

Diachronic Shifts in Word Class for Sound Ideophones  
Ronald P. Schaefer and Francis O. Egbokhare  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and University of Ibadan

**Key Words:** sound ideophones, diachronic path, cause-effect serial verb, Emai, Edoid

As a word class, ideophones are marked forms that depict sensory imagery (Dingemanse 2012, Dingemanse and Akita 2017). They stand apart from more prosaic word classes like verb and noun, since they exhibit special phonotactics, expressive morphology, and collocational pairing with a single/small verb class. As with nouns and verbs, ideophonic forms transition diachronically to and from other word classes. In Africa, verb is often proposed as primary source (Childs 1989, Creissels 2001) and adverb as principal target (Newman 1968, 2001). Beyond this general characterization, verb as source remains unarticulated. To fill this gap, we propose a diachronic trajectory from verb to adverbial and then to ideophone.

To illustrate, we employ data from an Edoid language of West Africa. Emai is an under-described speech variety spoken across ten Nigerian villages. It manifests lexical and grammatical tone in addition to simple and complex predicates. The latter construct as verb plus particle or verbs in series.

A clear majority of Emai ideophones denote sound images. Synchronically, they are found in simple clauses, i.e., form *khùó* follows a verb and its direct object: *óje* <sup>↓</sup>*híán* *úkélé* *khùó* [Oje RPST\cut\PFV morsel whoosh] ‘Oje cut a morsel with a whoosh.’ Adverbial status arises from canonical position (post-verb-phrase) and replacive high tone on preceding direct object *úkélé*. In clauses with no adverbial, object tone is low (*óje* <sup>↓</sup>*híán* *ùkèlè* ‘Oje cut a morsel’).

As source construction for ideophones we propose V2 position in a verb series of cause-effect (Aikhenvald 2006, 2018). This series often expresses change of material or positional state: *òjè* *hóó* *ólí* *úkpùn* *fúán* [Oje NPST\wash\PFV ART cloth become.clean\PFV] ‘Oje has washed the cloth clean’. V1 *hóó* expresses cause; V2 *fúán* conveys effect/result. Verb status for *fúán* is signaled by preceding direct object tone, which remains lexical (high low *úkpùn*). We hypothesize that sound expressing forms originated as intransitive V2 in series with transitive V1 verbs of contact by impact. As happens with cause-effect serializations, the direct object preceding V2 manifests a switch function; it is direct object of V1 but logical subject of V2.

After reanalysis as adverbials, ideophonic forms became optionally disjoined from their contact verb clause. Resulting paratactic structures show an isolated ideophone (*óje* <sup>↓</sup>*híán* *ùkèlè*. *khùó*. ‘Oje cut a morsel. Whoosh.’) or an ideophone in construction with sound verb *hón* ‘hear’ and 2nd person subject (*óje* <sup>↓</sup>*híán* *ùkèlè*. *ú* <sup>↓</sup>*hón-í* *khùó*. ‘Oje cut a morsel. You heard a whoosh.’)

Synchronic remnants of verb status remain evident. When ideophonic *khùó* occupies clause initial topic position, which requires a nominal, it manifests an obligatory deverbalizing prefix *ì-*: *ì-khùó*, *óje* *híán* *ùkèlè* ‘With a whoosh, Oje cut a morsel.’ This same prefix is regularly employed to nominalize verbs; no other adverbial types are similarly marked. When altering information flow in traditional oral narrative discourse, ideophonic forms assume a tripartite sequence of ideophone-isolates: (*óje* <sup>↓</sup>*híán* *ùkèlè*. *khùó*. *khùó*. *khùó* ‘Oje cut a morsel. Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.’). This function is usually limited to verb forms: *yán* *à gbé*. *yán* *à gbé*. *yán* *à gbé*. [3PL HAB dance] ‘They dance. They dance. They dance.’

To conclude, we examine Emai ideophone emergence in the broader typological context of V > ADV grammaticalization, where verb reduplication has appeared to dominate but where we also find another link to verb serialization since manner ideophones appear derived from manner-motion serial verb constructions.

## References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2006. Serial verb constructions in typological perspective. In A. Y. Aikhenvald & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Serial Verb Constructions: A Cross-linguistic Typology*. 1-68. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2018. *Serial Verbs*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Akita, Kimi. 2017. The linguistic integration of Japanese ideophones and its typological implications. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 62.2: 314-334.
- Akita, Kimi & Mark Dingemanse. 2019. Ideophones (Mimetics, Expressives). In Mark Aronoff (ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. 1-18. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Childs, G. Tucker. 1989. Where do ideophones come from? *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 19.2: 55-76.
- Childs, G. Tucker. 1994. African ideophones. In L. Hinton, J. Nichols & J. Ohala (eds.), *Sound Symbolism*. 178-204. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Childs, G. Tucker. 2014. Constraints on violating constraints: How languages reconcile the twin dicta of “Be different” and “Be recognizably language.” *Pragmatics and Society* 5.3: 341-354.
- Creissels, Denis. 2001. Setswana ideophones as uninflected predicative lexemes. In F. K. Erhard Voeltz & Christa Kilian-Katz. *Ideophones*. 75-86. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2011. *The Meaning and Use of Ideophones in Siwu*. Munich: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2012. Advances in the cross-linguistic study of ideophones. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6/10: 654-672.
- Dingemanse, Mark & Kimi Akita. 2017. An inverse relation between expressiveness and grammatical integration: On the morphosyntactic typology of ideophones, with special reference to Japanese. *Journal of Linguistics* 53.3: 501-532.
- Doke, C. M. 1935. *Bantu Linguistic Terminology*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- Franco, Ludovico. 2017. L-syntax and phono-symbolism: On the status of ideophones in complex predicates. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 62.2: 243-279.
- Newman, Paul. 1968. Ideophones from a syntactic point of view. *Journal of West African Languages* 5: 107-117.
- Newman, Paul. 2001. Are ideophones really as weird and extra-systematic as linguists make them out to be? In F. K. Erhard Voeltz & Christa Kilian-Katz (eds.), *Ideophones*. 251-258. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Schachter, Paul & Timothy Shopen. 2007. Parts-of-speech systems. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description, Volume 1* [Second Edition] 1-60. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Voeltz, F. K. Erhard & Christa Kilian-Katz. 2001. *Ideophones*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Zwicky, Arnold M. & Geoff K. Pullum. 1987. Plain morphology and expressive morphology. In J. Aske, Natasha Beery, Laura Michaelis & H. Filip (eds.), *BLS*. 330-340. Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistic Society.