

# How iconic are ideophones in Mande?

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Ideophones are linguistic expressions depicting sensory imagery. They have been best studied in African languages (Dingemans 2012, 2018 and references therein). However, to my knowledge, ideophones in Mande family have not yet received much attention from Mandeists themselves, let alone linguists working in broader African as well as general typological perspectives.

In this paper, I provide a brief overview of ideophones in Mande languages belonging to different branches (Manden, Mokole, Southwestern, Southern). I concentrate on intensifying adverbs as a straightforwardly distinguishable lexical class of adverbs which are only used with specific predicates.

I argue that ideophones in Mande are quite typical of the area. On the one hand, they have distinctive phonological properties commonly violating segmental and prosodic constraints of a given language, e.g. having segments unattested elsewhere in the lexicon, allowing for syllable-final stops, being reduplicated, having unusual tonal patterns. On the other hand, they are not as unusual as one expects them to be. I specifically focus on Guinean Kpelle to present a study of formal properties of ideophones as opposed to the rest of lexicon in a given Mande language. For example, most common Guinean Kpelle morpheme structure is CVCV with *-l-* or *-n-* occurring intervocally, and indeed, these are the most common intervocal consonants in ideophonic expressions.

A clear semantic tendency has been attested for better documented as well as less documented Mande languages, that is to have intensifying adverbs co-occurring with specific colour predicates, e.g. 'to be (very) red', 'to be (very) white', 'to be (very) black', and with the predicate 'to be (very) full'/'to fill (completely)'. While their functions are similar, the forms of these expressions are usually different, e.g. 'to be very full' – Kakabe *tɛ́f*, Bamana *bánbali*, Dan Gwɛstaa *dɛ̀dɛ̀wɔ́*, Mwan *kíkí*, Guinean Kpelle *tótótí*. Moreover, a given function tends to be covered by multiple synonyms in a single language. These facts suggest that ideophonic words are indeed a lively and expressive domain in Mande. Still, no sound-to-meaning correspondences have been attested in intensifying adverbs implying that they are largely arbitrary in Mande.

**References** • Dingemans, M. 2012. Advances in the cross-linguistic study of ideophones. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6(10). 654–672. • Dingemans, M. 2018. Redrawing the margins of language: Lessons from research on ideophones. *Glossa: A Journal of general linguistics* 3(1)4. 1–30.

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