

## Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

**Ideophones in unexpected genres: what a varied corpus  
can tell us about the linguistic and cultural ecology of  
ideophony in Siwu (Kwa, eastern Ghana)**

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## **Ideophones in unexpected genres: what a varied corpus can tell us about the linguistic and cultural ecology of ideophony in Siwu (Kwa, eastern Ghana)**

Ideophones are marked words that vividly depict sensory events. Although well-known for their phonological, morphological, phonosemantic and syntactic peculiarities (Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz 2001), the actual use of ideophones across discourse genres has so far escaped the scrutiny of linguists. Drawing from a multimedia corpus spanning several hours and several types of discourse, this paper presents novel facts about ideophone usage in Siwu, an underdescribed Kwa language from eastern Ghana.

I start by giving an overview of the use of ideophones across various discourse types. So far, ideophones have been found to occur in such varied genres as greeting exchanges, conversations, arguments, insults, narratives, and special genres like riddles (*mìdzòlo*), recreational songs (*ìlikpi*), and funeral dirges (*sìkubiɛnɔ*). It will be seen that ideophones occur profusely in daily interaction and are put to many uses, somewhat contrary to the impression given in the literature that the main use of ideophones is as a dramaturgic device in narratives (e.g. Burbridge 1938; Nuckolls 1996).

Next I go on to examine the use of ideophones in the perhaps unexpected contexts of greeting exchanges and funeral dirges. Greetings, the connective tissue of Mawu society, regularly feature ideophones, some of them more routinized than others. Funeral dirges likewise employ ideophones; examples come from a collection of over 50 dirges, the majority of which was recorded in a community-initiated documentation event in August 2008. The adaptation of ideophones to these two genres is analyzed, and conclusions are drawn with respect to linguistic theorizing about ideophones.

### **References**

- Burbridge, A. 1938. The use of the ideophone. *Bantu Studies* 12, no. 3: 234.
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- Voeltz, F. K. Erhard, and Christa Kilian-Hatz, eds. 2001. *Ideophones*. *Typological Studies in Language*, 44. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.