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## Tone as trigger to semantic variation in Wapan

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**Abstract:** This study examines tone in Wapan. Wapan is a dialect of the Jukun language spoken in Wukari local government area of Taraba State. The study is aimed at providing linguistic information that could be used in avoiding misrepresentation of ideas in communication. The objective of this research is to study tonality in relation to semantic variation of lexical items in Wapan. The methodology adopted for this study is the descriptive method and the data for the study were gathered from some selected Wapan native speakers in Avyi, Assa, Chonku, and Wukari II districts who are well-informed and conversant with the fundamentals of the dialect. Secondary data were elicited from the already existing literature related to the study. The research used the Leipzig glossing rules for the organization and coding of data for easy understanding of the meaning of individual words used. The study adopts Chomsky's Classical phonology theory for its analysis. The investigation reveals that change in utterance can be initiated by a change in tone. The study concludes that the features of words and their analysis in the dialect are very essential in identifying the changes in the pitch level of a speaker's voice that result to change in the meaning of an utterance. The work has contributed to knowledge by giving insight on how a single word can represent different thoughts. More so, the study will serve as a reference material; give awareness to identical features in other languages. Recommendations were made for further research, campaigns and funding.

**Keywords:** Dialects, Grammatical and lexical tone, Pitch level and tone, Wapan

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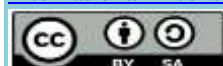
### 1. Introduction

Tone is the variation in the pitch of the voice while speaking. The word tone is usually applied to distinguish the meaning of words and grammatical categories. That is, tone is used to separate between two identical words. Suffice it to say here that, the meaning of words depends on the tone or pitch in which the words are said to be articulated. Roach (2010) observes that a tone language is defined as a language where different words with different tone inflections convey different meanings. For example, a single word could be pronounced differently and each of those different pronunciations will trigger change in the meaning of the word. Roach (2010), avers that tone is the use of pitch in language to distinguish lexical or grammatical meaning. That is, to distinguish or to inflect words. Lexical tone is the distinctive pitch level carried by the syllable of a word which is an essential feature of the meaning of that word. Grammatical tone however, is the distinctive pitch level which marks contrasts in grammatical features such as tense, aspect, and case.

Hyman (2016) observes that, lexical tone is a situation where tonal contrasts are on morphophonemic roots. Furthermore, Hyman (2016) opines that although it does however sometimes happen that tone is marked differently on different word classes, this is still lexical tone. Grammatical tone to Hyman (2016) can mark inflectional categories (nouns, verbs, adjective etc.) as well as derivational processes such as deriving nouns from verbs. Yul (2008) opines that tone plays a lot of grammatical function in indicating attitude and emotion of the speaker. It also shows the difference between question and statement, and between different types of questions. In line with Yul's assertion, Roach (2010) argues that tone in relation to attitude, reveals the interest of the speaker. Tone in relation to emotion,

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reveals anger, anxiety, surprise, joy or happiness, threat, desire, love etc. This is indicated by a rising arrow, falling arrow, or – sign indicating medial tone.

Hyman (2016) notes that, pitch can be characterized by the differences that occur in identical words in their sequence of consonant and vowel sounds. For example *akwin* in Wapan dialect of Jukun language could mean chicken, grinding stone or can; depending on the pitch variation assigned to *akwin* as articulated by the Wapan native speaker. Welmers (1947:11) observes that Wapan dialect depend on hearing a tone which is concerned with the sounds the Wapan use in speech and with the way the speaker has chosen to write those sounds. To buttress this fact, Magaji (2017:128) observes in Akoja that the Jukun language is classified among the Nigrific language and it is said to be a 'tone' language which uses pitch to indicate difference in the meaning of words. Suffice it to say here that a word in Wapan dialect of the Jukun language can be articulated differently to mean different thing from the original word, using different pitch in voicing or variation in spoken voice (tone).

The study is concerned with the tonal distinction in Wapan dialect of the Jukun language. The primary concern of tone is the variation in pitch of one morpheme to another that affects or results to change in morpheme. The study does not consider all forms of variation in pitch, but only consider the variation in pitch that result to change in the meaning of a morpheme. The tonal analysis is therefore said to be for semantic purpose. The Jukun language has different dialects. These dialects have their unique tonal expression in communicating meaning. The study is set to consider only the Wapan dialect of the Jukun language spoken in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

The study is aimed at identifying a change in the pitch level of a speaker's voice that result to change in meaning of an utterance. The Chomsky's Classical phonology theory was adopted for the study. The theory describes the phonology of tonal system and the differences of sound in phonological description that result to change in meaning of a sound. The method of data collection employed for this work was observation, interview, note taking and the intuitive knowledge of the researcher as a native speaker as the researcher and his assistant visited selected individuals like: scholars who are highly knowledgeable in the dialect within Wukari, native speakers of Wapan; especially the elders, the academics, the clergy, the farmers and business men/women, who are versed and are acquainted with the rudiments of the Wapan dialect. The aged were also considered as well as the youths. In collecting data for the research work, the researcher also consulted books, journals, magazines, conference papers that relate to the subject matter. Hence, the method of data collection comprised both primary and secondary source.

### **1.1. Aim and objective**

The aim of the study is to provide linguistic information that could be used so as to avoid misrepresentation of ideas in communication. The objective is to study tonality in relation to semantic variation of lexical items in Wapan.

### **1.2. Linguistic profile of the Jukun people**

The Jukun language according to Greenberg (1963) is classified among the Niger-Congo family of African Language Family classification. The language is widely spoken by the Jukun people. There are different dialects of the Jukun language scattered all over Nigeria and beyond. These among others include Wapan, Jibu, Ekpan-Nyonyon and Bakundi, widely spoken in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. According to Lewis (2014), the Wapan dialect as at 1994 has a population of 100, 000 native speakers worldwide. Ekpan-Nyonyon, spoken in Takum and Donga Local Government Area of Taraba State, Ichen spoken in Donga Local Government Area of Taraba State, Wanu spoken in Ibi Local Government Area of Taraba State, Wurukum and Abinse in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Kona spoken in Jalingo, Bali, and Dampar Local Government Area of Taraba State, Wurbo Pindiga, Kisha, Agatu spoken in Nasarawa State, Gwana spoken in Gombe State, Wase and others spoken in Plateau State (Welmers, 1947).

Jukun are an ethno-Linguistic nation in West Africa who traced their origin to Kwararafa Kingdom. According to oral tradition the Jukun people came from Yemen into Nigeria through the Mamdara hills and Lake Chad. They first settled in Ngazargamu. There, they established a stronghold by fortifying their settlement which later became the capital of Kanem Borno Empire, the present-day Maiduguri, Borno State. From Borno they moved to Upper Gongola Valley where they established a base for a very long period of time (known as Kwararafa Empire). The Kwararafa Empire extended its territory from far North to Cross-river around Calabar in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1618AD). However, the kingdom collapsed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to internal forces.

## **2. Review of related literature**

### **2.1. Empirical review**

Tonality as a feature of some of the world languages has been researched into by different linguists. Hyman (2016) researched on 'lexical vs grammatical tone: sorting out the difference'. In this study, Hyman examined the views of scholars on lexical and grammatical tone, their differences and languages whose tones are grammatical and those whose tones are lexical. Hyman also examined the views of scholars on languages that exhibit both lexical and grammatical tones. In Hyman's research, Mandarrin exhibits lexical tone, Chimwiini exhibits grammatical tone and Iau exhibits both lexical and grammatical tones. Hyman therefore, suggested that there is in principle no difference in the range of phenomena found in lexical vs grammatical tone. In Hyman's (2016) work, the following languages have been attested to be tonal languages: Thai, Vietnamese, Somali, Chimwiini, Mpi (Lloish; Thailand), Munclang (Adamawa; Chad), Bamileke-fe'fe (Grassfields Bantu; Cameroon), Paici (Austronesian; New Caaieclonia), Kukuya (Bantu; Congo), Talaltepec Chatino (Zapotecan, Mexico), Maaasai (Nilotic, Kenya, Tanzania), Kalabari (Ijoid, Nigeria), Gokana,

(Ogun, Nigeria), Barasana (Tukanoan, Colombia) White Hmong (China, Northern SE Asia), Kanuri (Nilo-Saharan, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon), Tangkhul Naga (Tibeto Burman, NE India) among others.

The above examined study relates to the present study because the former centered on tone, its point of departure is that it considered many tonal languages but neglected the Wapan dialect of Jukun language which is the focal point of the present study. This gap however, is filled in the present study. Similarly, Aderibigbe (2015) researched on function of tone: An overview of language in Nigeria. In this study the researcher established that tone is a distinctive feature of lexemes and that all languages make use of variations in the musical pitch of the voice as part of their sound system but differing in ways in which modifications of pitch are used and how many different types of functions are served by pitch variations. The researcher gave copious examples from Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Batonu, Nupe, Idoma, Bini (a dialect of Edo), Kahugu, Afo and Ibibio as Nigerian tonal languages. The study identified register or contour tones. The functions of tone as examined in the study are lexical and grammatical functions. The study relates to the present study in the sense that it centered on tone and considered the tonal exhibitions in Nigerian languages. However, it neglected the Wapan dialect of Jukun language which the present study seeks to do.

Furthermore, Chukwunonyelum (2018) researched on “the tone marking system of the Igbo language: A documentary overview”. The study examined the effort made over the years by scholars to develop the Igbo tone marking system. The areas that Igbo tone marking received attention as revealed by the study are the grammar books and the dictionaries of the language. The grammar book outlined level tones (high tone, low tone, and down-step) and level/gliding tones (high tone, low tone, down-stepped/mid tone, falling tone rising tone). The dictionaries on the other hand are not so transparent: some are tone marked while others are not. The researcher concluded that in their effort towards tone marking in Igbo texts, the present generation needs to retain a historical perspective by not overlooking much of the honesty and faithfulness to the language data as exemplified in the works of the past scholars. Chukwunonyelum’s (2018) work examined above relates to the present study for it centres on tone and Nigerian language, it also gives example of lexical tone. Its point of departure from the present study however, is that it focuses on Igbo language rather than Wapan dialect of Jukun language. This created a vacuum hoped to be filled by the present study.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The theory of classical phonology is suitable because it helps in accounting for the realization of different shades of meanings of identical words as a result of their tonal variation. The theory assumes that every sound is distinct in a given language and the feature of a given speech sound is capable of bringing about meaning distinction in a natural language. Adopting the theory, identical words having different shades of meaning as a result of tonal variations in Wapan dialect are analyzed. For example: *ánù* High-Low (mouth) and *ánú* High-High (river).

#### **3.1. Classical phonology**

The classical phonology as a theory was propounded by Noam Chomsky in 1970’s. The theory assumes that every sound is distinct in a given language and the feature of a given speech sound is capable of bringing about meaning distinction in a natural language. The theory is found to be suitable for it is applied to analyze how identical words do convey different shades of meaning as a result of variation in their tones.

### **4. Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey. As such, Data for the research were gathered by the researcher through field linguistic method of data collection using observation, interview and note taking for subsequent analysis as the researcher visited selected individuals like: scholars who are highly knowledgeable in the dialect within Wukari (Avyi, Assa, Chonku, and Wukari II districts), native speakers of Wapan, especially the elders, the academics, the clergy, the farmers and business men/women, who are versed and are acquainted with the rudiments of the Wapan dialect. The aged were considered as well as the youths as they interact in social gatherings. The researcher observed personally the people as they communicate or interact with one another. Observation was used so as to understand the structure of the Wapan dialect even without the knowledge of the speakers. In the course of their communication, the utterances of the speakers were critically observed to identify how pitch rises or falls (tone) as it initiates change in meaning. It is also important to state here that the researcher is a native speaker, therefore, part of the data were elicited by the researcher’s knowledge of the dialect attribute.

Semi-structured questions were developed and administered orally in a formal setting and relevant responses were taken down by the researcher for analysis. Non formal settings were also considered in the course of the research work where questions were asked in form of “interview interaction” to the Jukun native speakers of Wapan dialect with the aim of eliciting information relevant to the study. The semi-structured pattern of interview was quite flexible, and it allowed the respondents to give a lot of information even outside the scope. As such, the researcher was able to document the relevant information leaving out the irrelevant ones. Their responses were also recorded using phone recording device (handset), and later transcribed and interpreted for analysis.

In all, a total of forty (48) persons were interviewed, interacted with and observed in the course of this research work to obtain primary data. 5 persons were interviewed (from each district) and 28 persons observed in the four (4) districts on different occasions (naming, marriage, burial ceremonies and performances during traditional rites) to further clarify issues on the research objective. The intuitive knowledge of the researcher as a native speaker was also used in the process of analyzing the data used. In collecting data for the research work, the researcher also relied on library sources. Hence, the method of data collection comprises primary and secondary sources.

5. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Tone plays a significant role in the semantic variation of words spelled the same in Wapan. Identical words convey different shades of meanings when there is variation in the pronunciation of such words as can be seen in the data presented below:

1. Tonal Tier	(a)	H H	(b)	M M	(c)	H L
Association line						
Segmental Tier		á b á		ā b ā		á b à
		ábá		ābā		ábà
		dog CL		sack CL		wall gecko CL
		'dog'		'sack'		'wall gecko'
2. Tonal Tier	(a)	H M	(b)	H L	(c)	H H
Association line						
Segmental Tier		a b ē		á b è		á b é
		ábē		ábè		ábé
		money CL		leg CL		wise ADJ
		'money'		'leg'		'a name given to twin' (boy)
3. Tonal Tier	(a)	L H	(b)	M M		
Association line						
Segmental Tier		à c h ú		ā c h ū		
		àchú		āchū		
		rain CL		mat CL		
		'rain'		'mat'		
4. Tonal Tier	(a)	H H	(b)	L L		
Association line						
Segmental Tier		á n é		à n è		
		áné		ànè		
		scorpion CL		hoe CL		
		'scorpion'		'hoe'		
5. Tonal Tier	(a)	H L	(b)	H M	(c)	H H
Association line						
Segmental Tier		á n ù		á n ū		á n ú
		ánù		ánū		ánú
		mouth CL		husband CL		river CL
		'mouth'		'husband'		'river'
6. Tonal Tier	(a)	H H	(b)	M H	(c)	H L
Association line						
Segmental Tier		á t á n		ā t á n		á t à n
		átán		ātán		átàn
		fox CL		room CL		sieve CL
		'fox'		'room'		'sieve'
7. Tonal Tier	(a)	H H	(b)	H HL	(c)	M M
Association line						
Segmental Tier						

Association line

Segmental Tier	á kwé n ákwén knife CL 'knife'	á kwê n ákwên grinding stone CL 'grinding stone'	ākwēn ákwēn chicken CL 'chicken'
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8. Tonal Tier	(a) H H	(b) L L	(c) H M
Association line			
Segmental Tier	á z ú ázú muscle CL 'muscle'	à z ù àzù satisfaction CL 'satisfaction'	á z ū ázū liquor CL 'Liquor' (local alcoholic drink)

9. Tonal Tier	(a) H L	(b) M L
Association line		
Segmental Tier	n é n è n é n è spirogyra CL 'spirogyra'	n ē n è n ē n è tongue CL 'tongue'

10. Tonal Tier	(a) H H	(b) H L
Association line		
Segmental Tier	á t s á átsá raffia CL 'raffia' (raffia palm tree)	á t s à átsà three PAU 'three'

11. Tonal Tier	(a) H L	(b) H H	(c) M H
Association line			
Segmental Tier	á t s ò n átsòn ear CL 'ear'	á t s ó n átsón errand CL 'errand'	ā t s ó n ātsón title CL 'tittle'

12. Tonal Tier	(a) M M	(b) M L	(c) H H
Association line			
Segmental Tier	ā j ē ājē menstruation CL 'menstruation'	ā j è ājè fool CL 'fool'	á j é ájé fish CL 'fish'

13. Tonal Tier	(a) H H	(b) H M
Association line		

Segmental Tier	á z é n <i>ázén</i> countenance CL 'countenance'	á z ē n <i>ázēn</i> name CL 'name'
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14. Tonal Tier	(a) H H	(b) H M	(c) M L
Association line			
Segmental Tier	á f í n <i>áfín</i> lizard CL 'lizard'	á f ī n <i>áfīn</i> stomach CL 'stomach'	ā f ì n <i>āfìn</i> stinginess CL 'stinginess'

15. Tonal Tier	(a) H L	(b) H H
Association line		
Segmental Tier	á t ì <i>átì</i> gizzard CL 'gizzard'	á t í <i>átí</i> market CL 'market'

16. Tonal Tier	(a) H H	(b) H L
Association line		
Segmental Tier	á k y í <i>ákyí</i> food CL 'food' (mash)	á k y ì <i>ákyì</i> chin CL 'chin'

17. Tonal Tier	(a) M L	(b) H H
Association line		
Segmental Tier	ā k y è n <i>ākyèn</i> egg CL 'egg'	á k y é n <i>ákyén</i> tomorrow CL 'tomorrow'

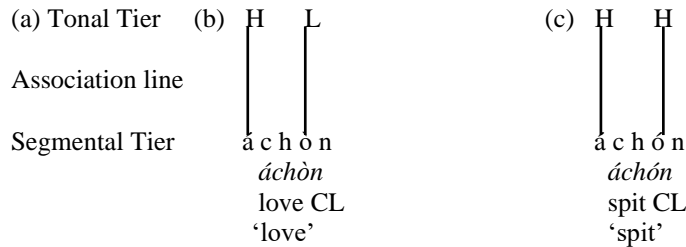
From the above data, it could be observed that tonal variation in identical words result into variation in the meaning of the words. For example, *átša* with High- High tone means raffia palm tree and *átša* with High-High-Low tone means deer. This proves the assumption of the lexical phonological theory that the feature of a given speech sound is capable of bringing meaning distinction in a natural language. The data also indicate that tonal variation in certain words can bring about variation in identical sentences containing such words as seen in the examples below:

18. *Ana na fyin banchi hora*  
Sleep CL *na fyin*-PROG child PL  
'Children are feeling **sleep(y)**'

(a) Tonal Tier	(b) H L	(c) M M	(d) H H
Association line			
Segmental Tier	á n à <i>ánà</i> sleep CL 'sleep'	ā n ā <i>ānā</i> cow CL 'cow'	á n á <i>áná</i> yesterday CL 'yesterday'

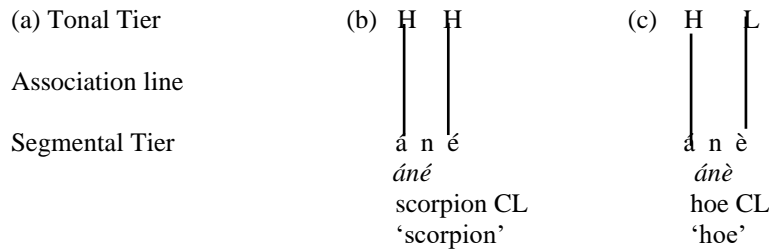
The study reveals that, “ánà” means sleep but when the tone changes as seen in the identical words, the meaning also changes thereby conveying different shades of meaning as seen in “ānā” and “áná”. Therefore, using inappropriate tone in words could result to a different interpretation as in “*the children are feeling cow and the children were feeling yesterday*” instead of “*the children are feeling sleep(y)*.”

**19. Achon** *chi bu wasansan*  
 Love CL is PRS something ADV good ADJ  
 Love is something good



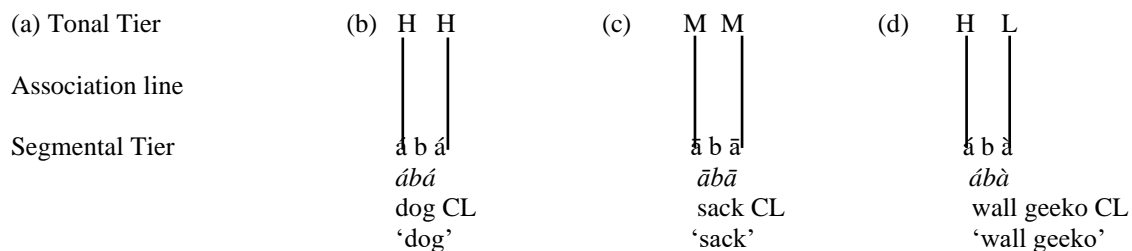
The above investigation shows that, áchoñ means love but when tonal marks vary as seen in the indistinguishable words “áchòn” and “áchón”, they take different senses thereby giving room for incorrect use of words in a sentence as in “*love is something good and spit is something good.*”

**20. Ane** *ta ku ana*  
 Scorpion CL sting PST him PRX yesterday ADV  
 ‘scorpion stung him yesterday’



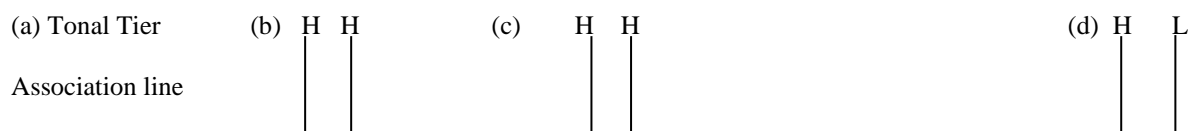
The data analyzed demonstrates that, áné means scorpion but when tone is applied changes occur as realized in the identical words which express different shades of meaning in “áné” and “ánè”. In that way, “*a scorpion stung him yesterday and hoe stung him yesterday*” is realized.

**21. Aba** *na wowo*  
 ABA-CL- na- PROG bark  
 ‘dog is barking’



The research shows that ,ábá means dog but when the tonal marks are applied, change occurs in the same expression thereby conveying different shades of meaning in “ābā” and “ábà” thus realizing “*sack is barking and wall gecko is barking*” instead of the “*dog is barking*”.

**22. Abe ba Ake** *na jojo kiya*  
 Abe and Ake CL na- PROG 2PL PRS play outside ADV  
 Abe and Ake are playing outside.



Segmental Tier	á b é ábé wise ADJ child CL 'boy name given to twin'	á k é áké wise ADJ child CL 'girl name given to twin'	á b è ábè leg CL 'leg'
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(e) Tonal Tier	(f)	H	M	(g)	H	M
Association line						
Segmental Tier		á b ē		á k ē		
		ábē		ákē		
		money CL		bone CL		
		'money'		'bone'		

The investigation illustrates that, “ábé and áké” are names given to twins but when tonal marks are applied, the meaning of the words are altered thereby assigning different shades of meaning to the words. In this manner, conveying “ábè”, “ábē” and “ákē”. Thus realizing “*leg is playing outside, money is playing outside and bone is playing outside*” which is different from the intended meaning as “*ábé and áké are playing outside*”.

### 5.1. Findings and discussions

From the above, it can be clearly seen that these group of words are spelled the same but differ in meaning because of the difference in pronunciation (tone). The analysis in this study also revealed that the morphology in this study takes zero inflection as variation in the pitch of the voice is applied in the cause of communication which addressed only the semantic aspect of tone. This proves the orientation of the classical phonological theory that the feature of a given speech sound is capable of bringing meaning distinction in a natural language.

This study provides the linguistic information that could be used in avoiding misrepresentation of concepts in communication. It also reveals that, as appropriate use of tone is applied in communication, misconception of thoughts is avoided. For example: “*ánà na fyin banchi hora*” meaning “*(the) children are feeling sleep(y)*”. The correct application of tone in *ana* (*ánà* High-Low tone meaning sleep), reveals the intended meaning of the speaker. However, when the tone changes in the identical words, the meaning also changes thereby conveying different shades of meaning as seen in “*ānā*” (Mid-Mid tone meaning cow) and “*áná*” (High-High tone meaning yesterday). Consequently, using inappropriate tone in words could result to a different interpretation as seen in “*the children are feeling cow and the children were feeling yesterday*” instead of “*the children are feeling sleep(y)*.”

### 6. Contribution to knowledge

The paper has achieved its purpose of exploring the tonal distinction of Wapan thereby contributes to knowledge by giving insight on how a single word can represent different concepts as a result of tone application. The study further shed light into the study of Wapan dialect of Jukun language phonology. The study will also give awareness to language developers to see some features that are identical in other languages thereby tracing their genetic origin to the same language family. Variation in the pitch of the voice while speaking also contributes to cultural values in regard to the different ways of using language in communicating desires, anger, anxiety, surprise, joy or happiness, threat etc. This will help individuals to adjust themselves while interacting in order to maintain the idea in communication thereby avoiding misrepresentation of ideas or misconception of the concept discussed.

### 7. Implication of the study

The investigation reveals that, when the tone changes in the indistinguishable words, the sense also changes thereby assigning different shades of sense as seen in “*ānā*” (Mid-Mid tone meaning cow) and “*áná*” (High-High tone meaning yesterday). Therefore, using inappropriate tone in words could result to giving the audience a different understanding of the intended meaning of an item as seen in “*ānā*” and “*áná*” instead of “*ánà*” (High-Low meaning sleep) as captured in data presented “*the children are feeling sleep(y)*.” Thus, maintaining the pitch level in communication gives clarity of information to the audience.

### 8. Recommendations

It is important to note that, this study has not exhausted all aspects of semantic variation in relation to tone in Wapan. As such, the researcher does not claim to have exhaustively treated the subject. There is therefore, a need for other researchers to explore other areas on tonal variation that have not been covered in regards to the Wapan dialect. In so doing, this will reveal the riches embedded in Wapan dialect and promote the status of the dialect to an enviable position. The Jukun Language Development Committee (JLDC) should expand their scope to accommodate research work especially, academic research work on Jukun language. Researchers should be encouraged to focus their research on dialectal studies ranging from exploratory, classification, to causal research so as to work towards building the dialects of the Jukun language. To this effect, it is important that conferences and workshops be organized with the aim of promoting the Jukun language dialects. Discussions and reviews on research findings on Jukun language dialects should be done. On this note, the Wukari Traditional council and Wukari Local Government Chairman should



endeavor to give financial support to the Jukun Language Development Committee as they work towards the development of Jukun language and the dialects of the Jukun language.

More so, the Taraba State Government should train teachers to master and teach indigenous languages thereby promoting our indigenous languages. Television programs that promote local dialects and languages within the state should be encouraged with awards and handsome gifts not only to the best performer but to all participants so as to encourage more people to participate in programs that promote local dialects and languages thereby preserving our local dialects and languages as linguistic information is provided.

### **Conclusion**

This paper analyzed the tone as a trigger to semantic variation in Wapan. Data had been presented and analyzed descriptively. In treating the tonal disparity of Wapan dialect, the paper has identified the variation in pitch of a spoken word that leads to change in meaning of Wapan words. The data presented shows that Wapan words are independently formed and can function in different environments thereby bringing about change in meaning of the same word as a result of variation in pronunciation (tone).

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