

Ideophonic Description of Motion in Hausa

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Abstract

Hausa ideophones describing motion are examined in this research. It is revealed that these ideophones do not only portray the character of the actor but also evoke the auditor's appraisal of the actor's personality. The use of ideophones in discourse in Hausa and as seen across several languages could be said to be largely esthetic as well as an exhibition of the (native) speaker's grasp of the language.

Key words: Ideophonic, Motion, Hausa.

1.0 Introduction

Interestingly, languages in general and African languages in particular are highly rich in figures of speech. Proverbs, idioms and ideophones are particularly heard in native speaker addresses or discussions. We may in fact assume that the richness of a language could be measured by its profusion of proverbs, idioms and ideophones amongst other yardsticks. These do not only portray the bounteous wisdom conveyed by the speakers, the languages also demonstrate certain degree of nuances which make the discourse very interesting and leaves both the speaker as well as the audience satisfied with themselves (by their use/grasp of language). Of course, the native speakers feel highly elated when they use such expressions while the learners or even those who do not speak the language are left amused when they hear certain ideophones echoed.

It is not enough to hear certain sounds, particularly ideophonic being uttered in a language. As ideophones, though usually in a form of onomatopoeia, do carry meanings which are imagined or instinctively understood by the auditor. For the native speaker auditor, it goes without saying that he/she would automatically comprehend the message conveyed. The non-native speaker or learner may however miss the content, which we must quickly add here, is part of the esthetics of the language.

This paper therefore intends to look at ideophones of motion in Hausa with a view to revealing their intended meanings. Eleven motion verbs with their ideophones in Hausa are examined. The work targets learners of Hausa, and linguists in general who may be interested in the semantics of ideophones or cognitive linguistics.

2.0 Ideophones

Hausa a Western Chadic language from the Afro-asiatic family, (Greenberg 1966), and like its other sister languages on the African continent, is endowed with very rich sounds, onomatopoeia in nature and could be assumed ideophones. The Ideophone has severally been defined by different scholars or linguists. Many see it as a vivid representation of an idea in sound, onomatopoeia in nature and describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to action, appearance, color, smell, state, size, manner, sound, motion or intensity. Some opinions about ideophones are that they echo or mirror sensible impressions or perceptions, they express or reflect emotions and feelings, they complete thought or create images, and most importantly, they complete, represent or express actions or ideas. See: Samarin (1971) and Welmers (1973) in Adamu (1984:14-15), Adamu (1984) and Crystal (1997). Some linguists consider ideophones as belonging to a particular word class though Abubakar (2001:70) observed that they may function as noun, adjective or adverb.

3.0 Related Literature

Several works have been done on ideophones with diverse perspectives. Some of these are Dikwa et al (2002) who wrote on Bura and Kanuri ideophones dwelling on the syntactic function and phonological description of the ideophones with their syllabic structures analysed. Muazu et al (2002) classified Kilba ideophones into intensifiers of adjectives, nouns or adverbs, and ideophones which express state of being. Their syllabic structures were also discussed. Alkali (1999) worked on the phonological structure of Kanuri ideophones, their tonal system and their functions. Syllabic structure of Kanuri ideophones are also given. Galadanci (1971), Awoyale (1983), Bodomo (2006) and many others have worked on ideophones with different foci.

Bamgbose (2001)'s explanation on Yoruba ideophones is quite significant as it reveals that Yoruba ideophones are sounds used to describe something which will be very well understood by the auditor. Thought is key to comprehending ideophones in Yoruba, he asserts. Dikwa et al (2002:84) see ideophone "as a speech act that tends to associate an idea along with possible sounds of a particular language." This therefore indicates that ideophonic sounds are naturally linked to the sounds of the language in question. It hitherto goes without saying

that the native speaker shall ordinarily comprehend ideophonic expressions. Let us examine our data on ideophones expressing motion in Hausa.

4.0 Data

Motion here is defined as an act of changing location or position, or the way in which somebody or something moves, it is also a movement, action or gesture; Microsoft Encarta Premium (2009). Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2005) defines movement as an act of moving the body or part of the body. Moving the body from one place to another by walking or running as ideophonically captured in Hausa is highlighted in this study. Eleven ideophones that describe motion in Hausa with a commentary on each ideophone as used with the action words are outlined below.

- i) **Sumu-sumu** ya wuce.

Shamefully he passed.

This illustrates some feeling of defeat or shame in someone who has done something wrong. Hence, he walks away with a feeling of having disgraced himself.

- ii) **Tinkis-tinkis** sai gata taho ta wuce mu.

There she comes lazily / tiredly walking pass us.

Tinkis-tinkis demonstrates the manner she lazily or tiredly walks (towards us) as she passes by.

- iii) **Fiit** ya wuce mu da gudu.

He ran pass us (with great speed) / he sped off.

Fiit demonstrates the speed by which he ran (with great speed).

- iv) Ya **zuura** aguje.

He fled (escaped).

Zuura shows the fastness by which he escaped.

- v) Sai gashi ya shigo **fyaat-fyaat-fyaat** yana jan kafa.

At last he came in dragging his feet.

Fyaat-fyaat-fyaat illustrates the sluggish manner by which he drags his feet as he walks.

- vi) **Suu** santsi ya debe ta, ta bugu da bango.

She slipped and hit herself against the wall.

Suu portrays the manner of an accidental slipping (and consequently falling down or hitting oneself against something).

- vii) Sai gata **kwas-kwas-kwas** ta sha bakin gilashi.

At last here she comes wearing dark glasses and gaily walking.

Kwas-kwas-kwas alludes to a lady walking on stiletto heel type of shoes.

- viii) Sai gata **bazaar-bazaar** ta iso.

At last there she scruffily arrives.

Bazaar-bazaar alludes to an untidy and probably dirty woman and the manner she comports herself.

- ix) Saboda tsoron kada a kama ta, ta **ruuga** da gudu.

For fear of being caught, she dashed off.

Ruuga illustrates fastness of running away when escaping, or in a haste to go for something.

- x) Sai muka ga Bello yana **saandaa** yashige dakin Baba.

We saw Bello sneaking into father's room.

Saandaa demonstrates quietness when sneaking.

- xi) Gata can tana tafiya tana **rangwada**.

There she goes gaily walking off.

Rangwada describes some gaiety in a lady's comportment.

5.0 Discussion

The foregoing gives the motion's manner as described by the ideophones. Thought being crucial in fully understanding ideophones as postulated by Bambgose (2001), one needs to think over these ideophones as they are pronounced and at the same time conceptualize the manner of the action being described. This is usually automatic for the native speaker of the language, which is demonstrated in the total comprehension of the language by the native listener. Ideophones play an important role in the cognitive aspect of comprehending what is expressed in a language. This is due to the visualizing or imaginative impact as a characteristic of ideophones, amongst others. The impact of recognizing ideophonic utterances is usually evident in the audience's response as most ideophones are essentially funny when pronounced, hence they may evoke laughter. Others may evoke other feelings such as sympathy or some feeling of disgust etc.

It is interesting to note however that most sounds referred to as ideophones cannot be assumed to be meaningless due to the fact that the listener could draw inferences from them hence attach meaning or comprehend the message conveyed even when pronounced out of context. It can therefore be said that ideophones have cognitive meaning. For example, *sumu-sumu* (shamefully), *bazaar-bazaar* (scruffily), (see use in context above), instinctively, the listener would recognize what action could be alluded to by the ideophones. It is also deduced that from the above data all the ideophones qualifying the motion words are adverbial as they illustrate the manners of the motions as expressed by the speaker.

6.0 Conclusion

Conclusively, the following have been observed in ideophones: they have some power to stimulate feelings which consequently evoke laughter, sympathy, disgust, etc. They also induce a feeling towards the actor, as the listener may understand his character hence be able to tell what kind of a person he is as could be seen in the above examples in *bazaar-bazaar* (scruffily) or *tinkis-tinkis* (lazily/tiredly). Ideophones also create some excitement in discussions. They have some esthetic value in the language as they add color to the discourse by making it highly interesting. Equivalences or similar types of ideophones may exist in various languages but the sounds may certainly differ depending on the phonological patterns of the languages. Certain notions that may be absent in some cultures may also lack ideophones for such notions. It would however be interesting to explore translating ideophones across languages with special focus on onomatopoeic ideophones. This will bring to light thoughts, perceptions and esthetics of diverse languages, and may also serve as a tool for inter-lingual comparative studies within the field of phonology semantics and even cognitive linguistics.

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