

## IDEOPHONES IN SISAALI

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### Abstract

In recent years, the debate surrounding whether ideophones constitute a distinct class of words has captured the interest of numerous language scholars. This study delves into the unique linguistic attributes of ideophones within Sisaali, a Mabia language spoken in Upper West Region of Ghana and certain areas of Burkina Faso. It examines the distinctive phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features exhibited by ideophones. The argument posited here is that these unique characteristics warrant the classification of ideophones as a distinct word class in the language.

**Keywords:** Mabia, ideophones, features, Sisaali

### Tiaŋ

Chebɔɔsi no tiaŋ, teŋ sisabila aa ŋmaa nyɔtaaduo re amɔ tile ideofonsi ma. Ba aa piɛsi re di ba naa, di winyuu no me kaŋ wibie a yaa daban ne gaa. Eɛ wia, teŋ no aa daga ideofonsi nagusi gaa ku re Sisaal tiaŋ, a pia naa di ba yaa winyuu aa si wuo siŋ batu tiaŋ ne gaa. Wɔgulo hu aa we teŋ no tiaŋ daga re anɛ ideofonsi no wibie, ba memii, ba vɔɔnu abee ba wu buloŋ leŋ ba yaa daban ne, a si wuo siŋ batu tiaŋ Sisaal taal tiaŋ.

**Winyuuni:** ideofonsi, sisabila, Sisaal, wɔgulo

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to systematically describe the idiosyncratic features of ideophones in Sisaali, a Mabia language spoken in the Upper West region of Ghana and in some parts of Burkina Faso (Luri 2009). This study scrutinizes the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic attributes of ideophones in comparison to other lexical categories such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. The findings underscore ideophones as a distinctive lexical category within the language. While ideophones have garnered significant scholarly attention in other languages, there exists no comprehensive study providing an account of the concept in Sisaali. Thus, this paper fills a crucial gap as findings from this language may either affirm or challenge the distinct classification of ideophones. Moreover, this paper aims to provide an overview of the linguistic features of ideophones within the language and situates the study within a typological context. The data for this study were primarily sourced through elicitation, recorded corpus of spontaneous speeches, and existing text (secondary source).

In the realm of literature, ideophones have been defined in various ways. Doke (1935), regarded as one of the earliest linguists associated with the term, defines ideophones as vivid representations of ideas in sound, often onomatopoeic words that describe predicates, qualifiers, or adverbs related to manner, color, sound, smell, action, state, or intensity. This definition, widely accepted today, is found in linguistic texts, dictionaries, and lexicons. Trask (1993) views ideophones as a grammatically distinct class of words in certain languages, typically expressing distinctive sounds or visually distinctive types of action. Crystal (1997) describes ideophones as vivid representation of ideas in sound, often occurring through onomatopoeia. Specifically, in Bantu linguistics, ideophones refer to a word class containing sound symbolic words.

Scholars like Childs (1994), Killian-Hatz (2004), Nuckolls (1999) argue that typologically, ideophones lack morphology. However, in Sisaali, this claim is challenged as ideophones exhibit morphological characteristics. Noss (2004) sees ideophones as representing a full range of sensory experiences, including sound, sight, smell, taste, and feeling. Ideophones also express action, motion, color, odor, texture, manner, intensity, and emotion, aligning with observations in Sisaali. Nsoh et al (2010) posit that ideophones are common literary devices in songs, employing sounds and tones for musical effects.

Controversies arise regarding the lexical categories of ideophones. While some scholars claim ideophones have a specific or distinctive category, others argue they are a subtype of other word classes, like adverbs and adjectives. Agyekum (2008) suggests that if ideophones are classified under a distinctive word class, it should be known as phonosemantic to reflect its basis on form and meaning rather than traditional grammar. This paper adopts Doke's (1935) definition as its working definition, as it accurately reflects the behavior of ideophones in Sisaalt, emphasizing their phonological, morphological, and syntactic properties, their emotive function, and their association with spoken and dramatic registers of speech.

### **1.1 The language and its speakers**

Sisaalt is a Mabia language spoken in the Upper West Region of Ghana and in some parts of Burkina Faso. The native speakers of Sisaalt are called Sisaala. The language has seven dialects (Luri 2009) which are mutually intelligible. The basic sentence structure of the language is subject, verb, object (SVO). Socially, the Sisaala are very patriarchal in nature where women are traditionally assigned roles centered around childbirth and domestic duties, despite societal advancements. Religiously, the Sisaala primarily adhere to traditional beliefs, worshipping the Supreme God known as Wiisi/Wia or Joribanga Bako, along with ancestral spirits, land spirits, and river spirits. Economically, the Sisaala are subsistence farmers, cultivating food crops such as maize, rice, yam, beans, soya beans and groundnut, while they also raise livestock such as goats, sheep, cattle, and poultry.

Beyond the introduction, the paper is structured as follows: section 2 reviews literature on the topic, section 3 analyzes the linguistic features of ideophones in Sisaalt, while section 4 concludes the paper.

## **2. Review of literature on ideophones**

This section focuses on the review of existing works on ideophones. For this review, attention is paid to the linguistic characterization of ideophones which include the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

Typologically, Dingemane (2023) argues that many of the world's languages feature an open class of ideophones; words with marked forms and sensory meanings that invite iconic associations. He claims that ideophones often form a class of words comparable in size to other major word classes and fulfill functional roles such as modifying expressions or predicates. They frequently constitute a distinct lexical stratum and are related to adverbs, adjectives, verbs, and other linguistic resources used for modification and predication. Ideophones are notable for their unique phonological features, their iconic associations between form and meaning, and their rhetorical uses. Dingemane thus defines ideophones as an open lexical class of marked words that depict sensory imagery.

Ameka (2001) identifies ideophones based on phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties. Phonologically, he identifies phonation, tonal register, and syllable structure as the main phonological features of ideophones in Ewe. He indicates that syntactically, there is no grammatical word class of ideophones in Ewe. Ideophonic words can fall into any syntactic class of the language. Thus, there are nominal adjectival, intensifiers, verbal, adverbial as well as interjection ideophonic words and these ideophonic words are used in all sentence types. He posits that few ideophonic words have an inherently repetitive structure with no corresponding monosyllabic form. He believes that ideophones undergo syntactic iteration rather than morpho-phonological reduplication. He concludes that that even though ideophones tend to deviate from the canonical phonological and morphological and morpho-syntactic properties of the language, they are an integral part of languages in which they occur.

Bodomo (2006) examines ideophones in Dagaare, highlighting their specific phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic characteristics distinct from other word classes. Phonologically, ideophones exhibit salient features like syllable structure, copying of the first syllables on to the subsequent ones, one tonal quality, that is either high or low on the entire stretch of the three-syllable word and lastly, each ideophone can be produced either as a uniquely low

tone lexeme or as a uniquely high tone one, with a slight variation in meaning. Morphologically, they differ from other classes in epenthesis patterns, and syntactically, they resist morphosyntactic modifications. In the exploration of ideophones' semantics and pragmatics, Bodomo (2006:207) posits that unlike comparable word classes like adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, ideophones lack independent semantics. He highlights the challenge, though not impossibility in pinpointing precise denotational meanings for ideophones, emphasizing their dependence on adjacent words and contextual cues for interpretation. Subsequent sections will delve into how ideophones in Sisaali exhibit behaviors regarding their phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

Abubakari (2017) delves into the realm of ideophones in Kusaal, a Mabia language. She posits that in Kusaal, ideophones are words that evoke specific mental images while also echoing particular sounds and movements in a manner distinct from any other word class. She asserts that ideophones in Kusaal function as modifiers for nouns or verbs but cannot function independently.

According to her analysis, ideophones in Kusaal share the following characteristics:

- i. They are inherently sound symbolic and depictive.
- ii. They often involve reduplication.
- iii. They adhere to various derivational processes in word formation.
- iv. Descriptions of their semantics often involve gestures, mimicry, and sensory imageries.
- v. They typically occur at the end of sentences.

These traits align with the characteristics observed in ideophones in Sisaali, as evidenced by the forthcoming data in subsequent sections.

Abubakari (2017) further delineates distinct phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features of Kusaal ideophones. Phonologically, she notes syllable structure and lengthening of nasals and trills at word final positions. She indicates that though Kusaal is a tonal language, ideophones are all monotonal. They are either high or non-high and "there are hardly any instances where oppositions in tonal qualities correlate with oppositions in meaning qualities." Morphologically, ideophones resist inflectional or derivational morphology and exhibit unique reduplication patterns and resistance to deletion. Syntactically, some ideophones in Kusaal perform modificational functions, often post-verbally and displaced to sentence initial positions with a focus marker 'ka.' This work will demonstrate the validity of such syntactic categorization in Sisaali.

Abubakari (2017: 53) also highlights semantics as a defining feature of ideophones, asserting their role in conveying sensory imageries and the necessity of additional cues like gestures for effective interpretation. She emphasizes the context dependent nature of ideophones' meanings, particularly regarding sound symbolism.

In conclusion, this section reviews studies on ideophones' typological features and categorization. While ideophones share some traits with adjectives and adverbs, they possess unique characteristics distinguishing them from other lexical categories. Subsequent sections provide a detailed description of ideophones in Sisaali.

### **3. Analysis of ideophones in Sisaali**

This section closely examines the distinctive characteristics of ideophones in Sisaali, delving into their phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Ideophones in Sisaali exhibit specific phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic traits that differentiate them from other lexical categories, paralleling findings by Bodomo (2006) for Dagaare, Abubakari (2017) for Kusaal and Antintono and Issah (2022) for Gurene and Dagbani.

#### **3.1 Phonology of ideophones in Sisaali**

Although scholars like Dingemans (2011), Bodomo (2006), Childs (1988), Abubakari (2017), and Antintono and Issah (2022) have discussed various phonological features of ideophones such as tone, vowel length, reduplication, and nasality, these features cannot be universally applied. Hence, there is a need to examine the phonological features of ideophones on a language specific

basis. The phonological features of ideophones in Sisaalt will be discussed under the following subsections; syllable types and structure, and tone.

### 3.1.1 The syllable types and structure

Luri (2009:67) suggests that Sisaalt encompasses CV, CVC, V, and CVV syllable types. Content words in Sisaalt typically consist of one to three syllables. Verbs are often monosyllabic, while adjectives and nouns may comprise one to three syllables, as demonstrated in (1).

- (1) a. Verbs: **fá** ‘run’ **mù** ‘go’ **kò** ‘come’ **lá** ‘collect’ **lú** ‘dig’  
 b. Nouns: **dúòn** ‘rain’ **háàŋ** ‘woman’ **gáál** ‘thief’ **gàl** ‘cloth’ **kpásà** ‘chair’  
 c. Adjectives: **bál** ‘big’ **túl** ‘shine’ **wié** ‘small’ **bìŋ** ‘dark’ **fíàŋ** ‘red’  
 d. Adverbs: **tíàŋ** ‘inside’ **hál** ‘back’ **dòŋ** ‘there’ **lògíŋ** ‘side’

Regarding the syllable structure of ideophones in Sisaalt, it is noted that ideophones consist of various syllable types and structures, as exemplified in table 1 below.

**Table 1: Syllable types and structure of ideophones**

Ideophone	Gloss	Syllable type
<b>pó</b>	sound of a falling object	CV
<b>váb</b>	the fall of a wet object	CVC
<b>filímm filímm</b>	to act dishonestly	CVCVN
<b>gbàm</b>	to act suddenly	CVC
<b>títítíŋ</b>	very dark or black	CVC
<b>pòròpòrò</b>	to clap	CVCV
<b>cháá</b>	pouring of water	CVV
<b>ígígíí</b>	to completely ignore someone	VCVCVV
<b>kpàngíláŋ</b>	a very thick object	CVN.CV.CVN

From the data presented, it is observed that ideophones ending with nasals, such as **filímm filímm**, **títítíŋ** and **mílmíl**, are lengthened, and speakers or narrators may also choose to prolong them until the desired effect is achieved. This lengthening feature does not apply to other word classes ending with nasals, as shown in (2). Failure to lengthen these nasals renders the ideophone unfamiliar to native speakers.

- (2) a. **búúŋ** goat  
 b. **váŋ** walk  
 c. **léŋ** let

### 3.1.2 Tone

Concerning tone, Sisaalt is a level tone language with marked low and high tones, and tone is phonemic. For example, **lòhò** with a high tone on the first syllable and a low tone on the second syllable means ‘funeral’ while **lòhó** with a low tone on the first syllable and a high tone on the second syllable means ‘partridge.’ However, ideophones in the language are monotonous; they are either high or low, unlike other lexical categories, which can have both low and high tones within the same word. If the tone of an ideophone is altered to include both high and low tones like other word categories, the ideophone loses its meaning and ceases to be a word in the language as demonstrated in (3).

- (3) a. **váhò** ‘dog’ – noun  
 b. **kpílkpíl** – ideophone  
 c. \***kpílkpíl**

In summary, phonologically, ideophones in Sisaali often exhibit characteristics such as lengthening of nasals (m, ŋ) when they occur at the coda position, a trait uncommon in other word classes. Additionally, ideophones are monotonal and composed of various syllable types.

### 3.2 Morphology of ideophones in Sisaali

Ideophones in Sisaali exhibit distinct morphological features compared to other word categories. According to Becks (2008), the morphology of ideophones distinguishes them, as they resist affixation, whether derivational or inflectional. However, this assertion is not universally applicable, as demonstrated by Doke (1963) in Zulu, where ideophones are inflected for tense and aspect. Similarly, Ameka (2001:26) argues that the assertion about the lack of affixation in ideophones only holds in languages with rich morphological systems, not in isolating languages like Ewe.

In Sisaali, ideophones do not accept any form of affixation, aligning with Becks' (2008) claim. They maintain minimal connection to other word classes such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. This suggests independent roots and no inflectional affixes for number marking or derivational affixes for class change. This contrasts with nouns and adjectives, which can be inflected for plurality as demonstrated in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Morphological contrast between ideophones and other word classes in Sisaali**

Word Class	Word (singular)	Gloss	Word (plural)	Gloss	Root	Affix
Noun	<b>váhà</b>	Dog	vàsì	dogs	Vá	-sì
Adjective	<b>bál</b>	Big	bàlà	big.PL	bál	-a
Verb	<b>fá</b>	Run	fáí	running	fá	-í
Verb	<b>fá</b>	Run	fifáál	runner	fá	fî-ál
Adverb	<b>lágí</b>	Quickly				
Ideophone	<b>kòm̀kòm̀</b>	Act of walking slowly				

The data in table 2 above illustrates the affixation patterns of various word classes. While other major word classes can undergo affixation, such as verbs becoming nouns and adjectives inflecting for plurality, ideophones in Sisaali remain unaffected. Unlike adjectives, which can be pluralized when accompanying nouns, ideophones maintain their singular form regardless of context as exemplified in 4 below.

- (4) a. **váhà** + **bìŋ** = **vabìŋ**  
 Dog black/dark black.dog
- b. **vàsì** + **bìŋ** = **vabìsì**  
 Dog.PL black/dark black.dogs
- c. **v kòm̀kòm̀** = his manner of walking/quiet nature  
 3SG IDEO
- d. **Ba kòm̀kòm̀ kòm̀kòm̀** = their manner of walking/quiet nature  
 3PL IDEO IDEO
- e. **Ba \*kòm̀kòm̀sɪ**  
 3PL IDEO

In example (4b), the adjective undergoes plurality inflection, whereas the ideophones remain unaltered in (4c & 4d), emphasizing their resistance to affixation. Despite this resistance, ideophones, like adjectives and adverbs, perform modificational functions without morphological alterations.

Reduplication is a common process in Sisaali for word formation, particularly for adjectives, adverbs, and some verbs, emphasizing intensity and iteration. Gariba (2017) suggests that in Sisaali, certain word classes like adjectives, adverbs, and verbs undergo reduplication to generate new words within the same class but with altered meaning. Additionally, she notes that some nouns also undergo reduplication to form adverbs. Gariba highlights that, adjectives, adverbs, and certain verbs, particularly those with a CV syllable structure, often undergo complete reduplication, whereas nouns are infrequently reduplicated in the language. Similarly, Luri (2009) asserts that reduplication in Sisaali involves a simple repetition of the stem without the need for segment truncation, as demonstrated in table 3.

**Table 3: Reduplication in Sisaali**

Word class	Word	Gloss
Adjective	múa	small
Adjective	múa múa	very small
Adverb	sòm	gently/slowly
Adverb	sòm sòm	Very gently/slowly
Noun	váhà	Dog
Noun	*váhà váhà	

Reduplication primarily serves to emphasize, intensify, and iterate, as noted by Bodomo (2006). This fundamental function of reduplication applies to ideophones in the language, just like other word classes except for nouns, as exemplified in table 4.

**Table 4: Common traits between reduplication in Sisaali**

s/n	Word	Meaning	Category
a.	fáfá	run, run; for intensity, iteration	verb
b.	sòm sòm	Gently/slowly; intensity, iteration	adverb
c.	múamúa	Small small; intensity	adjective
d.	gbílgbílgbíl	Intensity	ideophone
e.	pógipógipógi	Intensity, iterative	ideophone

Although both ideophones and other word classes utilize reduplication, there are subtle differences in their usage. While reduplication in other word classes tends to be less delineative, ideophones primarily are more delineative and illustrative, and are often triplicated or quadruplicated for effect, unlike other word classes as seen in (4d & 4e). This characteristic distinguishes ideophones from other lexical categories. Additional support for this argument is provided in the data presented below.

- (5) a. **sígísígísígí** ‘extremely quiet’  
 b. **gbárigbárigbárigbári** ‘walking weakly’  
 c. **fá** – verb ‘run,’ \*fáfáfá

It is noteworthy that ideophones in Sisaali cannot occur in their base form and must obligatorily be reduplicated, as demonstrated below. Ideophones have distinct phonotactics, resulting in longer words, and the reduplicated form may constitute a single word, which can further be reduplicated as seen in (6).

- (6) a. **tiŋtiŋtiŋ** ‘extremely dark’  
 b. \***tiŋ**  
 c. **pógípógí** ‘very white’  
 d. \***pógí**  
 e. **kpílkpíl** ‘plainly’  
 f. \***kpíl**

This underscores the unique nature of ideophones as a distinct class of words. Furthermore, it is observed that the syllable structure of reduplicated ideophones varies among different ideophones. One shared feature between ideophones and other word classes in the language is their resistance to deletion or truncation during reduplication. Luri (2009) argues that reduplication in Sisaalɔ occurs without the truncation of any segments; the stem is merely repeated. This is illustrated with the data in the example below. This similarity establishes a similarity between ideophones and other lexical categories.

- (7)  
 #**mʊʊ**# [mʊʊmʊʊ] → very small small  
 #**bʊllʊ**# [bʊllʊbʊllʊ] → very frequent (twice twice)  
 #**togʊ**# [togʊtogʊ] → nil, nil  
 #**taŋ**# [taŋtaŋ] → very serious/hot

(Luri 2009:75, table 48)

### 3.3 The syntax of ideophones in Sisaalɔ

According to Beck (2008), ideophones can function similarly to adverbs, specifying manner and other event characteristics when used with less generic verbs. As previously mentioned, ideophones in Sisaalɔ also fulfill modificational roles akin to adverbs and adjectives in the language. Syntactically, ideophones in Sisaalɔ often occur in clause final positions, where they tend to modify the verb phrase, a function that adverbs can equally perform. This is exemplified below.

- (8) a. **Bíé**    **hú**    **válà**    **gée**    **kòm̀kòm̀**    **àà**    **mú**    **dìà**  
 Chid    DET    walk    that    IDEO    PST    go    house  
 ‘The child walked quietly home.’  
 b. **Bà**    **yáá**    **háwélíe**    **rɛ**  
 3PL    COP    woman.good.PL    FOC  
 ‘They are good women.’  
 c. **Ū**    **həŋ**    **sòm**  
 3SG    sit.PST    calm  
 ‘He sat calmly.’

The sentences above illustrate that ideophones, adverbs, and adjectives all serve modificational functions. For example, in (8a), the ideophone, **kòm̀kòm̀** modifies the verb **válà** ‘walk,’ the adjective in (8b) modifies the noun woman, and the adverb, **sòm** in (8c), also modifies the verb **həŋ** ‘sit.’

It is important to note that when ideophones and adjectives modify nouns, the sentence structure remains unchanged. The primary distinction between ideophones, as demonstrated in (9a), and adjectives, as shown in (9b), is the presence of a number affix. Adjectives can be inflected for plurality, whereas ideophones cannot be inflected for plurality in the language.

- (9) a. **Bà**    **yáá**    **kírikíri**    **ré**  
 3PL    COP    IDEO    FOC  
 ‘They are hyperactive.’

- b. **Bà yáá bàbómò ré**  
 3PL COP man.bad.PL FOC  
 ‘They are bad men’
- c. **Bà yáá \*kíríkírísi ré**  
 3PL COP IDEO.PL FOC
- d. **Bà kíríkírí hú párà ré**  
 3PL IDEO DET much FOC  
 ‘Their hyper-activeness is too much.’

In the example above (9d), it becomes apparent that ideophones, when modifying nouns or pronouns, can directly follow the noun or pronoun without the need for a copula. In such cases, they do not appear at the clause final position. Additionally, when ideophones modify nouns within a sentence, they are positioned post nominally and embedded within the noun phrase (NP). Consequently, they modify the NP they follow and cannot be extracted to the clause initial position as independent syntactic elements as demonstrated in (10a and 11a).

- (10) a. **Lùrí mári kídì pátè ré**  
 Luri cook.PST food IDEO FOC  
 ‘Luri cooked tasteless food.’
- b. **\*Pátè ré Lùrí mári kídì**  
 IDEO FOC Luri cook.PST food
- c. **Kídì pátè ré Lùrí mári**  
 Food IDEO FOC cook  
 ‘It is tasteless food that Luri cooked.’
- (11) a. **Bíísí hú hòṅ dííbìṅ tíṅtíṅ tiàṅ né**  
 Child.PL DET sit house.darkness IDEO inside FOC  
 ‘The children sat in complete darkness.’
- b. **\*Tíṅtíṅ né bíísí hú hòṅ**  
 IDEO FOC child.PL DET sit

From the provided examples, it is observed that all NPs occur in premodifier positions and undergo partial truncation of their endings when paired with these types of ideophones. For instance, in (10a), **kidiilie** ‘food’ becomes **kídì** ‘food.’ Moreover, since these ideophones are embedded within the NP, they cannot be relocated to the clause initial position as independent elements, unlike other ideophones that modify verbs.

Furthermore, some ideophones tend to modify verbs, a function also performed by adverbs. When ideophones modify verbs, as exemplified in (12a & 12c), they occur post verbally. Attempting to place the ideophone before the verb results in an ungrammatical construction as evident in (12b & 12d).

- (12) a. **Báálà hú vùà ú chígíchígíchígí**  
 Man DET tie.PST 3SG IDEO  
 ‘The men tied it very tight.’
- b. **\*Báálà hú chígíchígíchígí vùà ú**  
 Man DET IDEO tie.PST 3SG
- c. **Ú mágà dì ú básì kpílkpíl lé**  
 3SG must that 3SG say IDEO FOC  
 ‘He must speak plainly.’

d. \***Ú**    **màgà** **dì**    **ú**    **kpíłkpíł**    **bási**    **ré**  
 3SG    must    that    3SG    IDEO    say    FOC

Syntactically, it can be concluded that most ideophones in Sisaalt occur clause finally when they modify verbs and must be positioned post verbally. An ungrammatical structure arises when an ideophone intended to modify the verb immediately follows the noun as seen in (12b).

However, in Sisaalt, ideophones can also occur at the clause initial position, in which case they must be focused as demonstrated in (13).

- (13) a. **Chígíhígíhígí**                      **ré**    **bà**    **vùà**                      **púnà**                      **hú**  
 IDEO                                      FOC    3PL    tie.PST                      animal                      DET  
 ‘They tied the animal tightly.’
- b. **Kágíságí**                      **ré**    **ú**    **téŋ**    **yáá**  
 IDEO                                      FOC    3SG    skin    COP  
 ‘His skin is rough or thick’
- c.\* **Kágíságí**                      **ú**    **téŋ**    **yáá**  
 IDEO                                      3SG    skin    COP

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that some ideophones in Sisaalt collocate with other lexical categories as observed by Abubakari (2017) for Kusaal. For instance, ideophones such as **múlámúlá**, **kágíságí**, **gbíntíłíŋ** among others, collocate with adjectives, as illustrated in (14).

- (14) a. **Háfíàŋ**                      **múlámúlá**                      **hú**    **kò**    **ré**  
 Woman.fair    IDEO                      DET    come    FOC  
 ‘The fair soft woman has come.’
- b. **Bàbál**                      **téŋ**    **kágíságí**                      **hú**    **mùà**  
 man.big                      skin    IDEO                      DET    go.PST  
 ‘The big rough skin man is gone.’
- c. **Dúbál**                      **mángíłán**                      **hú**    **mémù** **tíàŋ**  
 House.big                      IDEO                      DET    under    inside  
 ‘Under the big shapeless house’
- d. **Ú**    **yáá**    **nínyáá**                      **kpíłí**    **ré**  
 3SG    COP    person.poor    IDEO    FOC  
 ‘He is a completely poor person.’

The data in (14a-d) demonstrates that some ideophones collocate with adjectives, resulting in a structure like a noun + adjective + ideophone. This structure arises because the nouns precede the adjectives, and the adjectives precede the ideophones. It is important to note that any of the ideophones mentioned above can be omitted from the sentence without affecting its grammaticality. However, when ideophones are omitted, the sentence loses its depictive or imagery aspect, which ideophones typically contribute to.

### 3.4 The semantics of ideophones in Sisaalt

In Sisaalt, ideophones stand apart from other lexical categories like adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and nouns, due to their lack of independent semantics. Assigning a single literal meaning to them proves challenging, as they rely heavily on context and the accompanying lexical categories for interpretation. For instance, consider the examples in (15a & 15b) which highlight this dependence.

- (15) a. **Mária píj aribánaá**  
 Maria lie IDEO  
 ‘Maria laid IDEO’
- b. **Ɖmáŋ hú túú télè góngúlón**  
 Rope DET down fall IDEO  
 ‘The rope fell IDEO’

Becks (2008:6) suggests that ideophones evoke entire scenes rather than specific objects, events, or manner, portraying actors participating in specific events in a particular manner. Abubakari (2017) notes that paraphrasing ideophones in Kusaal requires additional gestures, facial expressions, mimicry, or sensory imagery. Similarly, ideophones in Sisaali often necessitate the use of multiple words for explanation, primarily focusing on imagery and delineation as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: The semantics of ideophones in Sisaali**

Ideophone	Meaning
<b>sírítítí</b>	to remain completely quiet
<b>gbílgbíl</b>	flowing of water with pressure
<b>pírígí</b>	to suddenly disappear
<b>fórótótó</b>	extremely tall and without shape

Again, the use of ideophones is closely tied to gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. This reliance on non-verbal communication further distinguishes ideophones from other lexical categories. As demonstrated in (16a-16c), gestures accompanying ideophones are often unconscious.

16. a. **sírítítí** – the use of the index finger on the lips  
 b. **múlámúlá** – the use of all the five fingers to smooch the skin  
 c. **vab** – raising and dropping of the hand to indicate a falling object

Childs (1994:191) asserts that ideophones convey feelings, emotions, intensity, and duration through physical movement and sound. This holds true for ideophones in Sisaali, which express manner, sound, and intensity as seen in (17a- 17c).

17. a. **Ú válà gándáávál kò júú**  
 3SG walk IDEO come enter  
 ‘S/he walked majestically inside.’
- b. **Ú válà mʉámʉa kò líí**  
 3SG walk IDEO come out  
 ‘S/he walked out quietly.’
- c. **Níí hú líí gbílgbíl**  
 Water DET out IDEO  
 ‘The water came out with pressure.’

These semantics are often enhanced by accompanying gestures and facial expressions. Additionally, ideophones can convey multiple interpretations, such as the ideophone **gándáávál**, which signifies both a majestic walk and bold footsteps. Also, in (17b), the ideophone **mʉámʉa** connotes quiet nature or manner the person walked out or light footsteps whereas in (17c), the ideophone **gbílgbíl** describes the intense pressure with which the water flows. Context plays a crucial role, especially in sound symbolism, as demonstrated in (17b & 17c).

Moreover, ideophones can carry a sense of mockery, aligning with Bodomo (2006) and Dingemans (2015) observations that they are used for mockery and derogatory remarks. For example, the ideophone **kpíííí**, conveys extreme poverty and is often used to mock individuals who exhibit such traits.

In conclusion, the interpretation of ideophones relies on various semantic features, including gestures, facial expressions, body movement, and context, setting them apart from other word classes in the language.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper offers a comprehensive analysis of ideophones in Sisaalt, aiming to determine whether they constitute a distinct word class or belong to a sub-group of other lexical categories. It delves into the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of ideophones in the language. Phonologically, ideophones exhibit diverse syllable types and structures, with those ending in nasals being lengthened. Unlike other lexical categories, ideophones are monotonic. Morphologically, ideophones in Sisaalt resist affixation, both derivational and inflectional processes, distinguishing them from other word classes. Reduplication serves as a productive means of forming ideophones.

Syntactically, ideophones can modify noun phrases, typically functioning as postmodifiers. When embedded within a noun phrase, they cannot be moved to the clause initial position unless they directly modify the nouns. Additionally, ideophones can modify verbs, in which case they occur post verbally. While ideophones primarily serve modificational roles akin to adjectives and adverbs, they maintain their status as a distinct word class. Semantically, ideophones are accompanied by non-verbal features such as gestures, facial expressions, and emotive functions to enhance their semantic interpretation. These features are absent in other lexical categories, contributing to the challenge of assigning independent semantics to ideophones in the language.

#### Abbreviations

IDEO	Ideophone	COP	Copula
SG	Singular	PL	Plural
DET	Determiner	PST	Past
FOC	Focus	NP	Noun Phrase

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