Ideophonic Compounds in East and Southeast Asia

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Ideophones a.k.a. expressives, mimetics.


typologically widespread (Nuckolls 2004: 131)

[m]any natural languages have a basic class of words which have been called ‘ideophones’ (Diffloth 1972: 440)
Ideophones

Doke 1935; Oft–cited Bantuist definition:

A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoetic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity. (Doke 1935: 118)
Japanese ideophone
uja uja (Gomi 1989:24)

uida uja
[6]
Describes many small things gathered together and moving, such as a swarm of insects or a crowd of people seen from a distance.

ideophone.org/do-you-know-this-feeling
Ideophones

Dingemanse 2011; from an Africanist point of view:

marked words that depict sensory imagery

• marked phonologically;
• words (not paralinguistic utterances, not phonaesthemes);
• sensory imagery: depicting imagery, often very detailed, of various types of senses;
• DEPICT;

(phonosemantically defined class(es) of words; they often have their own morphosyntactic properties)
Clark & Gerrig (1990) fundamental methods of communicative acts:

- indication (e.g. _DESCRIPTION);
- description (e.g.  /ˈboʊbi məkˈferən ˈsez dəʊnt ˈwʌri bi ˈhæpi/)
- demonstration (\(\approx\) DEPICTION in Dingemanse 2011);

there is still some level of arbitrariness/convention with depiction
Depiction versus description

See Dingemanse (2011).
See also Güldemann (2008)’s MIMESIS.

Not unproblematic, but also see Osaka & Osaka (e.g. Osaka 2009, Osaka & Osaka 2009) on how ideophones trigger sensory/motor areas in the brain.
Siwu (Dingemanse 2011:33)

(1) bo kagbàmìkù gaṅgbe ne,
    1PL area REL.KA-here TP,
ka-Ś-lo-ma ↑kanana.nananana↑
ING-3SG.TP-silence-3PL IDPH.silent.EM4
‘As for our neighbours, he silenced them ↑kananana↑!’

(2) krō ne, kù-wà go-ngbe kù-nyo ↑qɔbɔrcɔ.ccc↑
    now TP, KU-stuff REL.KU-here KU.s-look IDPH.soft.EM
‘Now this stuff here, it looks soft ↑qɔbɔrcɔɔ↑!’
Okinawan

(3) *mumu*  *nu*  *yuttaikwattai*  *shi, nagari-ti*  *chaa-bi-ta-n.*
peach  SUBJ  IDPH  do  flow-CON  come-POL-PST-IND

‘The peach flowed down the river in a *yuttaikwattai* manner.’ (Yushiya 1999)
(桃(むむ)ぬゆったにくわたいたし、流れて来(ち)やあびたん。;www.haisai.co.jp/koabanasi.htm)

(4) *winagu*  *nu*  *kukuroo*  *taagu*  *nu*  *miji*  *nu*  *gutu*
woman  GEN  heart;TOP  bucket  GEN  water  GEN  manner

*yuttaikwattai*
IDPH

‘Women’s heart are *yuttaikwattai* like water [swirling around] in a bucket.’
(女(イナグ)ぬ心(ククロ)一桶(ターグ)ぬ水(ミジ)ぬぐとうゆったにくわたいた;
homepage2.nifty.com/kawana_masami/_tTDeRF.htm)
Dingemanse 2011: Ideophones are depictive WORDS;

Here:

• Some East/Southeast Asian languages have classes of ideophones which are bound to a non-ideophonic and non-‘light’ adjective/verb/noun, so these ideophones are affixes and not words.
Bound Ideophones in Sinitic Lngs

Affixed to a ‘full’ lexical adjective/verb/noun (i.e. not just light predicate/dummy noun)

Figure: Japanese *buku buku* (Gomi 1989:149)

*ideophone.org/do-you-know-this-feeling*

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e.g. Cantonese

fei⁴ – tan⁴ tan⁴

fat – IDPH

(*tan⁴tan⁴*)
Ideophonic Compounds

Compounds with at least one ideophone and at least one ‘full’ (i.e. non-ideophonic and not ‘light’) lexical item.

e.g. Cantonese

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wat}^6 \text{– lyut}^1 \text{lyut}^1 & \quad \text{wat}^6 \text{– saan}^4 \text{saan}^4 \\
\text{smooth–IDPH} & \quad \text{smooth–IDPH}
\end{align*}
\]
Ideophonic compounds in Cantonese

e.g. Lau 1999, Bodomo (2006, 2008ms), Lee 2003

Semantic domains:
• most sensory domains (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, temperature, balance (?), time);
• states of body and mind.
The vast majority of bound ideophones in Cantonese are suffixal.

\[
\text{fei}^4{-}\text{dyut}^1\text{dyut}^1 \quad \text{fei}^4{-}\text{tan}^4\text{tan}^4
\]
\[
\text{fat}{{-}\text{IDPH}} \quad \text{fat}{{-}\text{IDPH}}
\]

Some are prefixal:

\[
\text{sap}^1\text{sap}^1{-}\text{seoi}^3 \quad (\sim \text{seoi}^3{-}\text{sap}^1\text{sap}^1)
\]
\[
\text{IDPH}{{-}\text{break}_\text{into}_\text{bits}}
\]
‘insignificant matter/ easy job’

(Google: "濕濕碎" 603k results; "碎濕濕" 108k results; 12\textsuperscript{th}/7/11)

\[
\text{lo}^1\text{lo}^1{-}\text{lyun}^1 \quad (\ast \text{lyun}^1{-}\text{lo}^1\text{lo}^1)
\]
\[
\text{IDPH}{{-}\text{bent}}
\]
‘feeling worried/unsettled’
Most involves complete reduplication, some partial:

\[ gwat^6{-}leoi^4 ceoi^4 \quad zik^6{-}bat^4 lat^4 \]
blunt\—IDPH \quad straight\—IDPH

Very occasionally there are tetrasyllabic ideophonic compounds. (All syllables are obligatory.)

\[ daai^6 \quad tou^5 \quad lam^4 dam^1 \]
big \quad belly\—IDPH
‘to appear to be in an advanced stage of pregnancy’

\[ haau^4{-}si^1 \quad dan^3 duk^1 \]
coquettish\—?\—IDPH
Most bound ideophones are bound to adjectives, some to verbs:

\[
\text{saa}^4\text{saa}^4-\text{gwan}^2 \hspace{1cm} \text{wan}^4-\text{to}^4\text{to}^4 \hspace{1cm} \text{tan}^4\text{tan}^2-\text{zan}^3
\]

\[
\text{IDPH–have_an_affair} \hspace{1cm} \text{faint–IDPH} \hspace{1cm} \text{IDPH–shake}
\]

Or to nouns (especially body part nouns):

\[
\text{ngan}^5-\text{gam}^1\text{gam}^1
\]

\[
\text{eye–IDPH}
\]

‘eyeing with lust’
Most bound ideophones are made up of syllables that would themselves of nonsense words, or happen to be homophonic to something unrelated. Occasionally they have clear lexical meaning (i.e. free words).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tau}^5 \text{ dap}^1 \text{ dap}^1 & \quad \text{ngaan}^5 \text{ sap}^1 \text{ sap}^1 \\
\text{head lowered lowered} & \quad \text{eye wet wet} \\
\text{hau}^2 \text{ maak}^3 \text{ maak}^3 & \quad \text{dung}^3 \text{ bing}^1 \text{ bing}^1 \\
\text{mouth open open} & \quad \text{cold ice ice} \\
\text{ngaan}^5 \text{ baak}^6 \text{ baak}^6 & \quad \text{‘looking on helplessly/indifferently’} \\
\text{eye white white} & \quad \text{‘looking on helplessly/indifferently’}
\end{align*}
\]
Sometimes the lexical head of an ideophonic compound is less than a word if it is uttered independently.

\( jin^6 - tau^1 \ tau^1 \)

?–IDPH

‘state of a (big) sum of money in cash’

c.f. \( jin^6 - gam^1 \)

current– gold

‘cash’
Idophonic compounds are less easily modified.

???, m⁴ san¹–cuk¹ cuk¹
NEG new–IDPH

However, e.g. in a m⁴...m⁴... construction:

di¹ ngan⁴zi² m⁴ san¹–cuk¹ cuk¹
CL.NSG banknote NEG new–IDPH
keoi⁵ m⁴ jung⁶ ge³ wo³...
3SG NEG use MOD FP

‘The banknotes if they are not totally new s/he doesn’t use them...’
or in a yes–no question:

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di¹ jip⁶ jip⁶ leng³ m⁴ leng³
CL.NSG leaf leaf pretty neg pretty
hung⁴ m⁴ hung⁴–bok¹ bok¹ aa³
red NEG red–IDPH ?
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‘Are the leaves pretty and all red?’

(d頁頁靚唔靚, 紅唔紅卜卜呀??;
hk.myblog.yahoo.com/jw!PcoJ4myWBRsdVs3BJEIdxGwh/article?mid=4149&fid=-1&action=next)
ʼThe colour temperature is not right, it is a bit light greenish’

(色溫唔啱,有啲青bb;
www-d12in01u.hkmug.org/viewthread.php?tid=49706&extra=page%3D30&page=1)
siu² cong⁴ lung⁴ dou¹ gei² mat⁶
also quite dense
ji⁴ ce² hou² ceng¹ – bi¹ bi¹
moreover very l_green–IDPH
‘siu² cong⁴ lung⁴ is also quite dense [in vegetation],
moreover it is very light green!!’
(小藏龍都幾密, 而且好青BB!!;
blueisthecolor.mysinablog.com/index.php?op=ViewArticle&articleId=1092783)
zeoi³ ceng¹–bi¹ bi¹ ge³
most l_green–IDPH MOD
joeng⁵ zo² loeng⁵ go³ gei² jyut⁶
keep PFV two CL some month
‘The ones most light green I kept them for about two months...’
(最青BB啲养咗两个几月...; bbs.gz4u.net/thread-1241374-1-1.html)
* ceng¹ –bi¹ bi¹³  di¹ / *ceng¹ di¹ –bi¹ bi¹³
l_green–IDPH COMP
‘more light greenish’

? ceng¹ –bi¹ bi¹³  –gwo³  nei⁵
l_green–IDPH  –SURPASS  2SG
‘more light greenish than you’
Other languages in the region

Southern Pinghua: (c.f. Cantonese)

\( \text{wat}^2-\text{lut}^5\text{lut}^5 \) 'smooth'
\( \text{pek}^{22}-\text{lut}^5\text{lut}^5 \) 'white (skin; adult)'
\( \text{pek}^{22}-\text{tut}^5\text{tut}^5 \) 'white (skin; child)'
\( \text{un}^{53}-\text{tap}^5\text{tap}^5 \) 'sour (slight)'
\( \text{un}^{53}-\text{tau}^{53}\text{tau}^{53} \) 'sour (strong)'
\( \text{ham}^{11}-\text{lak}^5\text{lak}^5 \) 'salty'
\( \text{ei}^{55}-\text{ni}^5\text{ni}^5\text{ni}^5 \) 'small'
**Shanghainese:**

'ćʰiŋ-ɗi摄入 'greenish'

pʰaŋ-toʔtoʔ 'fat looking'

pʰaŋ-kuku 'fat and full' (Creamer 1991)

**Fuchow/Hokchiu:**

paʔ²¹–tsʰaʔ⁵³tsʰaʔ²¹² ‘very white’

(paʔ⁵ sia²¹² sia²¹² >)

paʔ²¹–lia⁵³lia²¹² ~ sia²¹lia²¹–paʔ⁵ ‘pale/tasteless’

ŋaŋ²⁴²–kʰuʔ²⁴kʰuʔ²⁴ ‘hard’

ŋaŋ²⁴²–tieu⁵⁵tieu⁵⁵ ‘stiff’ (Féng 1998)
N. Zhuang (Tai):  
ndaem ndat ndat  ‘black’

Lao (Tai):  
jên3 còj4 còj4 ເ”ັນຈໆອຍໆ ‘cool’ (Enfield p.c.)

Kam (Kam–Sui):  
jai323 je31 je31  ‘long’ (Lóng 2003:125)

Be:  
'baŋ24 kŋ11 kŋ11  ‘bright’ (Liǎng & Zhāng 1997:82)

‘Mulao’ (Kra):  
ŋau33 ten33 ten33  ‘sweet’ (Bó 2003:80)
Kaili Hmong (Eastern Guizhou Hmong):
fan⁵⁵ ka³¹ la³¹ ‘(uglily) yellow’ (Zhāng & Cáo 2005:134)

Vietnamese (Mon Khmer):
dài lê thê ~
dài lu’ôt thu’ôt ‘long’

Mang (Mon Khmer):
ʔe⁵⁵ lep⁵¹ lep⁵¹ ‘hard’ (Gāo 2003:84)
Tujia:

\[tu^{53} \, tɕi^{21} \, tɕi^{21}\]  \(\text{‘heavy’}\)

\[lan^{21} \, si^{55} \, si^{55}\]  \(\text{‘stinky’}\)  \(\text{(Chén 2006:103)}\)

Langsu (aka Maru, Lhaovo; Burmish):

\[pjäk^{55} \, pjäk^{55} \, tʃiŋ^{35/31}\]  \(\text{‘sour’}\)

\[khjεŋ^{35} \, khjεŋ^{35} \, nε^{31}\]  \(\text{‘red’}\)  \(\text{(Dài 2005:57)}\)
Tibetan (Bod, Tibeto–Burman):

\textit{dkar khyugkhyug} ཆཀར་ཁྱུག་ཁྱུག་ ‘whitish (flashing light)’
\textit{dkar chabchab} ཆཀར་ཆབ་ཆབ་ ‘whittish’
\textit{dkar chemchem} ཆཀར་ཆེམ་ཆེམ་ ‘glittering/sparkling white’

(Idu (Northern Mishmi, Tibeto–Burman):

\textit{ka³³ don⁵⁵ don⁵⁵} ‘bent’
\textit{gu³³ tsu⁵⁵ tsu⁵³} ‘wrinkly’ (Jiāng 2005:93)
Some major differences

- In Vietnamese, the ideophones are not morphologically bound.

đờ ‘red’, [hây hây] IDPH, [đờ hây hây] (nothing can intervene between)

e.g. when modifying a head noun:
má đờ ~ má hây hây ~ má đờ hây hây
‘red cheek’
Thai:

some free ideophones:
bə̂ərə̂ə เบ้อเร่อ ‘big’ ~ yày bə̂ərə̂ə ใหญ่เบ้อเร่อ ‘big’
(Google: "เบ้อเร่อ" -ใหญ่ 82.5k; "ใหญ่เบ้อเร่อ" 11.6k; 21/07/2011)

some monosyllabic ideophones:
sǔay-chîa สวยเชีย ‘(very) beautiful’
wǎn-cîap หวานเจียบ ‘(very) sweet’
(François Langella p.c.)
Separable ideophonic phrases

- In many Hmong varieties (but not Western Hunan Hmong), the ideophone and the preceding adjective/verb can be separated by a NP.

Kaili Hmong

\[ f\eta^{55} \ (m\eta^{11}) \ ka^{31}la^{31} \]

yellow (face)  IDPH

‘(the face is) uglily yellow’  (Zhāng & Cáo 2005:137)

\[ l\varepsilon^{11} \ (o^{35} \ t\varepsilon^{35}) \ kau^{33}jau^{33} \]

flow  (clothe  long)  IDEO

‘(the long clothe) flutters’  (Zhāng & Cáo 2005:115)
Other than the VO order, modern Sinitic languages are strongly right headed.

BUT there are many more left headed ideophonic compounds than right headed ones.

In Wu languages, where the tone domain is larger than a syllable, right headed ideophonic compounds are often more tonally marked than left headed ideophonic pronouns.
e.g. Shanghainese

[˨˩˧˨˦˨]:
[lǎ toʔtoʔ] ‘tactile cold’
[lǎ lili] ‘temp cold/
    internal cold when sick’
[lǎ szsz] ‘temp cold’
[lǎ pinpin] ‘tactile ice
cold’/ ‘cold hue’/ ‘lack of passion’
[lǎ s}s{s} ‘getting cold in
the body’

[zaʔzaʔ][lǎ] ‘very cold’
[ˈpinpin][lǎ] ~ [ˈpinpin lǎ] ‘very cold’

(Qián, Xǔ, Tāng 2007)
Old Chinese

Book of Odes:  
行道遲遲 walk road IDPH:slow
雨雪霏霏 fall snow IDPH:fierce
白石皓皓 white stone IDPH
明星煌煌 bring star IDPH

Songs of Chu:  
漂翻翻 float IDPH
芳菲菲 fragrant IDPH

(Zhāng & Cáo 2005: 147—148)

( Zhāng & Cáo 2005: 169—176)
**Conclusion**

• Ideophones are *marked words/affixes that depict sensory imagery*;

• Some mainland East/Southeast Asian languages have ideophones which often cooccur with a non–ideophonic adjective, verb and/or noun:
  – Some have ideophonic compounds where the ideophone is bound, e.g. Sinitic Languages, Western Hunan Hmong;
  – Some have ideophonic compounds where the ideophone is free, e.g. Vietnamese;
  – Some have ideophones compounds of which the ideophones is monosyllabic, e.g. Thai;
  – Some have ideophonic phrases, e.g. Eastern Guizhou Hmong.
Conclusion

• In the case of Chinese at least, Sinitic languages probably developed from having free ideophones in ideophonic phrases in Old Chinese, to bound ideophones in ideophonic compounds in modern Sinitic languages.
Bibliography


