

Classification and functions of ideophones in Kilba

Abstract. This paper examines ideophones in Kilba. ideophones are a class of words that convey a vivid representation of an idea in sound. Kilba ideophones can be divided into four classes. ideophones in Kilba occur with specific syllable structures. Finally ideophones in Kilba are sometimes characterised as synonyms.

1. Introduction

African languages, with the exception of the Khoisan languages, are characterised typologically by a fairly large group of words known as ideophones. Ideophones are found in every Niger-Congo language, as well as in the Nilo-Saharan languages and the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic phylum, to which the Kilba language belongs.

According to Welmers (1973), the term *ideophone* is a vivid representation of an idea in sound which may be described as predicate, qualificative, or adverbial in respect to manner, colour, smell, action, state or intensity. Similarly, Smarine (1971, cited in Jibrin 1984) defines ideophones as an originally owned sound or sounding by itself and states that ideophone words have been considered neither subjective, adjectival, or adverbial in some languages. Ideophones have the following properties:

- (I) They are complete thoughts or impressions that create images
- (II) They express or reflect emotions and feelings
- (III) They completely express actions or ideas
- (IV) Ideophones echo or mirror impressions or perceptions

(see Williams 1973, Doke and Bunme 1970, Larbank and Burssens 1968, and Damman and

Smith 1970 (cited in Jibrin 1984)).

The definition of ideophone can be summed up as an idea in sound which the speaker wants the listener to capture. In other words, Ideophone can be a more subjective way to describe clauses, qualifiers, and adverbs in respect to actions, appearance, colour, intensity, manner, motions, size smell, sound and state.

2. Functions of ideophones

The majority of African ideophones are qualifiers, and Kilba ideophones are not exceptions. In Kilba, a number of words are frequently used as ideophones, which occur for instance as qualifiers of utterance which denotes any of the following, appearance, colour, intensity, manner, motion, size, smell, sound, state and taste. Kilba ideophones, based on their functions, can be classified into four types:

- (I) adjectives intensifying ideophones
- (ii) noun intensifying ideophone
- (iii) verb intensifying ideophones and
- (iv) Ideophones expressing a state of being.

Like ideophones in all languages, Kilba ideophones fulfil such traditional functions as qualifying verbs, nouns, and adjectives. In general, it can be said that Kilba ideophones are adverbial in nature and intensify things that may change or may vary in degree.

A. Adjective intensifying ideophones

Some Kilba ideophones can occur as qualifiers, which intensify adjectives. These ideophones (intensifiers) come immediately after the adjective:

| Adjective | | intensifier | | Ideophone |
|------------------|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Dàngwàng Fat | + | kəkəsú very | → | dàngwàng kəkəsú very fat |
| həfù thin | + | lengà - lengà,á very | → | həfù lengà,á – lengà,á very thin |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| dəgál big | + | bwothəu very | → | dəgál bwothəu very big |
| təshəu short | + | tùkùtlùbù very | → | təshəu tùkùtlùbù very short |

It has been noted that in Kilba, some adjectives have more than one ideophone as intensifiers.

This can be shown below:

| Adjective | | intensifier | | Ideophone |
|------------------|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| təshəu short | + | tùtlù/tùktùtlùbù/cùkùlùb | → | təshəu tùtlù/ tùkùtlùcùkùlùbù/cùkùlùb very short |
| kyàkyà black | + | shìtù/ pít very | → | kyàkyà shìtù/ pít coal-black |

The above examples show that Kilba intensifiers (tùtlù/tùkùtlù□ù/cùkùlùb) and (shìtù/ pít) are in free variation. Thus the sound can be used interchangeably without affecting the meaning. Similarly, in Kilba, almost all the colour adjectivals have their own specific ideophones.

| Adjective | | intensifier | | Ideophone |
|------------------|---|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| pərtù white | + | tél snow | → | pərtù tél snow-white |
| kyàkyà black | + | shìtù/ pít coal | → | kyàkyà shìtù/ pít coal-black |
| dèzəu red | + | njóng bloody | → | dèzəu njóng bloody red |

In the same vein, In Kilba the colour ideophones can be reduplicated to form a sub-class of ideophones that are formed through a complete reduplication process. Both the determinant and the determinatum are ideophones and serve as intensifiers.

| Adjective | | intensifier | | Ideophone |
|------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Pèrtù White | + | tél- tél very snow | → | pèrtù tél snow-white |
| kyàkyà black | + | shìtù-shìtù /pít-pít very coal | → | kyàkyà shìtù-shìtu/pít-pít very coal-black |

dèzəu + njóng-njóng → dèzəu njóng-njóng
 red very bloody very bloody red

An ideophone compound serves as an intensifier of adjectives. Each ideophone intensifies a particular adjective. In Kilba, some ideophones have taken on the function of colour. For example, *tél-tél* collocates with ‘white’, *shìtù-shìtù* and *pít-pít* with ‘black’, and *njóng-njóng* with ‘red’.

| Ideophones | Gloss |
|-------------------|--------------|
| ngərdù | mixed colour |
| dərkəthəu | dark colour |
| dzərdərdù | mixed colour |

B. Noun intensifying ideophones

Some Kilba ideophones can occur as qualifiers, which intensifiers nouns. These ideophones (intensifiers) come immediately after the noun. A single ideophone marks the intensification.

Consider the following examples (6).

| Nouns | | Intensifier | | Ideophone |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------|---|---|
| Lùkùtù Cloth | + | kəkələtsəu big | → | lùkùtù kəkələtsəu big cloth |
| ndù person | + | kùtùbù healthy/fat | → | ndù kùtùbù healthy/fat looking person |
| mbò place | + | tùdùmù dark | → | mbò tùdùmù dark place |
| mbòndà the place | + | fòtàbàyù plane/tough | → | mbòndà fòtàbàyù plane/tough place |
| vì room | + | ndərkəthəu dark | → | vì ndərkəthəu dark room |
| hirà teeth | + | wùràtètèng bad setting | → | hirà wùràtètèng bad set of dentition |
| biti water | + | pòr-pòrù very hot | → | biti pòr-pòrù very hot water/boiling water |

C. Verb intensifying ideophones

Some kilba ideophones can occur as qualifiers, which intensify verbs. These ideophones (intensifiers) come after the verbs. Examples of this are provided below (7).

| Verbs | | intensifier | | Ideophone |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|---|--|
| ngwàbù to sit down | + | tsàthèù properly | → | ngwàbù tsàthèù properly sit |
| hyàtèù to stand | + | fwàtù immediately | → | hyàtèù fwàtù stand up immediately |
| hùì to run | + | tsàtsà,ù faster | → | hùì tsàtsà,ù run faster |
| bwànyà to talk | + | fàt-fàtù friedly | → | bwànyà fàt-fàtù talk friedly |
| təkəbiyà to divided it | + | tàtàsù parts/pieces | → | təkəbiyà tàtàsù divide it into parts/pieces |
| piyà to sleep | + | bùrùbù unexpected | → | piyà bùrùbù sleeping in group |

D. Ideophones expressing states of being

Some Kilba ideophones are used to express states of being like happiness, sadness, feelings, etc. When creatively observed they function as interjections in the language. That implies that in Kilba, some words can be used as interjections as well as ideophones, depending on the context that one used them. Consider the following examples in (8)

| Ideophones | Gloss |
|-------------------|--|
| Wàdàù | express being hurt |
| Màkìdàmà | expressing surprise |
| Màkìdàmà | seeking for help/assistance |
| Kwàràràù | expressing state/action |
| Màkìmà | people come and help me, i am in trouble |

Based on the above examples, it is clear that in Kilba, there are sounds (ideophones) that are

only used to express *state of being*, i.e., they do not intensify anything.

3. Syllable structure of Kilba ideophones

According to Samarin (1971 cited in Jibrin 1984), a great majority of African ideophones have a CVC syllable structure, which are reduplicated. In most cases, the final consonant as well as the word final syllable cannot be only /n/, /k/, /t/, or /b/, which are not only found in non-ideophone words, but also in several other phonemes.

Similarly, according to Aston (1944) cited in Jibrin (1984), the syllable structure of common Bantu language ideophones is CV(V). However, the transparency of this structure is modified somehow in various Bantu languages, where nonprominent syllables have been subjected to altered glottalic and timing mechanisms which reduce their nuclei to short, unvoiced vowels, or completely omit them in some cases.

On the other hand, Newman (1968) and Galadanci (1971) state that the syllable structures which are permissible in most of the African language ideophones are CVC, CV, and CCV. The following syllable structures are possible in Kilba ideophonic words: CVV, CVC, CVCVCV, CVCC, VCV, CVCVV, CVVCV, and CVCVCVC. Examples of such ideophone structure in Kilba are:

(i)CVV

Suu
Caa
Duu

(ii)CVC

tél
njóng
pít

(iii) CVCVCV

Jəɸəɸù
tətàsù
bùrùbù

(iv) CVCCVCV

fàffàtù
pòrpòrù
tùkbùrù

(v) CVCVCVV

àmàdáu
àdàdáu
àwàdáu

(vi) CVCVCVC

kwàràràu
wùràtâtèng
gùmùtèng

In the examples of Kilba ideophones given above, we see as possible forms of ideophone syllables CVV, CVC, CVCVCV, CVCCVCV, CVCVCVV, and CVCVCVC. Similarly, it is also noted that only short vowels occur in CC syllables and the only CC sequence is found medially and consists of final consonants of any syllable plus the initial consonant of the next syllable.

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