Intensifying ideophones in three Luhya languages
Margit Bowler (UCLA) & John Gluckman (UCLA)

Ideophones are described as “marked words that depict sensory imagery” (Dingemanse 2011: 25); they are documented in many languages, particularly in Africa (Voeltz & Killian-Hatz 2001, Hinton et al. 1994, among others). Common features include sound symbolism (onomatopoeia), marked syntactic distribution, unusual phonology, and marked intonation and phonation. However, they have received relatively little attention in the formal literature, despite the interesting puzzles that they raise for theories of semantics, morphology, and syntax.

We provide a case study of ideophones in three Luhya languages (Llogoori, Lunyore, and Lutiriki: Bantu, Kenya), show that they differ from other documented ideophone systems in Africa, give a proposal for their semantic contribution, and discuss the theoretical puzzles that they raise. All of the Luhya data comes from our original fieldwork in Kenya and the US.

Data. Like other ideophone systems, Luhya ideophones: a) have a strict syllable shape (monosyllabic); b) may contain phonemes that are otherwise uncommon in the languages; and c) select for a semantic class of predicates that they combine with (Table 1). Impressionistically, the Luhya ideophones all contribute a highly intensified reading of the predicate that they combine with, akin to ‘extremely’ (following examples from Llogoori; numbers identify noun classes):

(1) ama-aze ni ma-hio pa.
   6-water COP 6-hot IDEO
   ‘The water is very hot.’

(2) ki-chomba ni ki-chiringanu zi.
   7-room COP 7-quiet IDEO
   ‘The room is very quiet.’

(3) Sira yi-zuriz-i ki-kombe du.
   1.Sira 1-fill-fv 7-cup IDEO
   ‘Sira filled the cup to the brim.’

(4) m-veye na ma-hooru mno.
   1SG-COP with 6-longing IDEO
   ‘I really miss you.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideophone</th>
<th>Lexical item</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Meaning with ideophone</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pa</td>
<td>hiu (adjective)</td>
<td>‘hot’</td>
<td>‘very hot’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kuhia (verb)</td>
<td>‘to be hot’</td>
<td>‘to be very hot’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roro (adjective)</td>
<td>‘spicy,’ ‘bitter’</td>
<td>‘very spicy,’ ‘very bitter’</td>
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<tr>
<td>zi</td>
<td>zilu (adjective)</td>
<td>‘cold,’ ‘still’</td>
<td>‘very cold,’ ‘very still’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chinganu (adjective)</td>
<td>‘quiet’</td>
<td>‘very quiet’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ti</td>
<td>mwamu (adjective)</td>
<td>‘black’</td>
<td>‘very black’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chafu (adjective)</td>
<td>‘dirty’</td>
<td>‘very dirty’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Llogoori ideophones and their lexical classes

Syntactically, the Luhya ideophones cannot stand alone as predicates (unlike Ewe (Ameka 2001) or Kisi (Childs 1988)), and cannot be introduced by a complementizer, quotative marker, or light verb (unlike Wolof (Baglini 2016), Setswana (Creissel 2001), and many others). The Luhya ideophones are cross-categorial modifiers; impressionistically, they modify adjectives (1–2), VPs (3), and nouns (4). The Luhya ideophones show a high degree of grammatical integration and a correspondingly low degree of “expressiveness,” defined as intonational/phonational foregrounding (Dingemanse & Akita 2016).

Puzzles. We address the following puzzles: i) What is the precise semantic contribution of Luhya ideophones that differentiates them from degree intensifiers like saana ‘very’? ii) Do the Luhya ideophones contribute additional expressive, non-truth conditional content? iii) What accounts for both the syntactic and semantic restrictions on Luhya ideophones that differentiates them from other ideophone systems?
Analysis. We adopt standard theories of degree semantics that propose that gradable predicates combine with both a degree argument and an individual argument (Cresswell 1976, Heim 2001, among many others). At present, we propose that the Luhya ideophones contribute a highly intensified reading of the predicate they combine with; that is, they denote that the degree of the predicate with respect to the individual greatly exceeds the contextual standard. In (5) below, we use >!! to indicate “much greater than”:

\[
(5) \quad \text{[IDEO]} = \lambda G_{<d<et>} \lambda x. \exists d >!! \text{standard}_G \& G(d)(x)
\]

This accounts for the ideophones’ distribution in combination with adjectival predicates, since all of the Luhya adjectives that combine with ideophones are also all typically associated with degree scales (hot, cold, and so on). However, the Luhya ideophones can also combine with lexical items that are not standardly assumed to include degrees in their denotations: VPs (3) and nouns (4). To account for data like (3), we adopt an analysis of Luhya degree achievement predicates like kwizuriza ‘to fill’ along the lines of Dowty (1979) and Abusch (1986). These proposals give a denotation for degree achievement verbs that include an aspectual operator BECOME in combination with a gradable adjectival predicate. We note that all of the Luhya verbs that can co-occur with ideophones also have an adjectival core. Degrees are introduced into the semantics in this way.

To account for data like (4), we first note that the predicates are consistently of the form with N. We propose that this with N constituent is itself semantically equivalent to an adjectival predicate; degrees are introduced either through a type-shifter of type \(<<et><d<et>>\), or by the nouns themselves (following e.g. Morzycki 2009).

Unlike many other languages, Luhya ideophones do not have an expressive component. For instance, they can be targeted by negation (6) and obligatorily shift in attitude reports (7). This would be unexpected if they were speech-act level operators.

\[
(6) \quad \text{ama-aze ni ma-hio pa mba.}
\]

6-water COP 6-hot IDEO NEG

‘The water is not very hot.’

\[
(7) \quad \text{Sira a-ganagan-a ndee ma-aze ni ma-hiu pa, netare m-vogil-il-a ndio daave.}
\]

1.Sira 1-think-FV COP 6-water COP 6-hot IDEO but 1SG-believe-APPL-FV NEG

‘Sira thinks that the water is very hot, but I disagree.’

Conclusion. In this paper, we show that the Luhya ideophones are highly grammatically integrated (following the terminology of Dingemanse & Akita 2016). We treat the ideophones as degree intensifiers with an adverbial distribution. We propose that their morphological exponence is dependent on semantic class, as shown in Table 1. Time permitting, we explore the consequences this has for a theory of morphology. Finally, we suggest some axes of syntactic variation with the goal of creating a more nuanced classification system for ideophones cross-linguistically.