

What is exotic about Venda consonants?

John R. Rennison and Friedrich Neubarth (University of Vienna)

In this paper we present the quite rich inventory of consonants in Venda, a Southern Bantu language, and two phonological processes (known as “mutations”) which affect them. The inventory comprises 74 consonants, of which 27 are palatalised or labiovelarised. We will show that within our Government Phonology approach, both the consonants themselves and the mutation processes affecting them receive quite normal representations, and that the large number of consonants (and related mutations) result from the maximal exploitation of each phonological element to gain the largest possible number of contrasts. Interestingly, Venda still manages to avoid many of the more “exotic” consonants of Southern Africa and front rounded vowel-like articulations (labioplatals).

“Basic” consonants (i.e. not palatalised or labiovelarised)	<i>bilabial</i>	<i>labio-dental</i>	<i>dental</i>	<i>alveolar</i>	<i>post-alveolar</i>	<i>palatal</i>	<i>velar</i>	<i>“glottal”</i>
<i>voiceless aspirated stops</i>	p ^h		t ^h	t ^h			k ^h	
<i>voiceless plain stops</i>	p		t	t			k	
<i>voiced stops</i>	b		d	d			g	
<i>nasal stops</i>	m		ɲ	n			ŋ	
<i>prenasalised voiced stops</i>	^m b		^ɲ d	ⁿ d			^ɲ g	
<i>voiceless aspirated affricates</i>	p ^{fh}			t ^{sh}	t ^{ʃh}			
<i>voiceless plain affricates</i>	p ^f			t ^s	t ^ʃ			
<i>voiced affricates</i>	b ^v			d ^z	d ^ʒ			
<i>prenasalised voiced affricates</i>	^m b ^v			ⁿ d ^z	ⁿ d ^ʒ			
<i>voiceless fricatives</i>	ɸ	f		s	ʃ		x	
<i>voiced fricatives</i>	β	v		z	ʒ			
<i>prenasalised voiced fricatives</i> ¹		^m v		ⁿ z	ⁿ ʒ			
<i>trill</i>				r				
<i>laterals</i>			ɭ	l				
<i>glides</i>	w					j		ɦ

¹ In many, perhaps all, cases the prenasalised voiced fricatives are not distinct from the corresponding affricates.

Palatalised and labiovelarised consonants	<i>bilabial</i>	<i>labio-dental</i>	<i>dental</i>	<i>alveolar</i>	<i>post-alveolar</i>	<i>palatal</i>	<i>velar</i>	<i>"glottal"</i>
<i>voiceless aspirated stops</i>	p ^{hw} , (*p ^{hj})		t ^{hw} , (*t ^{hj})	t ^{hw} , t ^{hj}			k ^{hw}	
<i>voiceless plain stops</i>	p ^w (*p ^j)		(*t ^w , *t ^j)	t ^w , t ^j			k ^w	
<i>voiced stops</i>	b ^w , b ^j		(*d ^w , *d ^j)	d ^w , d ^j			g ^w	
<i>nasal stops</i> ²	m ^w (*m ^j)			n ^w (*n ^j)			ŋ ^w	
<i>voiceless aspirated affricates</i>				t ^{shw} (*t ^{shj})	t ^{ʃhw} (*t ^{ʃhj})			
<i>voiceless plain affricates</i>	none, but t ^{shw} and t ^{ʃhw} are probably t ^{sw} and t ^{ʃw} respectively							
<i>voiced affricates</i>				d ^{zw}	(*d ^{ʒw})			
<i>voiceless fricatives</i>				s ^w	(f ^w)			
<i>voiced fricatives</i>				z ^w	(*ʒ ^w)			
<i>trill</i>				(*r ^w)				
<i>laterals</i>			(*l ^j)	l ^w				
<i>glides</i>	(*w ^j)					(*j ^w)		h ^w
<i>prenasalised voiced stops</i>	mb ^w , (mb ^j)		(*nd ^w)	nd ^w , (nd ^j)			ŋg ^w	
<i>prenasalised voiced affricates</i>				nd ^{zw}	(*nd ^{ʒw})			
<i>prenasalised voiced fricatives</i> ³				nz ^w	(*nʒ ^w)			

² In many, perhaps all, cases m^w is not distinct from ŋ^w.

³ In many, perhaps all, cases the prenasalised voiced fricatives are not distinct from the corresponding affricates.