

IDEOPHONES IN KUSAAL

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Abstract

Ideophones, also referred to as ‘expressives’, have in recent years received massive attention in the literature from linguists across the globe. What still remains undoubted is the fact that ideophones are unique on a language specific basis and as such the need to uncover their nature using individual language analyses. Thus, this paper sets out to study ideophones in Kúsáál, a Mabia (Gur) language spoken in the Upper East Region of Ghana. This article advances the claim that ideophones in Kúsáál exhibit syntactic links with adjectives and adverbs yet they show distinctive morphological, phonological and semantic properties that set them apart from all other lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives in the language.

Key words: Ideophones, Kusaal, Mabia (Gur) languages

1. Introduction¹

Research on ideophones (Westermann 1930; Doke 1935; Samarin 1965), which are also often referred to as ‘mimetics’ in Japanese linguistics and ‘expressives’ in South-East Asian languages (Diffloth 1972; Kilian-Hatz 2001; Nuckolls 2004), has taken center stage in recent studies in African Language, Linguistics and Literary studies (*cf.* Bodomo 2006; Mphande 1992; Childs 1994; Ameka 2001; Dingemans 2011; *in press*; Essegbey 2013; among others). As at the time of this study, only one Mabia language, Dagaare has received such a comprehensive analysis (see Bodomo 2006). Previous studies on Kúsáál recognize the presence of ideophones in the language but the information provided on the topic is limited. Niggli (2014:128) for instance dedicates half a page to ideophones and Spratt and Spratt (1972) also make mention of words like *hale* ‘very much’ and *zina* ‘today’ as ideophonic adverbs in their work (Spratt & Spratt 1972:57). The present study is essential as it aims at providing a detailed account of the phenomenon in Kúsáál. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the structure of ideophones in Kúsáál by looking at their phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics in close comparison with other lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in the language.

Just as any other phenomena, several efforts have been made in attempts to craft a definition for ideophones. A widely used definition is Doke’s (1935:118):

A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity.

¹ I would like to express my profound appreciation to Tony Naden for proof reading this work and also to Mr Micheal Awimbila (GILLBT) for cross-checking my data not forgetting all the reviewers whose comments have helped sharpened the discussion this far. To, Prof. Adams Bodomo under whose tutelage the ideas for this paper were conceived, I say thank you.

There are controversies surrounding the lexical categories of ideophones. Whereas Bodomo (2006), Trask (1993:131-132), Kulemeka (1997) among others argue that ideophones form a distinctive word class of their own, others such as Newmann (1968, 2000 and 2001) argue that ideophones should be considered as subtypes of other classes such as adverbs and adjectives. Furthermore, Childs (1988) makes the assertion that ideophones have links with other word-categories such as adjectives, adverbs, verbs, exclamations and even nouns. Moreover, links can even be further established with non-spoken language e.g. gestures. Observations on ideophones in Kúsáál point to the existence of syntactic links between ideophones and lexical categories such as adjectives and adverbs of manner. This paper explores whether such links can be equally established in the phonology, morphology as well as semantics of ideophones in Kúsáál in comparison with other lexical categories.

Ideophones in Kúsáál are words that create specific mental imagery as well as echo specific sounds and movements in a way that no other class of words does. They modify either nouns or verbs but cannot stand on their own.

- (1) a. **nóndaán** **tàpù f**
poor_man IDEO
‘A penniless poor man or the poorest of poor men’
- b. ***tàpù f** ‘poorest of the poor’

The ideophone ‘*tapiif*’ always forms a collocation with ‘*nóndaán*’ and cannot stand alone. Others like *tat-tat-tat* and *pva-pva-pva* which connote sounds of movement and clapping respectively need to occur with verbs of actions e.g. *kiŋ* ‘go’ and *nwɛ* ‘hit clap’. Ideophones in Kúsáál are (a) mostly sound-symbolic and depictive in nature, (b) mostly characterized by reduplication, (c) hardly ascribe to any form of derivational processes of word formation (d) mostly accompanied with gestures, mimicry, and sensory imageries when attempts are made to describe their semantics and (e) mostly occur at sentence final positions. The questions this article seeks to answer among others include: (1) How do we identify ideophones in Kúsáál? And (2) Do ideophones exhibit links with other lexical categories in the language or do they form a distinct class of words?

This work is divided into four sections. Section two will give brief background information on the Kúsáál language, highlighting aspects of its grammar that are most relevant for discussions in this article. It further discusses some of the uses of ideophones in the language. Section three draws a comparison between the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of ideophones and other lexical categories in Kúsáál. This is in an attempt to establish whether ideophones exhibit links with other major word classes in Kúsáál or they form a separate group of words on their own. The final section, section four concludes with general observations and findings in this study.

2. The Kúsáàl language and the uses of Ideophones²

Kúsáàl is a tonal language with three level contrastive tones as well as a downstep high (Bodomo & Abubakari (forthcoming), Musah 2010).

- (2) a. **bà'** 'father' **bá'** 'to fix into'
 b. **sààm** 'father' **sáám** 'a stranger' **sáàm** 'to mash'
 c. **kū** 'to kill' **kú** 'to cut into pieces' **kù** 'will not'

The unmarked word order of Kúsáàl is SVO and the NP has a head-initial characteristic where the head noun precedes the article, the determiner, the adjective as well as the numeral.

- (3) **Dáú gíj lá dā'** **díib lá.**
 man short DEF buy-PERF food DEF
 'The short man bought the food.'

There are nine oral vowels and five nasal vowels in Kúsáàl. The nine vowels are divided into [\pm ATR] sets. The structure of words adheres to a harmonic patterning of vowels (*also see*: Bodomo & Abubakari (forthcoming); Musah 2010: 89; Spratt and Spratt 1968: 29).

- (4) **kúróg** 'trousers/shorts' **kùrùg** 'old'

The distribution of ideophones in Kúsáàl is mostly at sentence final position as also observed in other languages like Dagaare (Bodomo 2006), Siwu (Dingemanse in press: 3), and Nyagbo (Essegbey 2013: 239). This can be attributed to the modificational function ideophones play in the languages.

- (5) **Fù zót píimá bànè ián'ád** **níntánj fiáun-fiáun lá.**
 2SG fear arrows that fly daytime IDEO DEF
 'You are scared of arrows that fly during the daytime *fiávn-fiávn*.'
- (6) **Bà d̄ɪl taábá kēŋ sòndúg-sòndúg.**
 3PL follow one-another go IDEO
 'They follow one another in separate groups'

The ideophones '*fiávn-fiávn*' and '*sòndú g-sòndú g*' in examples (5-6) serve as modifiers to the verbs '*ian'ad*' and '*d̄ɪl-kēŋ*' respectively.

Ideophones in Kúsáàl are mostly mimicry of the sounds they represent. They serve as icons that help in linking sound and meaning. An ideophone can be said to sustain a direct

2 Most of the data used in this work are culled from an unpublished Kusaal Dictionary edited by Tony Naden and available at the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation. In this document, the lexical category of any entry is indicated and ideophones are identified as such. About 55 ideophones are recorded in this collection. Other sources of data included folktales as well as elicitations from other native speakers not excluding the researcher's own intuitions as a speaker of Kusaal.

relationship between a sound and the meaning it portrays. The ideophones in the sentences below are mimics of the sounds they depict.

- (7) a. **Ká sáá kōō fūkīd ìlìlìlì.**
 LINK rain gather fall IDEO
 ‘The cloud gathered and rain started falling IDEO’
 b. **ìlìlìlì** ‘sound of rain drops’
- (8) a. **Sáá ián’ád tānsīd pànr-pànr.**
 rain fly/jump shout-IMPERF crinkle-crackle-IDEO
 ‘There is lightning and thunder/ there is crinkle-crackle sound of striking tender.’
 b. ...**pànr-pànr** ‘crinkle-crackle sound of striking tender’

Other ideophones that mimic their meanings include: *ziká-ziká* ‘a shaking noise’ *pú rá-pú rá* ‘clap’ and *fàànn* ‘sound of suddenly expelled breath’. However, there are ideophones that do not imitate any sound but rather create a vivid mental image in the mind of the listener. This makes some slight distinction between ideophones that are onomatopoeic and ideophones that are not onomatopoeic. The latter is such that the listener imagines and creates a vivid picture or imagery of the scene being described by the ideophone especially in storytelling scenarios. Examples of such ideophones include: *kìpì* ‘stationary’, *kímm* ‘firmly’, *pìl-pìl* ‘clean, bright’ and *pèp* ‘straight’.

- (9) **Ká bíis lá lébìg fón k’.**
 LINK children DEF become quite IDEO
 ‘The children became very quiet’
- (10) **O zuóbíd wúsà lébìg fárr-fárr.**
 3SG hair all become IDEO
 ‘All his/her hair turned gray.’

Beyond the relationship that exists between sound and meaning through the use of ideophones, there also exists a special role such that ideophones combine with gestures to create a ‘whole that is both greater than, and different from, any of its constituent parts’ (Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron 2011, cf. Mihás 2013:28-29). Ideophones also express meaning through sounds combined with gestures in Kúsáál to express emotions and feelings (see Childs 1988; Mphande 1992:122; Mihás 2013; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron 2011; Dingemanse 2011). This is the only instance where tone is identified in the use of ideophone in this article. The ideophones *hum m m* connotes a ‘heavy sigh of relief or of worry’ and *húúúmm* connotes an ‘offensive smell’. The first ideophone when uttered is accompanied by a sagging body posture with the palm supporting the chin most of the time. The second is accompanied by a cringing look on the face with the fingers blocking the nose from inhaling more of the bad odour. It must still be indicated that the sounds alone still convey the respective messages but the impact is stronger when gestures are included. A similar instance is observed by (Childs 1988:168) from Kisi where the ideophone *fifi* stands for “stinky, smelly”.

Ideophones have the potential of connoting the exact meaning and interpretation of events and actions in stories and written narratives that other word classes cannot do. For

this reason, they are mostly used in descriptive writings³, conversations, narratives, folktales and stories in Kúsáàl. The examples below are sentences picked from some folktales in Kúsáàl.

- (11) a. **Buríbíg yé 'gbír-gbír' ká nwííg kensīgɪd.**
 billygoat say IDEO CONJ rope breaks
 'Billygoat says IDEO and the rope breaks.'
- b. **Ká Àsúmbúl á'án ìánkì nwē' píp-píp-píp n gīlīg**
 LINK Mr_Rabit again jump beat IDEO N roam
tííg lá gbín wúsa wúsá.
 tree DEF under all all
 'Mr Rabbit got up and repeated the search IDEO roaming all over under the tree again.'

Ideophones in Kúsáàl are also used as forms of indirections. They are mostly used in proverbial language and to conceal meanings that may appear offensive to others. Examples of such ideophones include *filím-filím* and *tàpùf* in (12-13).

- (12) **Kpá'ám líné àn filím-filím lá nà naaé t'ɔ́ t'ɔ́.**
 oil which is IDEO DEF will finish quickly
 'What is dishonest does not last.'
- (13) **Nónḡdaán tàpùf lá kíná.**
 poor_man IDEO DEF come
 'Poorest of the poor/penniless has come.'

Though not often, some colours are also represented by the use of ideophones: *fárr-fárr* 'white', *píl-píl* 'bright' and *lím̄m̄* 'darkish/dim'.

- (14) **ò wílá kù lɛn sɔ́bígi àn lím̄m̄ nɛ.**
 3SG branch will_not again black is IDEO FOC
 'His branch will not darken again.'

In brief, ideophones serve diverse purposes in Kúsáàl. They perform both attributive and modificational roles at phrase or clause final positions. They are iconic in nature and they are mostly used in descriptive writings, conversations, narratives, and folktales. They are also used as intensifiers, forms of indirection and for colour depiction.

3. Ideophones and other lexical categories

In this section, we will take a close look at the nature of ideophones in Kúsáàl by examining their phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics in comparison with other lexical categories.

³ These are types of writings that engage the five senses and are aimed at describing people, entities, and places such that one forms a mental picture of what is being described. Descriptive writings are excellent methods of arousing reader's interest and capturing their total attention. Ideophones are tools used in such writings.

3.1. The phonology of ideophones in Kúsáàl

Several phonological characteristics of ideophones have been discussed in the literature (Dingemans 2011; Bodomo 2006; Essegbey 2013; Childs 1988 and Mphande 1992) and claims have been made that although there are some cross-linguistic phonological features such as tone, vowel length, reduplication and nasality, these cannot be said to be universal and as a result, there is the need to investigate phonological characteristics of ideophones on language specific basis. Phonological properties of ideophones in Kúsáàl are not so distinct from the features listed above but they offer an interesting perspective that can contribute to discussions on this topic. Whilst reserving discussion on reduplication to our next subsection on morphology, we will consider phonological properties such as syllable types, monotonocity, nasal assimilation, and tone.

To begin with, syllable types in Kúsáàl are roughly grouped into four categories; the peak only syllable, the VC syllable, the CV/CVV syllable, and the CVC syllable (CVN, CV:C, CVVC, CV?V) types. Lexical words in Kúsáàl usually range between one to three syllables. Nouns and adjectives are often composed of two and three syllables whilst verbs are often monosyllabic. Nouns that are composed of three and more syllables are often compound words.

(15) a. Nouns: **búúg** ‘goat’ **búpiél** ‘white goat’ **bíís** ‘children’, **bíbíbís** ‘little children’, **tú’úmà** ‘work’, **tú’úmbe’ ed** ‘sin’

b. Adjectives: **títá’ár** ‘big’, **venlà** ‘beautiful’, **sàbulùg** ‘black’, **bé’ ed** ‘bad’

c. Verbs: **īs** ‘to remove’, **nū** ‘to drink’, **dī** ‘to eat’, **nōk** ‘to take’, **lū** ‘to fall’, **mōŋ** ‘to deny’

d. Adverbs: **túón** ‘before’, **nyá’án** ‘after’, **dεεŋ** ‘early’, **ná’ána** ‘easily’

Ideophones in Kúsáàl are composed of all manner of syllable types and syllable structures. They reveal marked syllable forms such as CVN:⁴, CVR: and CVNR which are rare in any lexical category in the language. The syllable structures of ideophones are unpredictable and they are susceptible to the violation of all phonotactic constraints in the language. From the examples in (16), we see instances involving the cluster of nasals and trills in ideophones. This occurrence is highly marked in the possible combination of phonemes in Kúsáàl.

(16)

Ideophones	Gloss	Syllable type
kí’	‘quietly’	CV
l̄imm	‘dim, darkish’	CVN:
fil̄imm-fil̄imm	‘dishonest’	CVCVN:
fiánn-fiánn	‘whizz’	CVVN:
ìl̄l̄l̄l̄	‘rain drops’	VCVCV
Pánr-pánr	‘crackle’	CVNR
púra-púra-púra	‘clap’	CVCV
fárr-farr	‘very white’	CVR:
tát-tát-tát	‘sound of walking’	CVC

⁴ (:) represents the multiple occurrence of the sound.

In a related development, we see the possibility of lengthening nasals and trills at word final positions. In casual speech, narratives and folktales these nasals are extended as long as the speaker can endure.

(17)

Ideophone	Gloss
l̄imm...	'darkish'
s̄il̄imm...	'in silence'
b̄úŋ..-b̄úŋ...	'strongly'
ḡùmm..	'firm'
w̄àmm..	'comfortable'
ȳirr.....	'gentle'
p̄ánr..-p̄ánr...	'crackly, lightning'
b̄ór r...	'yucky'
k̄ímm...	'firmly'

This is one unique feature that differentiates ideophones from other words. Even though word final nasals are not unique to ideophones, their occurrences in other words do not attract lengthening as shown in (18).

(18)

Category	Word		Lengthening	Gloss
Noun	máán	→	*maánnn	'a sacrifice'
Adjective	gím	→	*gím̄mm	'to be shot'
Verb	g'élím	→	*g'élím̄mm	'count'
Verb	dél ím	→	*dél ímm	'rest one's weight on something'
Noun	líéŋ	→	*líéŋŋŋ	'an axe'

Additionally, all the vowels preceding the nasals /m, n, ŋ/ in ideophones undergo some kind of regressive assimilation where the following sound (nasal) extends its influence on the preceding sound (vowel). This is not unique to ideophones since vowel nasalization is a common phonological process in Kúsáál.

(19)

Ideophone	Gloss
a. ḡúmm	'firm, tidily'
b. p̄ánr-p̄ánr	'crackle'
c. l̄ímm	'dim, darkish'

Though Kúsáál is a tonal language, ideophones are all monotonal. They are either high or non-high and again, there are hardly instances where oppositions in tonal qualities correlate with oppositions in meaning qualities. Comparing the example in (20a) and (20b-c), it is observed that ideophones unlike other lexical categories do not conform to the phonemic nature of tone in Kúsáál.

(20)

a. b̄ùg	'to powder'	b̄úg	'drunk'	b̄ūg	'to divine or soothsay'
b. p̄ánr-p̄ánr	'lightning'	p̄ánrp̄ánr	?	p̄ánrp̄ánr	?
c. s̄il̄ímm̄	'silently'	s̄il̄ímm̄	?	s̄il̄ímm̄	?

The words with question marks do not bare any differences in meaning with their counterparts except that they do not portray the exact sounds they mimic.

Altogether, ideophones demonstrate uniqueness with regards to their phonology compared to other word classes in Kúsáàl. They are composed of all manner of syllable types among which are marked phonotactic forms in the language. Ideophones unlike other words are all monotonic and they also lengthen nasal and trills at word final positions which are unusual in other categories of words.

3.2. The morphology of ideophones in Kúsáàl

Becks (2008) notes that one property that distinguishes ideophones from other lexical categories is their morphology. According to Becks, ideophones show strong resistance in taking inflectional or derivational morphology⁵. Ideophones in Kúsáàl are consistent with this claim as they reveal very little relationships between their stems and that of other word classes like nouns, verbs and adjectives. Ideophones in the language do not trace their roots from other word categories and they do not as well take inflectional affixes to mark number compared to categories like nouns and adjectives that inflect for number in Kúsáàl as in (21).

(21)

Category	word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
Adjective	súm	‘good.Sg.’	súmá	‘good.Pl’
Adjective	bíl	‘small.Sg.’	bíbís	‘small.Pl’
Noun	bíig	‘child.Sg.’	bíis	‘child.Pl’
Verb	z̄	‘to run’	z̄dné	‘running’
	z̄yá	‘ran’	z̄t-z̄t	‘athlete’
Adverb	t̄’út̄	‘quickly from t̄’		
Ideophone	nùg -nùg	‘texture: ‘soft and fluffy’	nùg	?
Ideophone	t̄t-t̄t-t̄t....	‘sound of movement’	t̄t	?

The examples in (21) are demonstrations of various inflectional affixes used by nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs for different purposes. Ideophones on the contrary do not take any form of inflections.

Again, reduplication in Kúsáàl is used for marking iteration, intensification as well as pluractionality. This derivational function of reduplication in Kúsáàl is noticeable in all grammatical categories with ideophones being no exception. Example (22) is a demonstration of various forms and functions of reduplicated words in selected lexical categories in Kúsáàl (see Dingemans 2015a: 955).

(22)

Example	Meaning	Input	Output
bíl→bíbís	pluractional	Adjective	Exactly one word
z̄ → z̄z̄-z̄z̄	Intensification	Verb	Exactly one word
	iteration/pluractional		
z̄z̄→z̄t-z̄t	Nominalization	Verb	Exactly one word
t̄’út̄→t̄’út̄t̄	Intensification	Adverb	One syllable

⁵ It is important to add that there are languages, e.g. Zulu, in which ideophones inflect for both tense and aspect (see Voeltz 1971, Doke 1963). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this.

tàt-tàt→tət-tət-tət...	Iteration/ intensification	Ideophone	At least one word
nùg-nùg→nùg-nùg-nùg ...	Intensification	Ideophone	At least one word
kí'→kí'-kí'	Pluractional	Ideophone	Exactly one word

The distinction in the use of reduplication in ideophones in comparison with other lexical categories is dependent on their modes of applications. Whereas reduplication in other categories are less depictive in nature reduplication in ideophones are exclusively for depictive purposes.

(23) **Bīng lá zán nááf lá dūóé mɔr gīlib tət-tət-tət⁶.**
 child DEF hold cow DEF get_up carry roam IDEO
 'The child took hold of the cow and started walking around.'

(24) **Bà kpem zān'ās ká tānsīd búŋ-búŋ.**
 3SG continue refuse and shout IDEO
 'They kept shouting strongly and insistently.'

(25) **O zúóbíd wúsà lébìg fárr-fárr.**
 3SG hair all become IDEO
 'All his/her hair turned very white'

(26) **Gúŋgóm lá bŋknè nùg-nùg.**
 cotton DEF feel IDEO
 'The cotton is very soft'

The ideophone *tət-tət-tət* in (23) creates a strong mental representation of the act of movement. The ideophone *fárr-fárr* in (25) means 'very white' with the stem '*fárr*' meaning 'bright or clean'. The ideophone *nug-nug* in (26) forms a collocation with *gŋgóm* 'cotton'. It expresses the texture and feeling of the cotton.

In addition, the stems of categories like verbs, adjectives and nouns are mostly used in natural speech and it is not typical to have a verb or an adjective triplicated in a reduplication process.

(27) Verbs: ***kūōs kūōs kūōs** 'sell-RED', ***vāāē vāāē vāāē** 'collect-RED',
 ***dī dī dī** 'eat-RED'

Adjectives: ***bībíbís** 'little-RED' ***fiíns fiíns fiíns** 'small-RED'

Conversely, it is unusual to use the stem of an inherently reduplicated ideophone on its own. The normal usage is to have them in at least two words and if possible reduplicated in a manner that reflects the situations being depicted.

⁶ Ideophones such as *tət-tət*, and *nug-nug* can be classified as inherently reduplicated ideophones but they can further be triplicated and quadruplicated till their desired effect are achieved. Others such as *ki'* is only reduplicated to *ki'→ki'-ki'* for pluractional purposes.

- (28) Ideophones: **tàt-tàt-tàt-tàt.....** **?tət**
 nùg-nùg-nùg **?nùg**

Also, reduplication is used in adverbs to mark intensity. In these instances, the stem has a direct link with the reduplicated form: *tɔ'ɔ* 'quick' → *tɔ'ɔtɔ* 'quickly', *kii* 'steadily' → *kiiki* 'very steadily', *baanlim* 'slowly' → *baanlim baanlim* 'very slowly'. It is not typical to say **tɔɔtɔtɔ*, **tɔɔtɔtɔ*, **kiikiiki*, **kiikiki*. Reduplicated adverbs often involve instances of partial reduplication: *tɔ'ɔ* 'quick' → *tɔ'ɔtɔ* 'quickly', *kii* 'steadily' → *kiiki* 'very steadily'. On the contrary, reduplicated ideophones are always total reduplication. No instance of partial reduplication has so far been cited: *tat-tat-tat* 'sound of movement, *farr-farr-farr* 'very white'.

Another morphological distinction between ideophones in Kúsáàl and other lexical categories is evident when the former usually lengthen vowels and consonants at word final positions whereas the latter have the tendency of deleting vowels at word final positions. Lexical items in Kúsáàl can be grouped in two forms: Long and Short forms. The long forms are used in questions and negations and the short forms are used elsewhere. The short forms are predicted to be derived from the long counterparts by deleting their final vowels. Conversely, ideophones lengthen the sounds that occur at word final positions.

- (29)

Category	Main entry		Derived entry	Gloss
Relative Pronoun	kàné	→	kàn	's/he who, which, who'
Article	sí'élá	→	sí'él	'something, anything'
Noun	Kúgírì	→	kúgír	'stone'
Noun	kú'ómì	→	kú'óm	'water'
Verb	lɛ́bìsì	→	lɛ́bis	'to return'
Verb	nyɛɛnɛ	→	nyɛɛn	'to shine'
Adverb	fɔ́ɔnɛ	→	fɔ́ɔn	'silent'
Adverb	Àgólá	→	àgól	'loudly'
Ideophone	Kímm	→	kimmmm	'firmly'
Ideophone	Siyàà	→	siyaaaaaà	'still, calm'
Ideophone	gbír gbír	→	gbirrrrrr gbirrrrrrrr	'sound made by Billygoat'

Ideophones in Kúsáàl resist any form of deletion, be it vowels or consonants, for the reason that they mostly mimic specific sounds. Any form of deletion will distort the exact representation of the target sound. Ideophones that end with vowels, nasals, and the trill /r/ resort to the lengthening of these sounds instead of deleting them. Ideophones in Kúsáàl therefore show revealing morphological features that separate them from other lexical categories.

2.3. The syntax of ideophones in Kúsáàl

As previously indicated, a link can be established between some ideophones in Kúsáàl and lexical categories such as adjectives and adverbs. This relationship is traced to the syntax of these lexical items. Some ideophones and adjectives as well as adverbs of manner perform modificational functions as can be seen from (30-31).

(30)

Noun	Adjective	NP
ńín.dáán land.owner.Sg 'landowner/native'	súm 'good'	ńíndáán súm land.owner.Sg good.Sg 'good landowner'
ńín.ńím land.owner.Pl 'landowner'	súmá 'good.Pl'	ńíńím súmá landowner.Pl good.Pl 'good landowners'

(31)

Noun	Ideophone	Noun Ideophone
ńńńdaan poverty.owner.Sg 'poor man'	tàpù f 'penniless'	ńńńdaan tàpù f poverty.owner.Sg pennilessØ 'penniless poorman'
ńńńdim poverty.owner.Pl 'poor men'	tàpù f 'penniless'	ńńńdim tàpù f 'poor man.PL pennilessØ 'penniless poor men'

The phrase structure of the nouns modified by the adjective and the nouns modified by the ideophone, as represented in (31), are identical except for the subtle morphological distinction of number on the adjective but not the ideophone.

(31) i. NP [NP_{Num} [AdjP_{Num}]]ii. NP [NP_{Num} [IdeoP]]

In like manner, some ideophones in Kúsáàl modify verbs. They occur post verbally and also undergo displacement to sentence initial positions in ways similar to adverbs of manner.

(32) a. **Bà zó yí wíém wíém.**
3PL run.PERF go_out.PERF IDEO
'They swiftly ran out (vanished in thin air).'

b. **Wíém, wíém kà yà zó yí.** Command
IDEO FOC 2PL run go_out
'Run out immediately/Vanish like the wind!'

c. **Bà túm tú'úmàlá t'ót ó.**
3PL work.PERF work-NOM DEF quickly
'They did the work quickly.'

d. **T'ót ó kà yà túm tú'úmàlá.** Command
quickly FOC 2PL work work-NOM DEF
'Quickly do the work!'

Just as adjectives, the syntactic characteristics of adverbs of manner cannot be easily delineated from ‘ideophones of manner’. Their differences are mainly seen from their morphology as well as their phonology and semantics.

Another trend worthy of comment is the formation of set collocations by some ideophones with other lexical categories. Even though data available for this study does not show overwhelming instances of collocation, I think it is still relevant to mention its presence since it forms part of the overall observations made in this study. For instance, the ideophone *ki* which connotes ‘silence’ usually forms a collocation with the adjective *fɔn* ‘mute’. Other ideophones mentioned elsewhere that form collocations include *nug-nug* ‘fluffy/soft’ with *gúngùm* ‘cotton/thread’ and *nɔndaan* ‘poor man’ with *tàpiif* ‘pennilessly poor’. It will be premature to form a generalization of pattern regarding ideophones and collocations since data available on this has to be extended. However, currently available data seems to show a trend of noun+ ideophone and adjective + ideophone collocations. This is not too far-fetched since it is established that some ideophones in Kúsáàl perform modificational functions.

3.4. The semantics of ideophones in Kúsáàl

A unique feature that sets ideophones in Kúsáàl apart from other lexical categories is their semantics. A close observation of the interpretations of examples used in this work reveals the use of series of words in attempts to carve explanations or meanings of the ideophones used. Ideophones among other characteristics are words that convey sensory imageries and efforts at explaining them involve more depiction than descriptions (see Dingemanse 2015b). Below are instances of some of the series of words used in describing ideas expressed by the following ideophones.

(33)

Ideophone	Meaning
gbéúú	‘overhanging cliff, mountains about to fall’
tàt-tàt-tàt	‘sound of acting hurriedly’
sòndùg sòndùg	‘in separate groups’
sóéé	‘disappearing completely’
Faán	‘puff/sound of a suddenly expelled breath’

The meaning and pragmatic function of ideophones in Kúsáàl has significant impact in distinguishing them from all other major word classes in the language. The difficulty in getting exact paraphrases in attempts to interpret ideophones compared to other lexical categories cannot be overemphasized. It is difficult if not impossible to paraphrase ideophones with other words in Kúsáàl without an extensive resort to the additional use of gestures, facial expressions, mimicry or sensory imagery. In the study of ideophones in Asian languages, Diffloth (1972:441) indicates that “many speakers cannot find exact paraphrases and prefer to repeat the ideophone with a more distinct elocution, accompanied by facial expressions and body gestures if appropriate”. In trying to explain the meaning of an ideophone in Kúsáàl, speakers use several sentences and, in most instances, they have to repeat the ideophone and try using it in context to further enhance the interpretation of the meaning of the ideophonic word. However, this difficult encounter is absent in defining or explaining the meaning of other categories such as nouns, adverbs, adjectives and verbs. The profound use of gesture was illustrated with the use of the ideophone *húúúmm* which is accompanied by a cringing look on the face with the fingers blocking the nose from inhaling more of a bad odour. Other ideophones such as the following are used for further illustration.

- (34) i. **nùg-nùg**: The five finger tips are closely brought together with the tip of the thumb continuously rubbing the surfaces of the other finger tips to connote the texture: ‘soft and fluffy’
- ii. **tàt-tàt-tàt**: walking hurriedly in a flip flop slippers such that it will be creating a tat-tat-tat sound
- iii. **sòndòg sòndòg**: putting one’s fingers together in a curved manner and stretching the hand like a hockey stick and pointing it to the speaker in representing a group of people. This is repeated severally representing several groups of people
- iv. **sóéé**: bringing the two palms together such that one is above the other, one then rubs/brushes the palm on top over the one below in a very swift manner.

These are some gestures that are subconsciously used by speakers alongside the ideophones in casual speech. The connotations of these ideophones (34) were illustrated using these gestures by three native speakers consulted to explain them.

Equally, there are instances when people have to use context to define ideophones, especially when it has to do with sound symbolism. A sensory iconic ideophone is best conveyed in context for the most effective meaning to be derived. Speakers therefore repeat the sound in the scenario when it is best used in casual speech as illustrated with *pànr pànr* and *bùŋ-bùŋ* below.

(35) **Sáá ián’ádi tãnsĩd pànr-pànr.**
 rain fly/jump shout-INPERF crickle-crackle.IDEO
 Lit.: ‘Rain falling and shouting *pànr-pànr*.’

(36) **Bà kpem zãn’ãs ká tãnsĩd búŋ-buŋ.**
 3SG continue refuse CONJ shout-IMPERF IDEO
 Lit.: ‘They kept shouting back *bùŋ-bùŋ*.’

Another approach used to explain ideophones is by using their collocates. Ideophones that form collocation are easily understood by the nature of their collocates. Taking *nùg-nùg* for instance, the sense of touch expressed by the use of this ideophone is so unique that it describes perfectly *gù ngù m* ‘cotton’ and not any other entity.

Furthermore, the use of ideophone as a form of indirection is in itself a way of conveying a strong mental imagery necessary in enhancing the interpretation of the ideophonic word. There is wide cross linguistic usage of ideophones to mock and speak ill of people in societies (Dingemanse 2015b:225; Blench 2010; Bodomo 2006; Samarin 1969). The ideophone *tàpiif* is one such example in Kúsáàl. It describes someone as pennilessly poor that that individual is visualized as the poorest of all poor people. One can strip such a person naked and not a single penny is expected to drop from the pocket. The iconic use of ideophones in this way is so unique that it is hard to think of any other category of words that convey such picturesque vocabulary in the language.

Finally, it is argued that the use of ‘depictive gestures’ (Dingemanse 2015b) coupled with the repetition of the ideophone in context are tools that help in arriving at a definition or interpretation that enhances deeper understanding of the ideophone. Even though one cannot point to entities (nouns) or properties (adverbs and adjectives) in the interpretation of ideophones, there is a unique semantic approach to the interpretation of ideophones via gestures, mimicry, sensory imagery and facial expressions something that makes them different from other lexical categories in the language.

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to establish whether ideophones exhibit links with other lexical categories in Kúsààl or they form a distinct group of words on their own. The findings are thus summarised as below.

Syntactically, ideophones in Kúsààl do not perform functions similar to those of nouns and verbs. However, they perform modificational roles in ways similar to adjectives and adverbs of manner. This observation leads to the assertion that ideophones which perform modificational roles in Kúsààl show syntactic correlations with adjectives and adverbs. Nevertheless, the morphology, phonology as well as the semantics of these ideophones are distinct from adjectives and adverbs in the language.

Morphologically, ideophones in Kúsààl do not ascribe to any derivational or inflectional processes compared to other lexical categories in the language. Unlike adjectives and nouns, ideophones do not inflect for number. In addition, whereas ideophones resort to lengthening of their final sounds, other lexical categories in Kúsààl resort to deletion of their final vowel sounds

Phonologically, ideophones in Kúsààl show distinct properties that set them out from other groups of words. They undergo final nasal lengthening whereas other lexical words like nouns and verbs do not ascribe to this process. Tone has also been shown to be phonemic in verbs and nouns but not in cases involving ideophones. The common phonological process between ideophones and other categories of words is reduplication. Again, whereas reduplication in adverbs, adjectives, and verbs does not normally exceed the repetition of the base form twice, ideophones, on the contrary, allow the repetition of the base form in a manner that captures the exact sounds, meanings and effects they are intended to portray.

Semantically, ideophones, as presented by the data and argument, exhibit distinct semantic features compared to all other categories. By their nature, ideophones do not point to specific entities or properties in the world as other word classes do. The meanings of ideophones are shrouded in gestures, imagery, mimics as well as sound symbolism.

In general, the findings in this study indicate that ideophones in Kúsààl are identifiable by their distinctive morphological, phonological as well as semantic characteristics which separate them from other groups of words. However, they perform modificational roles in ways similar to adjectives and adverbs. The table below summarises the claim made so far where the sign (√) marks identical functional relationship between ideophones and other categories and (x) represents the absence of both functional and grammatical relationships between ideophones and the category that carries the mark.

Table1.

Lexical categories	Nouns	Adjectives	Verbs	Adverbs(manner)
Ideophones				
Syntax	x	√	x	√
Phonology	x	x	x	x
Morphology	x	x	x	x
Semantics	x	x	x	x

Abbreviations

IDEO	Ideophone	DEF	Definite Article
SG.	Singular	PL	Plural
PERF	Perfective	LINK	Linker
CONJ	Conjunction	FOC	Focus marker
RED	Reduplication	NP	Noun Phrase
Ideop	Ideophone Phrase	NOM	Nominalized

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