

# Ideophones in Temne<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

The question of whether or not ideophones constitute a separate word class in a language has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years. While Newman (1968), Courtenay (1976), Marivate (1985), Creissels (2001), Laughlin (2007), Beck (2008), among others, argue that ideophones in their languages of research form a subset of one of the major word classes, others like Alpher (1994) assign them to a separate part of speech. Although the problem of classifying ideophones into a lexical category has been addressed in many languages, the case of Temne remains unclear.

As in many languages, ideophones in Temne have a number of distinctive phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties. Regarding the phonology of ideophones, Wilson (1961:43) states that, “ideophones are pronounced on a higher or lower pitch than other words and are more susceptible to individual manipulation”. Right from the outset, Wilson sees ideophones as a set of words that are distinct from all other words in the language. He classifies ideophones into two groups: those which “emphasize abstract notions or states”, and those “describing actions or sounds”. Valuable as it is, Wilson’s work on ideophones is not only brief, but also silent on the morphological, syntactic and semantic properties of ideophones. Most significantly, Wilson did not address the issue of the word class to which ideophones belong. In this paper, I identify and describe the distinctive properties of ideophones in Temne and argue on the basis of their syntactic distribution and functions that they do not form a coherent word class. Rather, they belong to two different parts of speech. Some ideophones constitute a subset of adverbs, while a small set of ideophones constitute a separate language specific word class that I will refer to as intensifiers.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the various approaches in defining parts of speech and advances reasons why lexical classes in Temne should be defined in terms of their syntactic functions and distribution. The distinctive properties of ideophones are discussed in section 3. Section 4 highlights the syntax of adverbs, followed by a comparison of their syntactic functions and distribution with ideophones in section 5. The results of the study are summarized in section 6.

## 2. Defining parts of speech in Temne

Traditionally, word classes are defined in terms of semantic, morphological or syntactic criteria. However, recent studies (Croft 1991, Beck 2002) show that defining word classes solely in terms

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<sup>1</sup>Temne is a Niger-Congo language of the Southern Atlantic sub-group spoken in Sierra Leone.

I would like to thank my supervisor, David Beck for his valuable advice while I was writing this paper. The data in this paper come from two sources: my knowledge as a native speaker of Temne and from the spoken corpus of Temne that I am currently transcribing. I am therefore thankful to my numerous informants.

of a single one of these criteria may be problematic. For example, one of the criteria often used in morphology to define lexical classes across languages is inflection. Nouns, for instance, generally inflect for number, gender and case, while verbs inflect for tense, aspect and mood. However, as Beck (2002) points out, verbs in Totonac and Salish languages also inflect for number. Likewise Temne, as in many Niger-Congo languages, adjectives take noun class prefixes. These class prefixes encode information about number, grammatical gender and animacy as (1) and (2) illustrate.<sup>2</sup>

- (1)    Λ-feθ            Λ-bana  
           CL-house      CL-big  
           ‘A big house’
- (2)    ε-feθ            ε-bana  
           CL-house      CL-big  
           ‘Big houses’

Thus, both nouns and adjectives inflect for number in Temne, hence the obstacle in making a clear-cut distinction between the two in terms of number. This in a way undermines a definition of word classes in Temne solely in terms of morphology.

Furthermore, lexical classes are defined in terms of their semantic properties. Proponents of the semantic approach to the identification of a part of speech, such as Lyons (1977) and Dixon (1982), define an adverb, for example, as a word which denotes notions of manner, place, degree, and time; an adjective as a word which denotes property concepts such as dimension, physical property, colour, human propensity, age, value, and speed. However, as Beck (2002:13) observes, it is sometimes impossible to predict the lexical classification of a word in a given language from its meaning. He cites the case of Hausa where the dimension word *wide* is expressed as the noun *fad i* even though it is a property concept.

Similarly, in Temne, the human propensity words ‘jealous’, and ‘happy’ are expressed as nouns *kə-tut* ‘a jealousy’ and *mə-bɔnɛ* ‘a happiness’, even though they are property concepts. This implies that the semantic function of coding property concepts is not limited to adjectives alone. It is also an attribute of some nouns in Temne, which in no way helps in distinguishing nouns from adjectives. As Croft (1991) points out, a semantic definition of a lexical category falls short of “empirical adequacy”, causing a number of linguists to resort to “an internal analysis of syntactic categories” (p. 40). In this vein, Schachter (1985) observes that the primary criterion for defining a part of speech is grammatical, not semantic. In his view, semantic criteria are not always applicable.

Some linguists (e.g. Hengeveld 1992b, Baker 2003) define lexical classes in terms of syntactic functions and distribution. For example, adjectives are attributive modifiers, adverbs modify predicates, nouns function as subjects or objects, and verbs are syntactic predicates. Similarly, nouns occupy subject and object positions, adjectives stand adjacent to the noun they modify and adverbs occupy post-verbal position. This characterization captures the distribution of word classes in Temne in which word order plays a crucial role in defining a part of speech.

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<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations used in this study are the following: 3SG-third person singular agreement marker; 3PL-third person plural; COP-copula; CL-noun class marker; IDPH-ideophone; Q-question marker.

Thus, the grammatical status of Temne words, including ideophones, can be defined solely in terms on their syntactic functions and distribution.

### 3. Properties of ideophones

Doke (1935) defines an ideophone as “a vivid representation of an idea in sound; a word often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, smell, action, state or intensity” (Doke 1935: 118, cited in Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz 2001). This definition captures a class of Temne words, such as (3) below.

(3)	<i>gbèràk</i>	‘very’
	<i>pèrèθ</i>	‘scantly’
	<i>pǎy</i>	‘up to the brim’
	<i>gbèkré</i>	‘a clicking or reverberating noise’
	<i>pǎf</i>	‘very’
	<i>tàréy</i>	‘too’
	<i>fíkí fíkí</i>	‘running helter-skelter’
	<i>nǎmí nǎmí</i>	‘mumbling’
	<i>gbàkáp</i>	‘big beyond limit’
	<i>kàram</i>	‘tight hug/emotional embrace’
	<i>pùrbú</i>	‘bursting sound’

Words such as (3) above, which I will refer to as ideophones in Temne, have the unmarked syntactic functions of modifying verbs and some adjectives, and typically occur after the verb or adjective they modify. In the sections below, I describe the distinctive properties of ideophones in Temne with a view towards assessing whether or not ideophones constitute a separate word class.

#### 3.1. Phonological properties

In terms of the inventory of phonemes, ideophones in Temne largely employ the same phonemes found in other word classes. However, certain phonemes show a distinct distributional pattern. For example, the voiced palatal fricative /ʃ/ and the voiced palatal affricate /tʃ/ which do not occur in word final position in the other word classes are found in such a position in ideophones such as *gbǎʃ* ‘sound of smashing pieces of glasses’ and *nǎntʃ* ‘state of being too late’. Similarly, the voiceless glottal fricative /h/, which does not occur in intervocalic position, does so in the ideophone *gbòhóy* ‘sound of a cough’. In addition, the consonant cluster /ɲy/, found in the ideophone *ɲyàwóy* ‘meowing of a cat’, is not attested in other word classes. However, examples of such ideophones are very rare.

Furthermore, of the six diphthongs in Temne, only /ɔy/, /oy/ and /ɔy/ are found in ideophones. Some examples of these are illustrated in (4).

(4)	/ɔy/	<i>fǎy</i>	‘sound of a speeding car/person’
		<i>gbǎy</i>	‘sound of a spank/slap on the buttocks’

	<i>pʎy</i>	‘outright denial of a service’
/oy/	<i>gbǒy</i>	‘sound of stomach cramp’
	<i>yǒy</i>	‘wholesome’
	<i>θǒy</i>	‘bad smell’
/ɔy/	<i>kǒy</i>	‘state of collapse due to dizziness’
	<i>lǒy</i>	‘state of being flirtatious’
	<i>rǒy</i>	‘state of collapse due to dizziness’

The diphthongs /uy/, /ay/ and /ey/ are conspicuously absent in ideophones even though they occur in verbs, as in *kʎy* ‘to keep something in the mouth’, *θʎy* ‘to dry something in the fire’, and *tʎy* ‘to stop doing something’. The three diphthongs also occur in nouns, such as *ʎkʎy* ‘a crocodile’, *kʎθʎy* ‘marijuana’ and *ʎnʎy* ‘the sun’.

Ideophones are also different from other word classes in terms of their tonal pattern. Ideophones generally take a high or rising tone in cases in which other word classes take a low or falling tone. Monosyllabic ideophones, for example, are pronounced with a high or rising tone. As (5) illustrates, this feature often distinguishes ideophones from seeming homophones, which have a low or falling tone.

(5)	<i>bōr</i>	‘to peel a cassava, orange etc.’	<i>bǒr</i>	‘full to the brim’
	<i>gbʎp</i>	‘to walk on the side of the road’	<i>gbʎp</i>	‘full to the brim’
	<i>gbʎy</i>	‘to manufacture a tool, e.g. hoe’	<i>gbǎy</i>	‘extremely old’
	<i>gbʎp</i>	‘to lay hands upside down’	<i>gbǎp</i>	‘cut completely’

Disyllabic and polysyllabic ideophones also show a similar low-high tonal pattern as (6) illustrates.

(6)	<i>bʎrʎk</i>	‘to grab a person spontaneously’
	<i>bʎtʎ</i>	‘dying of flames of fire’
	<i>fʎθʎlʎ</i>	‘completely empty’

On the tonal pattern of ideophones, Wilson (1961) states that ideophones in Temne have tonal features that are not found in other words classes. He adds, “Ultra high and falsetto pitches are regularly heard in such words even in quiet conversation or formal speaking” (p.43).

In sum, ideophones are phonologically different from other words classes in tonal pattern and in the way in which certain phonemes are distributed. In the next section, we will focus on sound symbolism, which also distinguishes ideophones from other word classes.

### 3.2. Sound symbolism

Hinton et al (1994:12) define sound symbolism as “the direct linkage between sound and meaning”. Certain ideophones are characterized by onomatopoeia, in that they imitate sounds. In Temne, the rhythm of movement, as in (7a), chewing as in (7b), crying/noise of animals as in (7c), and the sound of objects as in (7d) are all expressed in certain onomatopoeic words.

- (7)
- |    |                    |  |
|----|--------------------|--|
| a. | <i>tʃɔ́ɔ́</i>      | ‘water trickling’                              |
|    | <i>wáá</i>         | ‘water or seeds falling’                       |
|    | <i>gbùrāk</i>      | ‘person gulping some water’                    |
| b. | <i>gbòkáp</i>      | ‘biting a piece of cassava/kola nut’           |
|    | <i>màràt m̀ràt</i> | ‘chewing of crispy food’                       |
| c. | <i>múú</i>         | ‘mooing of cow’                                |
|    | <i>nyàwɔ́ŋ</i>     | ‘meowing of a cat’                             |
|    | <i>pɔ́ŋŋ</i>       | ‘insect buzzing’                               |
| d. | <i>gbàkáp</i>      | ‘breaking a cob from the stalk’                |
|    | <i>kék</i>         | ‘crack of a brittle object, for example glass’ |
|    | <i>ʃíkíʃòkó</i>    | ‘sharpening of cutlass/machete’                |

The examples in (7) manifest a non-arbitrary connection between the ideophone and the event it denotes.

Another example of sound symbolism is synesthesia, which is defined as a process whereby “certain vowels, consonants, and suprasegmentals are chosen to consistently represent visual, tactile, or proprioceptive properties of objects, such as size and shape” (Hinton et al 1994:12). In Temne, this phenomenon is exemplified in the following ideophones.

- (8)
- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <i>kél kél</i>     | ‘bright, sparkling’                         |
| <i>yèŋɔ́ yèŋɔ́</i> | ‘bright, shiny, sparkling’                  |
| <i>kélèlú</i>      | ‘sparkling, flashing as of a thunder storm’ |
| <i>kèlɔ́ŋ</i>      | ‘shiny, sparkling, flashing light’          |
| <i>θí</i>          | ‘shiny black’                               |

The examples in (8) suggest that the front vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ are associated with the notion of brightness. They convey the impression of a shiny burst of light. There is no evidence in the dataset that back vowels in Temne have this property.

Furthermore, the back vowel /o/ is associated with noticeable or extra-ordinary loud noise while the low central vowel /a/ is associated with a relatively quiet noise as the examples below illustrate.

- (9)
- |    |                |   |
|----|----------------|---|
| a. | <i>gbòkáp</i>  | ‘person biting a piece of cassava, piece of kola nut’ |
|    | <i>gbó</i>     | ‘sound of a collision between two hard objects’       |
|    | <i>kóp kóp</i> | ‘sound of noisy shoes’                                |
| b. | <i>pǎf</i>     | ‘sound of a breaking empty peanut shell’              |
|    | <i>kǎf</i>     | ‘unnoticed sound of foot steps’                       |

In all the examples in (9a), an impression of a noticeable loud noise is conveyed, whereas in (9b) the noise is relatively low.

Moreover, in Temne, labio-dental fricatives are closely associated with movement as the following examples illustrate.

- (10)            *f̄ər*            ‘moving speedily’  
                   *f̄əs*            ‘wind blowing from a tunnel’  
                   *f̄ǎǎ*            ‘wind blowing from a wide space’  
                   *f̄ùràk*           ‘swift movement into an enclosure’

The use of labial fricatives to convey a notion of movement has been reported in many African languages. According to Childs (1994), this phenomenon is also found in Kisi, Hausa, ShiNzwani and Yoruba, hence leading to the conclusion that “labial fricatives are associated with the sound of moving air” (p.190).

Iconicity is another property of ideophones in Temne. Trask (1993:131) defines iconicity as “a direct correlation between a conceptual notion or distinction and its linguistic representation.” Iconicity is realized in Temne as expressive lengthening of vowels and some consonants. Some examples of these are illustrated in (11).

- (11)    *θ̄i*        ‘jet black’  
           *θ̄ii*        ‘blacker than jet black’  
           *θ̄iii*       ‘blackest’  
  
           *p̄óη*      ‘far way’  
           *p̄óηη*     ‘farther away’  
           *p̄óηηη*   ‘farthest’

As the examples in (11) illustrate, the lengthening of sounds has semantic implications. The more a sound is prolonged, the longer the duration or intensity of the action or state described. For example, in collocation with the adjective *b̄i* ‘black’, the ideophone *θ̄i* means approximately ‘jet black’, *θ̄ii* means ‘blacker than jet black’ and *θ̄iii* denotes the ‘blackest’ of the three. Similarly, in collocation with the verb *k̄onè* ‘go’ the ideophone *p̄óη* means ‘far away’, and *p̄óηη* means ‘farther away’ while *p̄óηηη* denotes the ‘farthest’ distance.

In sum, ideophones in Temne tend to be different from other word classes in that they mostly maintain a link between sound and meaning. Many of the ideophones in the dataset are onomatopoeic. In addition, several ideophones employ sounds that represent visual properties of objects. These features are not very common in other words classes. In the next section, we will turn to the semantic properties of ideophones in the language.

### 3.3. Semantic properties

Semantically, ideophones in Temne provide a vivid means of expressing one’s emotions, or perception of a state or event. Thus, an utterance like (12) below is characterized by its preciseness and communicative effectiveness in the way in which the information is conveyed.

- (12)    *áη-b̄iθ̄èr̄l̄*    *áη*            *gb̄áȳl̄*        *gb̄òyé*  
           CL-bottle    3SG.AGR      break/smash   IDPH (explosively)  
           ‘The bottle exploded/smashed into pieces.’

Thus, ideophones evoke entire scenes and events. Following Kabuta (2001), expressivity is the highest motivation for the use of ideophones.

Furthermore, Temne ideophones also appeal to the senses: smelling as in (13), tasting as in (14), and colour as in (15).

(13) *fəθ*            ‘horrible smell’  
       *fəl fəl*        ‘pleasant smell’

(14) *pát*            ‘tasteless’  
       *nēm nēm*      ‘tasteful’  
       *gbèrāk*        ‘sour taste’

(15) *tūy*            ‘reddish’  
       *θi*              ‘jet black’  
       *pār*            ‘snowy white’

In addition, Temne ideophones convey notions about distance as in (16) and age as in (17).<sup>3</sup> Ideophones denoting silence or absence of noise are also common. Some examples of these are illustrated in (18).

(16) *fá*            ‘far away’  
       *fé*            ‘close distance’  
       *póŋ*        ‘far away’

(17) *gbǎŋ*        ‘very old’  
       *gbǎf*        ‘very old’  
       *pǎt*        ‘very young’

(18) *yéŋ*        ‘silence’ as in *tánk yéŋ*                    ‘keep silent’  
       *pém*        ‘silence’ as in *tánk pém*                    ‘keep quiet’  
       *yíkáθ*      ‘silence’ as in *tánk yíkáθ*                ‘keep quiet’

Ideophones are, in Temne, the only means of expressing certain concepts. For example, notions about the noise of animals are conveyed only through ideophones. Some examples of these ideophones are illustrated in (19).

(19) *múú*            ‘mooing of cow’  
       *kàkám*        ‘monkey noise “ooh ooh ah ah”’  
       *póŋŋ*        ‘insect buzzing’

<sup>3</sup> These ideophones mean ‘very old/young’ only when they collocate with a word meaning ‘old’ or ‘young’. In isolation, they merely mean ‘very/too’.

To sum up, Temne ideophones evoke entire scenes and events; they appeal to the senses such as taste, smell and colour. They also convey notions of distance, age, noise and silence. Such concepts are expressed more commonly through ideophones. In the following section, we will look at the morphological properties of ideophones.

### 3.4. Morphological properties

Morphologically, ideophones in Temne bear no affixes. This feature sets them apart from nouns and adjectives, which take class prefixes, and verbs, which take valence changing and non-valence changing suffixes. Similarly, ideophones are neither derived from any other word classes nor are other word classes derived from them. This property differentiates ideophones from verbs, which are derived from nouns (20a) or from adjectives (20b). It also differentiates ideophones from nouns, which are derived from verbs (20c).

(20)	a.	<i>kêy</i>	‘thief’	<i>kêyà</i>	‘steal for’
		<i>lêy</i>	‘song’	<i>lêyà</i>	‘sing for’
	b.	<i>làs</i>	‘bad/ugly’	<i>làsár</i>	‘to spoil/destroy’
		<i>gbût</i>	‘short’	<i>gbûtàs</i>	‘shorten’
		<i>tšém̀p̀ì</i>	‘clever’	<i>tšém̀p̀às</i>	‘enlighten’
	c.	<i>dí</i>	‘eat’	<i>àdí</i>	‘the eater’
		<i>tšim</i>	‘fight’	<i>àtšim</i>	‘the fighter’
		<i>wây</i>	‘to buy’	<i>àwây</i>	‘the buyer’

Thus, ideophones are different from verbs, nouns and adjectives in that they do not undergo derivation.

Furthermore, we saw earlier that some ideophones undergo expressive lengthening of sounds. Closely related with sound lengthening is the indefinite reduplication of some ideophones, as (21) illustrates.

(21)	<i>nímí nímí nímí</i>	‘mumbling continuously’
	<i>m̀d̀š̀é m̀d̀š̀é m̀d̀š̀é</i>	‘contained laughter/chuckle’
	<i>bíkí bíkí bíkí</i>	‘running helter-skelter’
	<i>yóm yóm yóm</i>	‘lofty, such as walking on one’s toes’

The ideophones *nímí nímí nímí*, *m̀d̀š̀é m̀d̀š̀é m̀d̀š̀é*, *bíkí bíkí bíkí* and *yóm yóm yóm* in (21) occur only in iterative forms, possibly reflecting the continuity of the action that the verb collocating with the ideophone denotes. The repetition of ideophones can be indefinite. This makes such ideophones different from nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, which merely undergo single reduplication. Commenting on this phenomenon, Childs (1994:185) states: “Repeated or prolonged ideophones generally possess an iconic component in that the elongation represents extension in time and space”.

In sum, ideophones are morphologically impoverished. They neither take inflectional nor derivational affixes. Repetition is the only productive morphological process associated with ideophones in Temne.

### 3.5. Syntactic properties

In terms of syntactic functions and distribution, ideophones may be classified into two different word classes. There are ideophones that have the unmarked syntactic function of modifying verbs (22), and a small set of ideophones that modify adjectives, as (23) illustrates. I will refer to the latter type of ideophones as ideophonic-intensifiers.

- (22) wúr fás  
 leave entirely 'leave entirely'  
 fúmpàr bàràk  
 grab forceful 'grab forcefully'  
 dímfè bǎǎ  
 switch off dimly 'turn down dimly'

- (23) fèrÁ pǎr  
 white very 'extremely white'  
 bǎkǐ gbǎǎ  
 old very 'very old/strong'  
 bànà gbí  
 big very 'very big'

Ideophones such as those in (22) that modify verbs typically occur in post-verbal position, as (24) illustrates.

- (24) ò-wáθ ò dínè yéŋ  
 CL-child 3SG AGR disappear IDPH  
 'The child disappeared in an abrupt manner.'

Another syntactic property that sets ideophones apart from other word classes such as verbs and adjectives is that they are characterized by very tight collocational restrictions. For example, the verb *tínk* 'be calm' collocates with the ideophones *pém*, *òǎm*, *gbíkól* and *yíkáθ*, but neither of the four ideophones can have this number of collocates. Even in the case of ideophones such as *pít* 'very' and *gbǎǎ* 'very' that are near synonym, it is still impossible to find a single ideophone with more than two collocates. Consider examples (25) and (26).

- (25) ù-wáθ ù-lès pít/ \*gbǎǎ kónò dèr  
 CL-child CL-bad very (IDPH) 3SG come  
 'It was a very bad child that arrived.'

- (26) ù-lángbà ù-bǎkǐ gbǎǎ/ \*pít kónò dèr  
 CL-man CL-old very (IDPH) 3SG come  
 'A very old man arrived.'

Although the ideophones *pîŋ* ‘very’ and *gbăŋ* ‘very’ are synonymous, only the ideophone *pîŋ* can occur in (25). Similarly, only the ideophone *gbăŋ* ‘very’ can occur in (26). Thus, while there are many examples of verbs and adjectives collocating with more than two different words, the reverse is either impossible or extremely rare. This phenomenon is not limited to ideophones in Temne alone, hence Childs (1994:188) states: “Tight collocational restrictions also characterize ideophones. In languages where they co-occur with verbs or adjectives, ideophones usually occur with only one or two such items.”

A syntactic feature also peculiar to ideophones is that they are not modifiable. In contrast, nouns, verbs and adjectives are all modifiable. Nouns are modified by adjectives while adjectives are modified by some ideophones. Verbs are modified by adverbs and ideophones. Thus, syntactically, there are two classes of ideophones in Temne: ideophonic-intensifiers that modify adjectives and those ideophones that look more like adverbs in that they modify verbs. In the next sections, we will examine in detail the syntactic commonalities between ideophones and adverbs with a view of assessing whether ideophones that modify verbs can be classified in the word class of adverbs. We will begin by looking at the syntactic properties of Temne adverbs.

#### 4. Adverbs in Temne

Definitions of adverbs (Lyons 1977, Schachter 1985, Beck 2002) mostly focus on their syntactic functions and distribution. Schachter (1985:20), for instance, defines adverbs as “modifiers of constituents other than nouns”. Adverbs in Temne modify verbs (27) and typically occupy post-verbal position in a clause.

- (27) ò-lángbà      ò                      kóθ    lěmp  
 CL-man          3SG.AGR          walk    quickly  
 ‘The man walks quickly.’

Four types of adverbs in Temne may be identified, manner as in (28a), temporal as in (28b), degree as in (28c) and adverbs of place as in (28d).

- (28) a.      *lěmp*                      ‘quickly’  
          *săy*                        ‘stealthily’  
          *kàθègbè*                ‘slowly’
- b.      *dīs*                         ‘yesterday’  
          *lántjī*                    ‘before’  
          *dénkàràŋ*                ‘next year’
- c.      *ònrús*                      ‘extremely’  
          *sáybóló*                ‘haphazardly’  
          *òyíkèkè*                ‘too much’
- d.      *nò*                         ‘here’  
          *dò/rò*                    ‘over there’  
          *ròlénkèn*                ‘over there’

Thus, adverbs in Temne express manner, time, degree and place much like adverbs in Indo-European languages. With this, we can now compare the syntactic properties of adverbs and ideophones in the next section.

## 5. Ideophones and adverbs as a lexical class

In the previous sections, we saw that ideophones and adverbs share some syntactic commonalities. In this section, we will examine these syntactic similarities.

### 5.1. The syntax of ideophones and adverbs

Syntactically, adverbs and some ideophones modify verbs as (29) and (30) illustrate. A small set of ideophones and adverbs, which I will refer to as intensifiers, modify adjectives as (31) and (32) indicate.

(29) ð kóθ nóntfi  
 3SG walk slowly  
 ‘S/he walks slowly.’

(30) ð kóθ ràgbó  
 3SG walk IDPH  
 ‘S/he walks sluggishly.’

(31) ð-wàθ-bèrá ù finð ðθásàr  
 CL-young-female 3SG.AGR beautiful exceed  
 ‘The girl is very pretty.’

(32) λ-márò mè lès pít  
 CL-oil 3SG.AGR bad IDPH  
 ‘The palm oil is very bad.’

In (29), the adverb *nóntfi* ‘sluggishly’ modifies the verb *kóθ* just as the ideophones *ràgbó* ‘sluggishly’ does for the verb *kóθ* in (30). Similarly, in (31) the adverb *ðθásàr* ‘exceed/very’ modifies the adjective *finð* ‘pretty’ just as the ideophones *pít* ‘very’ does for the adjective *lès* ‘bad’ in (32). Thus, ideophonic-intensifiers and adverbs of degree modify adjectives, while all other ideophones modify verbs just as adverb.

Moreover, ideophones and adverbs do not enter into any agreement relations with any other word class. This property makes them distinct from other lexical categories such as adjectives, possessives and demonstrative pronouns, which agree in number, person, definiteness and animacy with the nouns they co-reference. Similarly, as pointed out earlier, both ideophones and adverbs are not modified by any other word classes. Table 1 summarizes the syntactic properties of adverbs and ideophones in the language.

Syntactic properties	Adverbs	Ideophones
Occur in post-verbal position	✓	✓
Modify:		
Adjectives	✓	✓
Verbs	✓	✓
No concord/agreement	✓	✓
Not modifiable	✓	✓

Table 1: Syntactic properties of adverbs and ideophones

## 5.2 Ideophones as a subset of adverbs

So far, we have seen that adverbs modify verbs, and some ideophones modify verbs. Ideophones that modify verbs pattern like adverbs of manner in that they describe the manner in which an event takes place. Consider the conversation in (33) below.

(33) Speaker A:   tó       ð-wàθ       ð               kóθ-á?  
                   how   CL-child       3SG.AGR       walk-Q  
                   ‘How did the child walk?’

Speaker B:   nóntfi  
                   ‘Sluggishly’  
                   ràgbó (IDPH)  
                   ‘Sluggishly’

Like adverbs of manner, ideophones answer the question ‘how?’ and describe the manner in which a state is or an event takes place.

In addition, ideophones and adverbs of manner are mutually exclusive as (34) illustrates. In contrast, ideophones are not mutually exclusive with adverbs of time and place as (35) illustrates.

(34) \*ð-wáθ       ð               dínè           lěmp       yéη  
                   CL-child       3SG AGR       disappear   quickly     IDPH (abruptly)  
                   Intended meaning: ‘The child disappeared quickly and abruptly.’

(35) ð-wáθ       ð               dínè           đis/nò pèt       yéη  
                   CL-child       3SG AGR       disappear   yesterday/LOC town   IDPH  
                   ‘The child swiftly disappeared (from town) (yesterday).’

Since the position occupied by the adverb *lěmp* ‘quickly’ in (34) is accessible to adverbs of time or place, we can only conclude that adverbs of manner and ideophones are mutually exclusive, hence the ungrammaticality of (35). This claim is borne out by the ungrammaticality of examples such as (36) in which another adverb of manner and an ideophone occur in the same clause.

- (36) \*ḡ-wáθ            ḡ                    kúlò    kèθégbè            gbàwú  
 CL-child            3sg.agr            cry    slowly            IDPH  
 Intended meaning: ‘The child cries slowly and painfully.’

Thus, in terms of syntactic functions and distribution, ideophones that modify verbs share commonalities with adverbs of manner. However, since Doke’s (1935)’s definition of ideophones does not capture adverbs of manner, I will consider such ideophones as a subset of adverbs of manner.

As stated earlier, ideophones in Temne do not form a coherent word class. The small set of ideophones, which I call ideophonic-intensifiers that modify adjectives, form a separate language specific word class that I refer to as intensifiers. As the name suggests, these ideophones emphasize or amplify the meaning and emotional content of the adjective they modify, as the examples below illustrate.

- (37) áḡ-sùp            ḡ            rḡnt  
 CL-soup            COP    tasteless  
 ‘The soup is tasteless’.
- (38) áḡ-sùp            ḡ            rḡnt                    pḡθ  
 CL-soup            COP    tasteless            IDPH  
 ‘The soup is extremely tasteless’.

In summary, ideophones in Temne do not form a coherent group. Some ideophones modify verbs and others modify adjectives. Ideophonic-intensifiers have the syntactic function of modifying adjectives and occur after the adjectives they modify. These set of ideophones are intensifiers. On the other hand, ideophones that modify verbs are a subset of adverbs of manner. Ideophones that modify verbs are more frequent than ideophonic-intensifiers. This is possibly due to the higher frequency of verbs than adjectives in the language.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify and describe the distinctive properties of ideophones in Temne with a view of assessing whether or not ideophones belong to a separate word class. The results of the study show that ideophones are largely different from nouns, adjectives and verbs in terms of their distinctive syntactic, morphological and semantic properties. In addition, ideophones do not constitute a coherent word class. Some ideophones describe the manner in which an event takes place, just as adverbs of manner. These ideophones have the same syntactic distribution with adverbs of manner. Hence, they constitute a subset of adverbs of manner.

A small set of ideophones, which I refer to as ideophonic-intensifiers, modify only adjectives. This set of ideophones constitutes a separate language specific word class that I refer as intensifiers. Of the two sets of ideophones in Temne, ideophones that modify verbs are more productive, possibly due to the higher frequency of verbs than adjectives in Temne. To conclude, Temne ideophones do not form a coherent word class. Some ideophones form a subset of adverbs of manner, while ideophonic-intensifiers constitute the separate language specific word class known as intensifiers.

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