

Sounds like an adverb?: Morphosyntactic properties of ideophones in Amazonian Kichwa

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Ideophones are ‘marked words that depict sensory imagery’ (Dingemanse 2011), which stand out on the basis of their phonological and morphosyntactic properties, as well as the kind of meaning they convey. These depictive words are relatively common cross-linguistically, but have thus far been granted limited attention from both descriptive and theoretical perspectives (cf. Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz 2001; Dingemanse 2011, Reiter 2012; Dingemanse & Akita 2017).

This talk focuses on ideophones in Tena Kichwa, a Quechuan language of the Amazonian Kichwa dialect cluster, spoken in Ecuador. Amazonian Kichwa ideophones have previously been analysed as ‘sound-symbolic adverbs’, but also as ‘markers of aspect’ (Nuckolls 1996). In the talk, I clarify the previous descriptions by providing a through corpus-based analysis of the morphosyntactic properties of Amazonian Kichwa ideophones.

I base my analysis on a ca. 20h corpus of naturalistic spoken Kichwa, transcribed and translated into Spanish by native speakers. My analysis has shown that Tena Kichwa, sound-symbolic expressions most often describe manner, sound, type of action, or direction, speed or characteristics of movement, and that they vary with respect to their integration into the predicate. Consider:

(1)

yapa tsi tsi shamu-sha... mana gustu wata-ri-n...
very IDEO IDEO come-COREF NEG nice tie-ANTIC-3

‘[the string] goes *tsi tsi* a lot (it slides in repetitive, short movements)...it doesn't tie well’

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(2)

Mashti machete, ichilla machete-wa, tias tias tias tias
what.is.it machete small machete-INSTR IDEO IDEO IDEO IDEO

‘Whatsitsname...machete, [you have to form the recipient] with little machete *tias tias tias tias*... (with a series of short, fast blows).’

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In (1), the ideophone occurs pre-verbally in the canonical adverbial position, and is modified by the degree modifier *yapa* (‘very’). By contrast, the ideophone in (2) is post-verbal and detached from the rest of the clause by a pause. In both examples the ideophones expresses a complex ideas associated with manner and path of movement.

On the basis of the corpus, the similarities and differences between Tena Kichwa ideophones and ‘standard’ adverbs can be summarised by the following points:

- (i) Both ‘standard’ adverbs and ideophones occur most frequently in pre-verbal position, as in (1) but ideophones are more frequently post-verbal or detached from the

predicate, as in (2);

- (ii) Ideophones are ‘performateively foregrounded’ (Nuckolls 1996) e.g. by means of changes in pitch, phonation, or by vowel lengthening, much more frequently than ‘standard’ adverbs;
- (iii) ‘Standard’ adverbs are mostly derived from adjectives by means of the suffix *-ta* (ACC). Only a very small set of underived manner adverbs is attested in the corpus. By contrast, the corpus reveals a large set of ideophones that need no additional morphology to function as verb modifiers;
- (iv) Derived adverbs are never modified by limitative enclitic *=lla*, which occurs frequently on ideophones and non-derived adverbs.

I will illustrate the above properties of ideophones and adverbs with audio-visual clips extracted from the corpus. This will also allow me to discuss the association between gesture and the more expressive instances of ideophone use.

Moreover, I will show that the discussion of Tena Kichwa data is relevant to the current research into cross-linguistic properties of sound-symbolic expressions. In their work on morphosyntactic typology of ideophones, Dingemanse and Akita (2017) recently claimed that there is an inverse correlation between expressiveness and syntactic integration, backing this observation with data from Japanese. The properties of Tena Kichwa ideophones provide additional evidence in support of the cross-linguistic validity of this claim.

References

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