

## BABATANA SEGMENTAL PHONEMES

Owen G. Whaley

University of Auckland

1.1 Babatana is one of several languages spoken on the island of Choiseul in the Western Solomons. The informant from whom the data for this analysis was obtained is Esau Tuza, a native speaker of the language at present studying in Auckland.

The investigation was conducted at the University of Auckland by the linguistics class, Anthropology II, 1962, of which I was a member.

### 1.2 *Limits of investigation.*

The study was limited to an analysis of the segmental phonemes. A working list of short utterances was collected and recorded in phonetic transcription. Phonetic segments were tested for contrast and distribution, and aligned into phonemes. Twenty-three phonemes were set up: sixteen consonants, and seven vowels.

### 1.3 *Stress and Vowel Length.*

Phonetically long, heavily stressed vowels are in phonemic contrast with vowels which are short and weakly stressed. The analysis has not proceeded far enough for a phonemic interpretation of this contrast to be formulated solely in terms of short versus long, or stressed versus unstressed vowels. In the following examples vowel length is marked [:] and heavy stress [ˈ].

[quru] "spear fish," [qú:ru] "pound nuts;" [tulu] "mute," [tú:lu] "three;" [mana] "past tense," [má:na] "blessing;" [ká:kiti] "bite," [ká:kí:ti] "open up a boil;" [beré:] "how about you?," [bé:re] "laugh;" [kula] "dance," [kú:la] "elephantiasis."

### 1.4 *Distribution.*

The following statements take as the unit of phoneme distribution the minimal isolable utterance parts, henceforth termed words.

No phonemic consonant sequences occur within words. Vowel sequences, however, occur in a considerable proportion of words obtained. Of the 42 possible combinations

of unlike vowels some 20 were recorded in a corpus of about 400 words. Examples are:

|mau| "thousand;" |mao| "valuable;" |nae| "his;" |nai| "mother;" |ntu| "rub against;" |gi| "that;" |sua| "child."

|a| occurs word initially, medially, and finally; |o| occurs initially in one borrowed word |osi| "horse," medially and finally. All other vowels occur medially and finally in words but not initially.

|m| occurs word initially and medially, and word finally in words which have a free variant with final |mu|. All other consonants occur word initially and medially, but not word finally.

## 2.0 Description of segmental phonemes.

### 2.1 Consonants.

|p| is a voiceless bilabial stop as in [peta] "thing."

|t| is a voiceless alveolar stop as in [tá:ba] "all."

|k| is a voiceless velar stop as in [ká:va] "dry."

|b| has two allophones. After silence [b] voiced bilabial stop, is in free or stylistic variation with [mb] prenasalized voiced bilabial stop. Examples are [bó:se] "man," [bambá:tana] "Babatana." Elsewhere [mb] occurs; [rá:mburu] "you (dual)."

|d| has two allophones. After silence [d] voiced alveolar stop, is in free variation with [nd] prenasalized voiced alveolar stop. Elsewhere [d] occurs. [diru] "ours (dual)," [ná:du] "firm."

|g| has two allophones. After silence [g] voiced velar stop. Elsewhere [ŋg] occurs. [ŋgó:le] "woman," [miŋga] "rain."

|m| is a bilabial nasal as in [má:ma] "father."

|n| is an alveolar nasal as in [ná:pu] "again."

|ŋ| is a velar nasal as in [ŋá:va] "long."

|v| has two allophones. Before |a| or |o| it is realised as a voiced bilabial fricative [w]. Elsewhere [v], voiced labiodental fricative, occurs: [wusili] "blow," [vá:ka] "ship."

|s| is a voiceless alveolar groove fricative as in [sasa] "rotten."

|z| is a voiced alveolar groove fricative as in [zava] "slice finally."

|g| is a voiced velar fricative as in [gá:ki] "eat."

|j| has two allophones. After silence, [j] voiced alveopalatal affricate occurs in free variation with [nj] prenasalized voiced alveopalatal affricate. Elsewhere [nj] occurs. [já:niu] "work."

|l| is a voiced alveolar lateral, as in [lala] "mark."

|r| is a voiced alveolar flap, as in [raru] "we (dual exclusive)."

The consonants may be tabulated as follows:

	Nasal	Stop		Fricative		Affricative	Liquid	
		vd.	unvd.	vd.	unvd.		latl.	flap.
Labial/Labiodental.	m	b	p	v				
Alveolar/Alveopalatal.	n	d	t	z	s	j	l	r
Velar.	ŋ	q	k	g				

## 2.2 Vowels.

|i| is high front unrounded, as in [bí:] "water."

|e| is mid front unrounded, as in [gé:] "that yonder."

|ɨ| is high central unrounded, with lip protrusion as in [gá:izi] "stalk."

|ö| is mid central unrounded, as in [gö:zö] "touch lightly."

|u| is high back rounded, as in [jujú:lu] "flow."

|o| is realized as a mid back closely rounded vowel when long or stressed as in [vamó:ja] "cook." Elsewhere it is a low mid rounded vowel, as in [ziŋo] "nose."

|a| is low back and unrounded when it occurs long or stressed as in [vá:ti] "four." Elsewhere it is low mid back unrounded, as in [kau] "ashes," and [puda] "bone."

The vowels may be tabulated as follows:

	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɨ	u (rounded)
Mid/Low	e	ö	a o (rounded)

3.1 In the orthography used by Babatana at present, long or heavily stressed vowels are not marked. The symbol ö is used to represent two phonemically distinct vowels, |ö| and |ɨ|.