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The Ideophone

A Linguistic and Literary Device in Gbaya and
Sango with Reference to Zande
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The ideophone which I call in the title of my paper a linguistic and literary device, is perhaps more correctly a linguistic item with special functions as a literary device. A definition frequently cited for the ideophone is that given by C.M. Doke in his study, *Bantu Linguistic Terminology*:

A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualitative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state, or intensity.¹

Although the Bantu languages might seem to be quite irrelevant in a discussion of Gbaya, Sango, and Zande, they do appear relatively close together in Greenberg's classification of African languages.² They are all within the Niger-Congo family, Bantu under the Benue-Congo subgroup, I.A.5., and the other three under the Adamawa-Eastern subgroup, I.A.6. In the Eastern branch of the Adamawa-Eastern subgroup, Gbaya is placed within the group of languages numbered one, Sango among the group numbered three, and Zande in group number four. Of greater importance, however, is the fact that the ideophone occurs very widely as a feature of spoken language. It has been attested in languages scattered across Africa as well as in others such as English and French where it is found most commonly as onomatopoeia in the expressive style of the comic strip and the comic book.³ However, in spite of its almost universal implications, the ideophone must ultimately be isolated and described as any other linguistic item within the context of the grammar in which it occurs.⁴

In the 1962 volume of *Sudan Notes and Records*, E.E. Evans-Pritchard wrote a short article called 'Ideophones in Zande',⁵ in which he gives a sampling of Zande ideophones and then observes that they are all either 'adjectives or adverbs or both, adding in parenthesis, 'at least in English translation they correspond to adjectives and adverbs'. From his class of ideophones he excludes onomatopoeia, interjections, and duplicated forms of the verb, concluding with the semantic evaluation that ideophones are 'poetry in ordinary language'. His purpose in the article is to draw attention to the ideophone as an item worthy of further study.

Consistent with this interest in the ideophone, the reader of Evans-Pritchard's collection of tales, *The Zande Trickster*, will find frequent Zande items retained in the translation.⁶ The meaning may be given in a footnote or the item may be judged meaningless or not even mentioned at all. On numerous occasions there are items appearing in footnotes with paraphrased glosses that seem to be adjectival or adverbial in structure. There are also words which are specifically identified as onomatopoeia. But the translation of the tales is not presented as a linguistic study, and the editor restricts himself to the task of translation, omitting all descriptive analysis.

If one looks up in a Zande dictionary or grammar the items to which his attention is drawn through Evans-Pritchard's work, he finds an amazing array of terms for a series of items that appear to be basically similar. C.R. Lagae in his grammar devotes individual sections to the adjective and the adverb but nowhere is an approximation of the ideophone described.⁷ Duplicated verbs are included under the adverb, but these were explicitly rejected by Evans-Pritchard from his category of ideophones. In the French-Zande and Zande-French dictionaries of Lagae and Plas and the Zande and English dictionary of Canon and Gore a great number of items appear under varied and sometimes conflicting terms.⁸

Vogovogo, 'loose, loosely', is considered by Lagae and Plas to be both adverb and adjective; to Canon and Gore it is an adjective. *Ndendende* is called both adverb and adjective by Lagae and Plas; Canon and Gore list it as an adverb meaning 'closely, tightly, packed full'. *Dégeredégere*, 'ample, full', is an adjective in Lagae and Plas, it is both adjective and adverb to Canon and Gore and means 'swaggeringly'. *Kakaka* is considered by both sources to be adverb and adjective, and Lagae and Plas give the following examples:

kù ki ti kakaka

kakaka nduge

'il tombe d'un trait'

('he falls flat, right to the ground')

'un voyage d'un trait, sans arrêter'

('a journey without stops')

Canon and Gore list a category called the intensive adverb of which *kpou* 'thoroughly, absolutely', is an example.

mi nizundu roko si ki vuru avura kpou

'I washed my cloth and it became thoroughly white'

A further example of their intensive adverb, *etuetu*, used with the verb *onga* 'to breathe', and meaning 'pantingly, gaspingly, breathlessly', is simply called an adverb by Lagae and Plas.

lpu is listed by Lagae and Plas as an interjection with onomatopoeic characteristics even though its syntactic construction appears to parallel the above sentence patterns with *kakaka* and *kpou*.

si nati sende kpu

'cela tombe à terre pouf!'

('that falls to the ground pouf!')

Canon and Gore also include an onomatopoeic category with *wa kpua*, 'with a tearing, rending sound'.

ngua ki siri ki ti wa kpua

'the tree then split and fell with a rending sound'

Surprisingly, however, Canon and Gore twice list *kpukutukpukutu*, as two separate lexical entries, first as an adjective with the gloss 'rough, uneven' and secondly as an adverb, 'with a thudding sound, with sound of galloping hoofs (such as a buffalo)'. The galloping of *kpukutukpukutu* would seem in fact to be quite as onomatopoeic as the rending of *kpua*.

Thus, from dictionary and text it is evident that certain descriptive items occur in Zande which have not been systematically analyzed either from a linguistic or a literary perspective, tasks which must be undertaken within the context of Zande language and tradition. However, Zande and Gbaya are related languages and the features of the one may prove to be of comparative interest and theoretical significance to the other. From form and function to meaning and usage, the characteristics of the Zande ideophone appear to be very similar to the features of the Gbaya and Sango ideophone.

The most apparent feature of the Gbaya ideophone is that its phonology and shape do not always fall within the same bounds as those of other lexical items. Or the reverse may be stated, namely that no other group of lexical items is characterized by unique phonological features.⁹

The velar nasal /ŋ/ is a Gbaya phoneme, but its distribution is restricted to medial and final position in all items except the ideophone where it may occur initially.

ŋee

'sound of gnashing teeth'

ŋgi

'suddenly' (as to uncover something with a quick motion)

ŋáyán

'the motion of rapid climbing'

The labio-dental flap /ɸ/ occurs only in ideophones. It could accordingly be considered a marginal phoneme, but to do so would be to imply that the ideophone was marginal or less than equal with other lexical items.

íaa

'sound of hitting something soft as rotten wood'

íuu

'sound of water breaking and rushing through a dam'

hívík

'sound of plunging under something as under water'

kuúúúúú

'mad rushing, great speed as a man running or an automobile'

The shape of the ideophone is the same as the remainder of the Gbaya lexicon except in a few polysyllabic items where consonant clusters that are otherwise very rare or nonexistent occur across syllable boundary.

ðákfalak

'falling limply in a heap'

kámkpéé

'stopping abruptly to stand stock still'

sákpámgbán

'lying on the ground or scraping one's feet on the ground'

zakvak dilak

'turning around suddenly to run'

Polysyllabic ideophones may frequently be analyzed as two or more items. Except in compound ideophone structures where two or more independent items occur in succession, the constituent parts

kili wili
wasq wuzuu

'something falling head over heels'
'thick, short, in disarray' (as hair)

To define the Gbaya ideophone, the above criteria may be taken as the preliminary identifying factors. The items which fit these criteria may then be analysed according to formal and syntactic characteristics. These features would then serve as further definition to enable identification of those ideophones which did not exhibit the phonological features first observed.

Formally it may be observed that ideophones are subject to the processes of (1) lengthening and (2) reduplication.¹¹ The function of the process is to modify the semantic character of the item. Lengthening indicates duration of time or continued action. This duration may be longer or shorter and correlates generally with the length of the ideophone relative to its normal short form.

2.42. *n'aa dük sém*
'and he stayed still a while'

8.6. *mí bē nē ká'm zóká ðe féeé, hé ! kam ám jɔ́ɔ sósós kádf'e*

Implicit in the last example is the concept of intensity. Not only does the old hunter quietly gaze at his kill, but he intently feasts his eyes on it thinking of the cassava that he will eat with its meat.

A second type of lengthening is internal lengthening. It is much less common than final lengthening and is closely related to emphasis as expressed by stress.

8.6. *dáa! bé ká rut, ká a yéè kọ hẹ*
 'father! then rut it slipped into a hole here'

8.6. *ɛma bẹ gbóśá gbangba dúkà só wó bẹ ká rúút! ká a yéè*
 'there was an old hole and rúut! it dived in!'

Just as the relative quantity of the lengthened syllabic is significant, so the doubling, tripling, or multiple repetition of an item corresponds to the duration of time or action. For action repeated two or three times, the ideophone is doubled.

8.1. *a gusd jf ne dɔnɔ toptop*
'he hit that one with the hammer *toptop*'

8.1. *gbasɔ yɔna wiɗi tɔnɔ orop orop*
'Gbasɔ crunched the fruit a couple of times'

81 *hi k'á'í' wá' a'p' a'p'* For repeated action, the ideophone may be repeated with occasional partial repetition several times.

8.1. *bi kó'l yáŋ orop orop orop*
'he picked some and took several bites'

8.1. *gbasɔ pii kɛ nú yɔŋ orop orop o o orop*
'Gbasɔ tossed it into his mouth and chewed and chewed'

In the preceding examples, the ideophone could occur singly alone, but in the following, the single CV item would rarely occur less than three times as in the first sentence.

8.6. *sám né war tiiti sí kó zér mé sán zú ferde kó mbóróró*
and then I ran on tippy-toe tiiti down into the valley on a Mbororo cowpath'

8.6. *be ka a a pli'i wurwurwurwurwurwurwurwurwurwur be ka a gomá*
'and then here it came padding along wurwurwurwurwurwurwurwurwurwur'

[illegible][illegible]

Frequently the tripled ideophone occurs in multiples of three. A deliberate tripling effect is then created by a tonal pattern of high-low-high as contrasted with the single triplet such as *orop orop orop* which retains the lexical tone on each item.

8.1. *te a yɔ́n hóro mé gbin'í ngéí ngéí ngéí ngéí ngéí*
'the tree was creaking again as it was about fall ngéí ngéí ngéí, ngéí ngéí ngéí'

8.1. *be' te a yáw'i* ngéi' ngei ngei', ngéi' ngei ngei', ngéi' ngei ngei'
'and the tree was creaking ngéi' ngei ngei', ngéi' ngei ngei', ngéi' ngei ngei''

In series the final triplet may be partial, as though the narrator wants to give the full pattern, but through impatience to continue his tale he leaves the final item for his listeners to fill in.

8.1. *wa a píl iyǽi hǎn hǎn hǎn, hǎn hǎn hǎn, hǎn hǎn*
'and then they were coming with great bounding leaps *hǎn hǎn hǎn, hǎn hǎn hǎn, hǎn hǎn*'

In the repeated series *hururururur...* and *bababa...* the action is being performed by single characters. *hór hór hór* in triplets, however, suggests both that the action is repeated and that it is performed by more than one character. Thus a second function of reduplication is to indicate multiple actors or objects. The following example was used in context to indicate that the husky and fat fish were selected from among the rest for the boy.

10.1. *kpóngóe-a kpóngóe-a*
'the husky husky ones'
Thirdly, reduplication may function to reveal intensity.

8.1. *ér né tja kparí kpari*
'its hands were very black'

8.1. *ér ghekú né bé gbé mɔ ɲgáɖ ɲgáɖ ɲgáɖ*
'Gheku's hands were bright red little things' (i.e. beautiful and clean)

In a few rare instances the same ideophone may be subject to single occurrence, to lengthening, and to reduplication. The Sango *ngbii* is one such item. In structure and occurrence it is an ideophone which has been incorporated to function as a verbal adjunctive, to use Samarin's terminology, or an adverb, and in its single adverb-ideophone form it means 'for a while'.¹²

lo sára kɔa ngbii et puis lo gwe
'he worked for a while and then left'

Lengthening indicates extended duration, and repetition indicates repeated action.
lo sára ksa ngbiii

lo sara ksa ngoni
'he worked quite a long while'
lo sara ngbi ngbi ngbi

lo sara ngol ngol ngol
'he did it again and again'

Gbaya ideophones are free forms in the sense that they require no special markers and are dependent on no introductory item for stabilization. It is true that they often occur following a conjunction when preceding the syntactic unit with which they are in construction or after the adverbial *hégó*, 'thus, like this', when following a predicate, but these items are not obligatory.

9.19 *ndéḍék ndéḍék i né ge?*

9.19. ndéḍék ndéḍék 'i né ge ?
'what is that *ndéḍék ndéḍék* ?

10.1. kpóngóe-a kpóngóe-a
'the husky husky ones'

Nominals are frequently derived from ideophones, and are then subject to all nominal affixation. These items, however, are then nominals in the strictest formal sense, and are ideophonic only in etymology.

<i>kpo-kpó</i>	'motorcycle'
<i>kutu-kutu</i>	'automobile'
<i>ndrén</i>	'the name of a certain old truck that roared <u>ndrén</u> in shifting gears'

In each of these nominals, if the item were repeated once additionally, they would no longer be nominals, but would revert to their ideophone status and function.

kpó kpó kpó 'the putter of a motorcycle's motor'
kutu kutu kutu 'the sound of an automobile engine'
ndrén ndrén 'the roar of double-clutching'

A verb may be derived from an ideophone, but in Gbaya this is a very restricted process.¹³

- 2.42. *sír né bé nán téné sír sír sír*
 '...he came shuffling his little feet along, shuffle shuffle shuffle, ...'
to-o zékédé zékédé zii to, to-o zékédé
 'a tale for fun, for fun, listen to a tale, a tale for fun'

The first example uses *sír* as a verb 'to shuffle' and then as an ideophone expressing the motion and sound of shuffling. The second example is part of the introductory formula preceding the performance of a tale. *zékédé* as an ideophone describes chuckling, as a verb it means 'to chuckle'.

Gbaya, unlike Sango with *ngbii*, does not incorporate ideophones into other function classes, although certain items are normally restricted to occurrence with specific lexical items such as *sír* which occurs with *mé tútuyé* to mean 'in the morning early'. But these restrictions are semantic and not grammatical.

Syntactically, the ideophone is an optional grammatical item. It is not an obligatory constituent of the primary syntactic Elements of Structure, to use M.A.K. Halliday's terminology. The Subject and Predicate, with their nominal and verbal exponents respectively, are the minimal obligatory syntactic Elements, with Object required in construction with certain verbs. The ideophone may be omitted, as is usually done in written text except in the most common and regular patterns such as *mé tútuyé sír*, 'very early in the morning'. In its stead, an adjectival or adverbial construction may be employed. Thus it is not surprising that Sango, although a great many of its speakers are of Gbaya origin and Gbaya has no shortage of ideophones, according to Samarin possesses very few of its own ideophones.¹⁴ It is a language which through pidginization and subsequent creolization apparently lost its ideophones so that as speakers today need to employ such lexical items, they borrow from their own mother tongues.

The ideophone functions as a modifying item. It may occur as part of a nominal construction or as part of a verbal construction. In the following examples the ideophone follows its nominal head with which it is in no way in agreement. It is a supplementary comment that is appositional in nature.

- 8.1. *tafú goro né gbé mo kéréké*
 'the spittle of Kola was bright red *kéréké*'
 8.1. *ér né tja kpári kpári*
 'its hands were very black *kpári kpári*'
 8.1. *ér gbekú né bé gbé mo ngázá ngázá ngázá*
 'Gbeku's hands were bright red little things'

Ideophones are frequently used with great imagination and creativity in Gbaya insults as Samarin has observed in his article, 'The Art of Gbaya Insults'.¹⁵

- ene zók yi sarkaka*
 'see his eyes that are not coordinated'
ene zók yi-a bar bar
 'look at his shining/glistening eyes'

An ideophone following its nominal head in this manner may be analyzed as part of a relative clause that need not occur in full form. The second example might read

- ene zók yi-a ne dúk bar bar*
 'look at his eyes that are shining/glistening'

The ideophone frequently occurs preceding the nominal head:

- dan kpókówókó zu-mé hé zú gp*
 'your tough round head like the head of a leopard'

- dan kpokowókó zu-mé hé zú g₁*
 'your tough round head like the head of a leopard'

- dan zékéké zu-mé dé ná*
 'your high pointed head is ugly'

- dan zekeké zu-mé dé ná*
 'your high pointed head is ugly'

- dan mgbákpádd zu-mé hé zu táná dé ná*
 'your flat wide head like a turtle's head is ugly'

- dan mgbakpádd zu-mé hé zu táná dé ná*
 'your flat wide head like a turtle's head is ugly'

When the ideophone precedes the nominal which it modifies, it is in construction with that nominal as is evidenced by the fact that it is subject to the rules of tone dissimilation. The preceding examples represent pairs of items which are in either high or low tone. The high tone item remains unchanged before a following low tone nominal, but a low tone item must slip up before a following low tone. In elicitation and questioning, the high tone form and the low tone form did not appear to be different in meaning. Perhaps for reasons of stress or area usage one was preferred over the other, but both were acceptable. The following example, however, is one that cannot occur in either of two tonal patterns. It is by nature a low tone item.

- dan bambá ím-mé hé ím díla gá wó*
 'your swollen chest is like the chest of a lion'

- dan bambán zan-mé hé zan ngubú*
 'your swollen stomach is like the stomach of a hippopotamus'

One characteristic for a classification of ideophones would be their tonal behavior, those restricted to a single lexical tone pattern, and those exhibiting dual tone behavior.

The normal predicator when the sentence comment is descriptive is the descriptive copula *ó*. It may be followed by an adjectival modifier or an ideophone.

- fara ó sélélé*
 'the place is quiet'
mo hí ó bambun
 'that thing is swollen/distended'
geé déé te sée kó-mé séká ó sarkaka'e ge ?
 'what happened to the shaft of your spear to make it split ?'

The relative clause given previously (p146) is an example of *dúk*, a verb 'to be, to stay', in copular function. Its plural form *yá* may also occur in this pattern.

- 2.42. *n'aa dúk sémm*
 'and he stayed still a while'
ene yá serú
 'you (plural) be quiet'
nútuwa dúk bóñ
 'the door is ajar'

- 2.42. *nín-dm ó gbiiiii*
 'my name is *gbiiiii* (the rumble of thunder)'

The last example above is formally within the above pattern, but its use is specifically literary (see following section II!). In giving one's name, the equational copula would normally occur equating the two sides of the sentence, but here in a deliberate play on the equational, the descriptive ideophone is used instead of a proper name.

The ideophone as it occurs in relation to a verbal is supplementary and appositional. It is optional because there is no formal criterion requiring its presence. It is appositional describing in its own way the action carried by the verbal. Its syntactic position depends on the speaker's stress and emphasis. If his focus is in the nature of the action itself, the ideophone will precede the Subject.

- 8.1. *be ndá kpóyón ! dno goma tík mbóóónu*
 'the *kpóyón* ! the hammer slipped out onto the ground'

- 8.6. *be ká rut ! ká yéé k₂*
 'and then *rut* ! it entered the hole'

- 8.1. *bé wól! a tika áso yi kádl*
'then wól! it had already dived into the water'
- 8.1. *yaa! dno bó ná*
'yaa! there was no hammer'

All but the final example, *yaa* which always occurs initially, could occur following the Predicate, should the narrator wish to emphasize the fact of the action over its description. The impact of the ideophone is then considerably reduced over its occurrence preceding Subject.

- dno goma tik mbáánu kpoyon*
'the hammer slipped out onto the ground *kpoyon*'
- ká a yéé kpo rut*
'then it entered the hole *rut*'
- a tika áso yi wól*
'it dived into the water *wól*'

In position, the ideophone follows the verb and the Object to which it relates. It precedes the second of serial verbs unless the narrator intends it to relate to both, and it most often precedes the Adjunct, although the speaker does have some freedom to place the ideophone in an appropriate position of stress.

- 8.1. *dák tokfólok pí sen nú kp* (serial verbs)
'pulled it limply threw it at the opening of the hole'
- 8.1. *bé a gusá kokolombaaze áakfalak gbé* (serial verbs)
'and he hit Kokolombaaze *áakfalak* and killed him'
- 8.1. *wa guia né gata in gba bjo wí káwán fet* (Adjunct)
'they warmed the little drums and the great drum until it sounded *káwán* completely' (with a sharp rhythmic sound)
- 8.1. *gbasq áaa nú hégo yán* (Adjunct)
'Gbasq spread his mouth like this *yán*' (wide open)

The *hégo*, 'thus, like this', of the final example above is a common but non-obligatory introductory item.

In the above three examples the ideophone is clearly optional and appositional even though semantically it may be said to complete an idea or notion of meaning. It may also be asked whether when it occurs initially, the following syntactic unit is not appositional. Structurally they can stand independently one of the other, and in meaning, the sense conveyed by the ideophone and the following syntactic unit is not necessarily the same. In the following sentence repeated from above it is significantly different.

- 8.1. *bé wól! a tika áso yi kádl*
'then wól! it had already dived into the water'

wól describes and expresses the action of slipping nimbly and smoothly into the water with scarcely a splash. The following sentence is spoken a moment later to say that by that time the frog had already escaped into the water.

Perhaps even more telling evidence of the syntactic function and independence of the ideophone is the fact that the ideophone may function as a predicator, but without the formal trappings of the verb, the number agreement and affixation. The examples which follow are syntactic units, grammatical and complete, although without verbs.

- 8.2. *wanto záááá*
'Wanto adamantly refused'
- 8.1. *béem kó koro faooo*
'the child of Rain came flying *faooo*'
- 8.1. *koro kpii in kóo fet*
'Rain came rumbling accompanied by his wife'
- 8.1. *koro huvuvuvu, há! bá a...*

- 8.6. *béé hék hék hék hék hék hék n'am h*
'Rain rushed toward him to strike him ...'
- 'then I came panting *hek hek hek hek hek hek* and I came to the place'

In the final example above, which occurs in the context of rapid narration, even the Subject is omitted so that the conjunction and the sixfold repetition of *hek* comprise the entire syntactic unit.

The ideophone may be described. It may be defined first phonologically and then grammatically as in the preceding discussion. Transformational rules could then be written for its functions and occurrences. The definition that is most often applied to the ideophone is, however, the semantic. Loke's statement is essentially semantic. Samarin in his Sango grammar (p. 59) describes the semantic potential of the ideophone:

Semantically, they refer to one's perception of or emotional reaction to such things in the universe as size, dimension, motion, texture, speed, temperature, color, design, and so on.

He does mention that they have phonological and grammatical characteristics which are uncommon elsewhere in the language, but the student is left with the semantic statement.

While semantics is a most difficult and dangerous criterion on which to base a definition it is precisely for their semantic properties that ideophones enjoy a major rôle in the structure and performance of oral arts. The ideophone is impressionistic and sensual. It expresses a feeling or emotion or event by becoming that feeling, emotion, event, state, or quality, thus contradicting Father Walter Ong who writes,¹⁶

Sound can induce response, but it never reveals quiescence. It tells us that something is going on.

However the ideophone does express and become quiescence. The sound of speech becomes positive silence as the speaker says *sélélé*, *yaa* does not merely describe emptiness, it is emptiness. *sém* describes stillness and is that very stillness. As the old hunter gazes warmly and proudly at the kill on his shoulder *fééé*, the listener experiences that moment with him.

The ideophone is frequently onomatopoeic but it may also describe a movement or change which is without sound. *ngilak* is the sudden hardening of Mghadimgha's heart, or liver in Gbaya, as he decides that he has taken enough from Wanto. The ideophone is quality such as the pitch black *kpo kpo* or the bright red of *kéréké*. It may describe shape such as the roundness of a hot pad *kér ké*, or items arranged in order like a row of houses *rék rék*. A person's features or appearance may be depicted. A soft swollen head is *hamhan*; a head that bends forwards to periodically jerk up is *kookoo*; a head covered with dirty matted hair is *ngbadí ngbadí*. The contents of the head may be depicted with equal precision. Someone is *yélé wélé*, brainless or scatterbrained, *ger ger*, troubled and confused.

III

If the phonological and grammatical properties of the ideophone are uniquely free and flexible, its semantic range is infinite. One of the tests of the oral performer's ability and skill is his creative and original use of ideophones.¹⁶ They may, of course, be used simply for description of action in an apparently adverbial sense. Evans-Pritchard gives in footnotes in his collection of Ture tales a number of examples which are paraphrased in the translation.

- p. 87. 'The men went and ran with their nets... and spread them properly.'

Note. *Mbegumbegu* indicates how well and completely the nets were spread and supported.

- p. 86. '...running after them with terrific speed'.

Note. The word *wakanaka* indicates great speed.

Other examples seem to relate to a nominal, although Canon and Gore identify the first as an intensive adverb and the last as a regular adverb in their dictionary:

- p. 45. '...and he was very white' (with dust).

Note. *Kpou* expresses the degree of whiteness.

- p. 79. '...he met Elephant balancing his great bulk near his termites'.

Note. *Tundurundu* indicates a great block or bulk of something.

- p. 79. '...to see how this big lump of a fellow swept around his termite mound'.

Note. *Kakputukakputu* : with rough edges on the body.

Items which are clearly onomatopoeic are retained in the translation again with explanatory footnote.

p. 70. 'When one was cooked it burst, 'bu',....'

Note. 'bu': the sound of the bursting egg.

p. 74. 'As they listened they heard a thud, 'kpu' near the grave.

Note. The sound of the dropped corpse.

As has been demonstrated in the preceding section of the paper, ideophones occur in parallel usage in Gbaya tales, and, though much less frequently, in Sango tales, but they may also perform a broader structural function. They may perform a descriptive and unifying role in a narrative.

Mgbađimgba, the name of a character in a tale, may be analyzed as two items, *mgbađi*, an ideophone used to describe a baboon's stumpy and crooked tail here meaning an unkempt and dirty person, and *mbám*, an expression used in warning. 'look out! beware!' Mgbađimgba has a goat for sale and the hero Wanto is always hungry for a good dinner.¹⁷ The price is merely a fight—on rocks, he learns to his later grief. He fights well until Mgbađimgba suddenly becomes angry *ngilak*, and then Wanto's head is pounded *kpím kpím kpím* as he sings:

Lama, oh your husband! Lama, oh your husband!

Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba!

To eat my goat, Mgbađimgba!

To eat my goat, Mgbađimgba!

Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba!

The chorus, which is sung between Wanto's cry to his wife and Mgbađimgba's proclamation of justice because Wanto had eaten his goat, of 'Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba-*ngim*, Mgbađimgba!' encapsulates the entire plot. The name describes the villain as a grotesque monsterlike character of whom one must beware for it pounds its victims against rocks *kpím kpím kpím*. The sound of a heavy crashing thud is *kpíngim* which comprises the phonology of both *kpím* and *ngim*. *ngim* itself could be a heavy solid thud. The tale ends happily, of course, when Wanto flees to his brother-in-law who fights in his place. In the end Wanto bravely attacks the fallen oppressor with a machete loudly proclaiming to his wife, 'Laiso, he'll die today!'

In the tale of Mgbađimgba the ideophone occurs both within the narrative text and within the song. Song is an integral part of Gbaya narrative, and songs appear frequently throughout Evans-Pritchard's collection. And ideophones are a regular feature of the song.

p. 44. 'Hue hue son of Ture

Hue hue son of Ture

Hue hue son of Ture.'

This is the song of Ture's son's barkcloth, *hue hue* representing the pleasing sound of something soft, in contrast to which Ture's stiff dry barkcloth sings:

p. 44. 'Gagariga Ture, gagariga Ture,

Gagariga Ture, you will be put to shame today.'

In the above songs the ideophone is meaningful. In the following, Evans-Pritchard notes that it is without meaning:

p. 40. 'Ture when you treat me thus

Ture it pleases me

Tiriri riri tiriri riri riri.'

'Meaningless' expressions may occur in song for purposes of rhythm, but as the late Professor A.C. Jordan, the South African writer and scholar, used to maintain, there is some reason why one sequence of sounds is selected over another. It is particularly unlikely that it is without any meaning here because in the same tale another song occurs with 'Turu turu' which the translator interprets to mean the sound of the pounding of termites in a mortar. Similarly in Gbaya, apparently meaningless lines occur, but most often when nothing else is intended they fill out the rhythm of the melody as the representation of the instrument with which the song is said to be accompanied. If it is a marimba, the refrain is 'Inden inden inden inden': if a drum it may be 'to to re, to to to rii, to to re, to to our drum is the Gbaya'. (6.30)

In a hunting tale told by an old Gbaya hunter, the movement and suspense of the plot is developed through a series of songs as the old man tries to smoke his prey out of a hole. He sings:

bayki bayki, bayki bayki, bayki bayki

bayki bayki, bayki bayki, bayki bayki

bayki bayki

He listens for a sound of the reed rat and beats again:

zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy

zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy

For the third song he picks up the tempo with a proverb asking, 'Is the inside of your bag the inside of my bag?' In other words, his companions will eat the game they kill, let him kill and enjoy his even if only a rat.

ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

ko bolo ka-me ne ku bolo ka'm ?

ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

He thinks it is coming out, but it turns around again and retreats. He gets new leaves and sings with intensified vigor:

zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy

zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy

zonkoy zonkoy, zonkoy zonkoy

Then:

lim safiya, lim bayki! lim safiya, lim bayki!

lim safiya, lim bayki! lim safiya, lim bayki!

Then he goes back to the proverb:

ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

de, ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

de, ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

de, ko bolo ka-me ne ko bolo ka'm ?

And finally as the end nears, he sings with anticipation and satisfaction, 'Live-with-a-rat knows a rat (mole rat)!'

duk in kpan a kpa ndaa kpan

duk in kpan a kpa ndaa kpan

duk in kpan a kpa ndaa kpan

duk in kpan a kpa ndaa kpan

Upon enquiring of the narrator and the audience, it became apparent that none knew the origin of the songs except those that were obviously traditional sayings or proverbs. The first two songs in both series were simply the sound and rhythm of the beating as it grew increasingly intense and determined. It is possible to find tenuous etymologies, but it would require a number of different linguistic sources and the results would be quite meaningless in this context except the word *lim* which might be from Fula and mean 'to count'. In the tale the audience accepts the songs as the narrator explains he intends them—symbols of rhythm and intensity. Ideophones, like other lexical items, must be productive and adaptable or they would die. The old man's peers give him credit for adapting from some unknown source or for creating a series of ideophones for the context he wishes to depict. Their laughter as he sings his victory is indisputable proof of his success.

IV

In conclusion, the ideophone is an integral part of oral language. In Zande as in Sango and Gbaya it is a legitimate lexical item with distinct phonological and grammatical features which, though similar across language lines, must be described within the context of the individual language. For the artist, the phonological and grammatical properties together with its unique semantic characteristics combine to form a device of significant creative and imaginative potential. For the linguist the ideophone comprises a major descriptive challenge, and for the writer or translator a most difficult item to transpose from the oral performance to the written page.

NOTES

1. C.M. Doke, *Bantu Linguistic Terminology*, London, 1935, p. 118.
2. Joseph H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa*, 2nd edition, the Hague, Mouton and Company, 1966.
3. Cf. Nils Thun, *Reduplicative Words in English*, Lund, Uppsala, 1963.
4. For various approaches to ideophones see the following :
 Paul Newman, 'Ideophones from a Syntactic Point of View', *Journal of West African Languages*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1968, pp. 107-117.
 William J. Samarin, 'Determining the Meanings of Ideophones', *Journal of West African Languages*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1967, pp. 35-41.
 William J. Samarin, 'Perspectives on African Ideophones', *African Studies*, vol. 24, 1965, pp. 117-121.
5. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Ideophones in Zande', *Sudan Notes and Records*, vol. 43, 1962, pp. 143-146.
6. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Zande Trickster*, Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1967.
7. C.R. Lagae, *La Langue des Azande : Grammaire, Exercices, Légendes*, Gand, Editions Dominicaines 'Veritas', 1921 vol. 1.
8. C.R. Lagae and V.H. Vanden Plas, *La Langue des Azande : Dictionnaire Français-Zande*, Gand, Editions Dominicaines 'Veritas', 1922, vol. 2; C.R. Lagae and V.H. Vanden Plas, *La Langue des Azande : Dictionnaire Zande-Français*, Gand, Editions Dominicaines 'Veritas', 1925, vol. 3; Canon and E.C. Gore, *Zande and English Dictionary*, revised by H.B. Bullen, London, Sheldon Press, 1952.
9. A possible exception is the interjection which is excluded here because of its distinct syntactic nature.
10. Citations for examples taken from original text are given by tape and item number. The tapes were recorded in 1966-1968 during field research in Cameroun under a Foreign Area Fellowship grant. All others are from personal notes.
11. These processes, though occurring regularly and frequently with ideophones, are not uniquely ideophonic as shown by the following adverbial examples :
 héǵǵ 'thus'
 héǵǵǵǵ (héǵǵǵǵ) 'on and on without stopping'
 héǵǵ héǵǵ 'this and that; back and forth'
 héǵǵ héǵǵ' héǵǵ 'on and on continuously'
 héǵǵ! héǵǵ! héǵǵ! héǵǵ! 'on! and on! and on! and on!'
12. William J. Samarin, *A Grammar of Sango*, the Hague, Mouton and Company, 1967.
13. The Zande feature of vertical reduplication with apparent ideophone implications as discussed by Evans-Pritchard (1962, p. 144, no. 2) is not paralleled in Gbaya grammatical structure.
14. William J. Samarin, op. cit., p. 78. Sango is the official language of the Central African Republic. It will be interesting to observe whether in the process of relexification, ideophones will again be introduced and whether through borrowing or internal processes.
15. William J. Samarin, 'The Art of Gbeya Insults', *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. 35, no. 4, October 1969, pp. 323-329.
16. Philip A. Noss, 'The Performance of the Gbaya Tale', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1970, pp. 40-49.
17. This tale occurs as tape 2, item no. 30. For the character of Wanto, cf. the Zande Ture.