

Ideophones in Chasu

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To the best of my knowledge, very little is known of properties of ideophones in Chasu (a Bantu language coded as G.22 in Guthrie's 1967-1971) classification. All examples and argumentations in this paper will be from Chasu data collected from Mwangi District, in Kilimanjaro region, in Tanzania. The paper attempts firstly, to offer a precise definition of ideophones in Chasu. It is the intention of this paper to provide an overview of the attempts already made in defining the notion ideophone in some African languages. The definitions provided in the literature vary in terms of scope, depth and precision. The classical and oft-cited definitions including that of Doke (1935) and that of his later works (1967) based on his study of the Southern Bantu languages is reviewed. Other definitions include Kunene (1978) for dialects of Sotho, Moshi (1993), based on her studies of Kivunjo-Chaga, Kimenyi's account of ideophone (from his Website) for Kinyarwanda, and finally, Kulemeka (1997) for Chichewa. Secondly, it outlines and discusses the phonological and semantic characteristics of Chasu ideophones. In order to delineate fully the ideophones, the paper does not dwell on distribution alone, but it also examines both morphology and syntactic characteristics. The following central questions will be addressed: a) what similarities and differences exist between ideophones and other categories of words such as verbs and adverbs in Chasu? b) what are behavioral patterns of ideophones when combined with verbs, adjectives etc. Thirdly, it evaluates the contribution that ideophones from Chasu can offer to the existing studies. Lastly, it proposes tentative conclusion as follows: i) Chasu ideophones have specific sets of parameters (phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic features) which can be used to determine their status as lexical category; ii) they are a lexical category distinct from verbs, adverbs and adjectives; iii) they share some characteristics with these categories, but fail most important tests of class membership, e.g. they lack tense/aspect inflection, nominal, adjectival inflection, etc.; iv) functionally they may modify predicates; v) they exhibit strict selectional restrictions unlike verbs and adverbs; vi) they constitute an open class.