, chin dukti dumburi. Nu khukheeti na viki kun zan gurki, tu pi khuskyang maʔyi kume ku fet lukta bar venda, tu khuskyang khuḅ lukta chip nu ve nda. Tu khukheeta shi tu shi kume ku fet lukta bar venda tu kuna. Nu kunaki tu ching gha. Gaanje nu khukheeti na viki kun zan kunaki, tu fuḍara vi bwa, tu maara shi gurgur. Nu gurgur maara nggulki nda, tu khuskyang damta tu fet lukti taḍakanda nugha. Naado, tu khukheeta tloghan dʔyine fuḍa wa dukṭunda dumburi.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to The Seed Company, Austin, TX, and the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust for financial help to attend the orthography workshop and the applied linguistics course, respectively, and to Dr Katy Barnwell of The Seed Company and to Cardiff University for their support.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the following consultants: Mr Babayo Madi (Deba), who also recorded the story of *The North Wind and the Sun*, Rev Benjamin Gaina (Hinna), who also recorded the words in the illustration, Mallam Yohanna Baro (Difa), Mallam Magaji Galadinan (Lubo), Mr Audu Kalagar (Lubo), Mr Yusufu Atuman (Zambuk) and Mr Jauro Maila, who reads the news in Tera on the radio. Also to Dr Uwe Seibert, who gave valuable advice on Chadic languages, Mr Danjuma Gambo, who gave valuable advice on tone analysis, and two anonymous reviewers for their thorough review and suggestions.

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