Haitian Creole Ideophones: An Exploratory Analysis

Marc E. Prou
Marc E. Prou  
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Haitian Creole Ideophones: An Exploratory Analysis

Introduction

Yiwola Awoyale (1997:1) in his article, ‘On the Categorical Status of Ideophones’, which he dedicates primarily to lexical/thematic categories of African languages, particularly Yoruba, advances that, “the occurrence of ideophones has been seen largely as an undue burden on those languages that have them, if not, at worst, an aberration, but as some strange words on the periphery of the lexicon of these languages.” Thus the consideration of ideophones to the inventory of lexical class has not been warranted among Haitian Creole lexicographers and lexicologists, as is evidenced in many Haitian dictionaries. The problem is further compounded by the fact that there is no systematic effort yet on how to study the origins and status of Haitian Creole ideophones.

This article is an exploratory attempt to analyze the status of ideophones through distinctive repetition, reduplication, and onomatopoetic features of Haitian Creole. It examines various types of ideophones in Haitian Creole, with the aim of understanding the processes of change in lexical categories, which involve the principles these processes manifest—thereby showing, on the one hand, why these diverse types of ideophones should be classed together and referred to with a single term, ‘ideophonization’; and, on the other hand, how this category of lexical items is to be distinguished from others.

The term ‘ideophone’ connotes different meanings. In synchronic descriptive analysis it can denote the sound or noises made by animals or coming from other sources, from a single underlying segment by what may be called ‘ideophonization’. For instance, the cat says meow in English and miau in German, guao in Italian and miaou in French, but myaw in Haitian Creole. In diachronic lexicology, it denotes a morpho-phonological change: segments which at one level are realized as single forms with one meaning, at another level come to be realized as reduplicated forms. If one views morpho-phonological change as tantamount to the introduction of new rules into Haitian lexicology, then these distinct forms of single-syllable ideophones can be understood as merely different facets of the same phenomenon.
In theory, a comprehensive study of ideophones in Haitian Creole could be based equally well in comparison of synchronic ideophonization rules or on a comparison of historical ideophonic variations. Practical considerations force me to base this research on ideophonic processes and variations. Our present understanding of Haitian Creole ideophones is so poor that a research of synchronic idephonic rules would not yield worthwhile results: we do not as yet know the proper form of ideophonic rule—and indeed, with our present understanding, we cannot even confidently assign correct underlying representations to all ideophonic forms. Only if we limit our attention to actual ideophonic variations can we insure that all our data are relevant to the central issue concerning ideophonic processes, namely the relation between the original (or underlying) single form and the later (reduplicated) forms with fundamental semantic distinction.

However, despite a certain amount of direct phonetic imitation, ideophones always fit into the phonemic system of the language in which they occur and are always stylized at least to a certain degree. The article shows how several types of reduplicative change in Haitian Creole—some of them traditionally called echo-words, others not—involves an identical process of repetition and differ only in terms of the semantic values involved. Thus we will consider a deeper claim, that when the apparent doubling of ideophones produces a predictable change in meaning or connotation, the distinction between repetition and reduplication becomes somewhat fuzzy and needs further inquiry.

I. Repetition, Reduplication: An Ideophonic Process

Awóyalé (1996:1) defines 'ideophones' as "words of a language where there exists a perceivably close association between their basic or derived meanings and their sound structure, which association has been lost in the non-ideophonic vocabulary." If Awóyalé is right, and I believe he is, then two questions to which answers must be found are worth exploring.

First question: Why is an ideophone in which meaning is expressed through mimicry associated with repetition of syllables in words? We know that many ideophones are words in which the second syllable is a repetition or reduplicative of the first. The repetition of syllables in a word seems to give a clue that the word is not "normal," in that the peculiar way it sounds is related to the meaning rather than arbitrary. In other words, repetition of whole words may occur as a grammatical operation with changes in meaning.

Second question: Are these changes made on the same principles as reduplication, which is repetition at the morphological level? A study of ideophones in Haitian Creole ought to discuss repetition of both syllables in words and phrases. When the apparent doubling of monosyllable ideophonic words produces a predictable change in meaning or connotation, the distinction between repetition and reduplication becomes somewhat unclear.
The similarity between “beng” and “beng-beng” (which is discussed later) is too great to ignore. Repetition and reduplication can be viewed as a single ideophonic process, one in which the very sound of a word or a morph is the object of mimicry. From this position, we can develop a view of ideophone as one strategy of word formation working in concert with other strategies in the lexical creativity of any language. If we consider exclusively the special class of words that are very clearly imitative (classic examples such as “moo,” “bowwow,” etc.), we deny the status of ideophones as real words and limit our ability to abstract information about lexical creativity in general. In other words, the most interesting areas of study are not the words, which we can classify easily, but those words, which tend to fall in between the divisions we have imposed on languages. As Awóyále (1996:19) points out in his analysis of morpho-phonological ideophones in the Yoruba Language, “to a very limited extent, some non-ideophonic forms in the language can be used ideophonically.” He calls this process ideophonization; and offered the following examples to illustrate his point:

(1) a. dâjii - dâjii  ('dâjii 'be clear')  'of certainty'
b. lâ - lâ  ('lâ 'big/large')  'of particularity/certainty'
c. obinrin - binrin  ('obinrin 'woman')  'even a woman'
d. okûrrin-kûrrin  ('okûrrin 'man')  'even a man'
e. ojôkan-jôkan  ('ojôkan 'one day')  'one day will be one day'
f. lâsàn-lâsàn  ('lâsàn 'for nothing')  'just for nothing'
g. lâsàn - lâsàn  lâsàn  'just for nothing'

In fact, “the use of phonological resources to reflect semantic coloration is a characteristic feature of ideophones generally” (Awóyále, 1974, 1978). Take the following examples in Haitian Creole:

h. sale  ('sale 'salt')  'salt'  HC
i. sale-sale  ('sale-sale 'saltish')  'very salty'  HC
j. blâch  ('blâch 'white')  'blâch'  HC
h. blâch-blâch  ('blâch-blâch 'whitish')  'very white'  HC
k. M ta bow-bow-bow!  ('M ta bow-bow-bow!')  "I would have shot a number of times"

By comparing ideophonic features and patterns in Yoruba and Haitian Creole we get a glimpse at existing possibilities of properties of both verbs and nouns. It is clear that the patterns of reduplication of ideophones are much richer and varied than what is available to other categories that undergo this process.

2. Hall on Repetition

According to Robert Hall (1953), repetition is a powerful and regular process in Haitian Creole lexical creativity. Briefly stated, he describes repetition as a
process when the same word or phrase is repeated with no connectives and special tonal pattern may denote emphasis or intensification. He offers the following examples as explanations to further categorize the different ideophonic classes in Haitian Creole:

(2) a. ‘blanch-blanch’ ‘whitish’
   Poul la yon ti jan blanch-blanch. HC
   [Chicken the somewhat white-white]
   ‘The chicken is somewhat whitish.’

   b. ‘sale-sale’ ‘slightly salty’
   Manje a yon ti jan sale-sale. HC
   [food the somewhat salty-salty]
   ‘The food is slightly salty.’

   c. ‘pike-pike’ ‘slightly piquant’
   Manba a yon ti jan pike-pike. HC
   [Peanut butter the somewhat hot-hot]
   ‘The peanut butter is slightly piquant’.

Hall also points out that a different tonal pattern will produce the meaning “...-ish” or “slightly.” When the first syllable slides downward, and is also preceded by the expression “yon ti jan” (somewhat), the meaning becomes what the above examples illustrated.

In the grammar of Yoruba, thought by some to provide a substratum for Haitian Creole (Sylvain, 1936; Lefebvre and Lumsden, 1989), the tonal patterns used with ideophones affect the meaning. For instance, with a repeated adjective, a pattern of low tones on the first and mid-tones on the second intensifies the meaning. When the pattern is high-mid or low-mid, the meaning is always pejorative. The following examples taken from Awóyalé (1996), analyzing Yoruba ideophones help to illustrate and support our contention that close association exists between the basic and derived meanings of ideophones.

(2) d. rògòdò ‘round, large size, not internally solid’

c. rogodo ‘round, average size, not internally solid’

e. rògòdò ‘round, small size/quantity, not internally solid’

The above examples identified the two existing forms in a derived ideophone: a basic word with its regular lexical meaning and pronunciation; and, a superimposed form with a modification of the pronunciation (often with a minimal semantic change). In fact, Awóyalé further suggests that a basic ideophone can be reduplicated with or without tonal modification, and with minimal, but proportionate/semantic change. For instance, the following two examples (2g and 2h) are what he calls second-order ideophones, while (2i) represents a third-order formation.
3. Single-syllable Ideophones

There are a number of ideophones that can be used in single or in reduplicated form, with the only essential difference in meaning being that the reduplicated form denotes repetition of whatever the single word represents. There is enough evidence to suggest that most of the single-syllable ideophones representing sounds or blows could be reduplicated with that effect, although this research paper did not include tests for all of them. Of course, not all ideophones correspond to single-syllable mimic words. There are many in reduplicative forms that do not have a single form, and several where the meaning of the 'single' form has little or no relation to the meaning of the 'double' form.

We will give attention to these later. Now let us take a look at some of the many one-syllable ideophones and their meanings. Since it is often unclear what part of speech these words belong to, I present meanings offered by my subjects, for what the words are associated with:

(3)  a. 'beng' for a loud noise, especially metallic
    b. 'bip' for a blow, something falling
    c. 'floup' for a swift forward movement
    d. 'krak' for a snapping sound or a breaking sound
    e. 'pach' for a loud slap
    f. 'pèch' for a sudden slap
    g. 'pèk' for a sudden break
    h. 'pan' for something done suddenly
    i. 'pich' for air leaking
    j. 'pim' for a blow
    k. 'pip' for a sudden action
    l. 'ploup' for a blow
    m. 'tap' for a knock
    n. 'tchwe' for a grease in a hot pan
Haitian Creole Ideophones

0. ‘tchoup’ for a blow
p. ‘vip’ for rough, unexpected movements
q. ‘van’ for a blow
t. ‘vloap’ for a blow
u. ‘yan’ for rapid flashing

The meaning of these ideophones varies from one person to another. The usage of these ideophones presents many problems. They are non-productive both morphologically and semantically, which we will discuss later. Let us briefly analyze the role of reduplication.

4. Reduplication of Ideophones

There are many one-syllabic ideophones in Haitian Creole ‘that are clearly stylistic to express leisure or admiration’ as supported by Awóyalé (1997), in his analysis of non-concatenative morpho-phonology of Yoruba ideophones. As previously mentioned, many of these ideophones can be used in single or reduplicated form.

(4) a. tonbe pip.
   [fall — IDEOPHONE] ‘of a sudden fall’ HC
b. tonbe vip.
   [fall — IDEOPHONE] ‘of an unexpected fall’ HC
c. tonbe vip-pip
   [fall—IDEOPHONE] ‘of a sudden and unexpected fall’ HC
d. Limyè-a fè yan.
   [light the makes IDEOPHONE] ‘The light flashes once.’ HC
e. Limyè-a fè yan-yan.
   [light the makes IDEOPHONE] ‘The light flashes rapidly at least twice’ HC

With the above examples, reduplication denotes that the action is repeated. These examples built on the combination of two different forms as in (4c) and the same form as in (4e), which enables us to detect the different roles played by both the vocalic and tonemic melodies. While the front vowels in (4a-b) tend to characterize internal composition, the nasal vowels in (4e) characterize external appearance. Though my research did not encompass careful tests of all of them, my subjects implied that any could be reduplicated with the same kind of effect. However reduplication is not as simple as it would seem from the above data. It is not just a secondary operation applied to pre-existing ideophones. We assert this because there are a number of reduplicative ideophones, which appear to have no plain or single
form. (The author’s confidence in this assertion is tempered by the possibility that the single forms have simply been dropped from the lexicon over time.)

5. Reduplicative Ideophones without Single Forms

Many of these reduplicative ideophones are somewhat richer in connotation than the single syllable forms. Tentatively, they may be more regular in a grammatical sense. It was beyond the scope of this research to determine usage rules for each item in this list. But, it appears that while some items ("poupou," "wounou") might be classifiable as both verb and noun, or ("taptap") be both a common noun and a basic ideophonic phrase, others will be used somewhat idiomatically. They might obey the same patterns as the single syllable ideophone.

Let us examine a few of the reduplicative ideophones that are somewhat ambiguous as to grammatical class. Our examination reveals that a few of them do not have single forms because the connotation of repetition is inherent in the meaning.

(5) a. bip-bip for rapid beating, as of a heart when excited
     b. chwap-chwap for swift cut (Deyita:"ak yon gwo grenn sel, li
        chwap-chwap li koupe.")
     c. chwi-chwi for whispering, gossip
     d. flowp-flowp for something going back and forth, not attached firmly
     e. kwelekweke for a tumult action
     f. mwit-mwit for batting eyes
     g. ploup-ploup for the sound of a horse; quickly
     h. pouf-pouf for the sound of simmering food
     i. poupou excrement; for relieving the bowels
     j. poup-poup-poup for the sound of a bird flying
     k. taptap for a knocking sound; an old truck; a kind of a small truck
     l. tachatchak for a messy mixture
     m. tenten noise, tumult, fuss; scandal
     n. tonnton for pounding food in a large mortar and pestle
     o. topst for the sound of quick footsteps
     p. vip-vip a sudden bouncing fall
     q. vounvoun a kind of large beetle
     r. vounvoun the sound of a car being started
     s. vounvoun like "vounvoun" above
     t. wounouwounou to mumble, the sound of mumbling, gossip, back slash
     u. yen yen for whimpering, whining; being tiresome; intermittent showers

Thus it appears that reduplication is not a transparent operation in Haitian Creole, although it may be a common one. Reduplication may be one route for sounds to enter the language proper for the pool of idiomatic ideophones. It is worth noting that the list above does in fact include several items, which are or can be more regular parts of speech.
There are a number of cases where the reduplicative form and the single form must be considered separate semantically.

v. *pich* for the sound of air leak (informant); an exclamation of disapproval (Peleman)

w. *pich-pich* eyes without lashes (Peleman); for the sound of going through water; reddened or mucous filled (eyes) [zye/je pichpich] (informant)

x. *ra* for sudden action, run suspiciously

y. *rara* a rattle: chatterbox (Peleman); a procession dance held on Good Friday; to go bad [tonbe nan rara] (Peleman).

z. *way* an exclamation of surprise (informant)

z2. *wayway* an argument with curses. A ruckus (Peleman), a low class person (informant).

The explanation for the semantic difference of the single forms as in examples (5v), (5x), and (5z) above is probably that the reduplicative forms as in examples (5w), (5y), and (5 z2) have fully emerged as a distinct lexical class from the single ideophone verbal forms.

6. **Reduplication as a Regularizing Process: Usage**

   We found ample evidence to support that reduplication is a process through which ideophones can enter the regular form classes. Let us compare *beng* and *bang-bang* in examples (6a) and (6b) below.

   6. a. *beng* for a metallic sound

   b. *bang-bang* for a loud noise; for the excited beating of a heart in surprise; an uproar; a scandal; for repeated beating.

All my subjects accepted the following ideophonic constructions and their semantic meanings listed in examples (6c), (6d), and (6e):

c. Li *beng.* He/she hits. He/she makes noise. HC
   [He/she — IDEOPHONE]

d. Li *beng-beng.* S/he hits repeatedly. S/he makes loud noise
   [He/she — IDEOPHONE]

e. M tande yon *beng.* I hear a bang. HC
   [I hear a — IDEOPHONE]
f. M tande yon beng-beng
   [I hear a — IDEOPHONE]
   I hear a banging. I hear a scandal. HC

g. Li fe beng.
   [He/she makes IDEOPHONE]
   He makes a bang. HC

h. Li fe beng-beng.
   [He/she makes IDEOPHONE]
   He makes a ruckus. He makes a banging.

It is interesting to note that the following sentence in example (6i) was rejected by all my subjects, because, as they explained, a person does not make a metallic noise when he hits someone else.

i. Li beng pou li.
   [He/she IDEOPHONE for him/her]
   He/she hits him/her. HC

j. Li beng-beng pou li
   [He/she IDEOPHONE for him/her]
   He hits him (repeatedly). HC

However, the sentence in example (6j) was acceptable, showing that the meaning of “bang-bang” is more abstract than “beng.” It is plausible to say that “beng” is becoming regularized by means of reduplication.

7. Regular Ideophones and Reduplicative Nouns

Although the data available are a random sample of different types of ideophones, they clearly reflect different stages of development between the original (underlying) and the (reduplicated) form of ideophones. We find a number of words which only function as nouns and which are formed from a mix of ideophonic and reduplicative process. For example:

(7) a. boubou a fool; an African shirt (my informant); timid, shy (Peleman)
b. Daskoucou a fond term for babies
c. glotglotglot noise of a running liquid in a pipe or in the throat
d. granpanpan a high class woman (my informant)
e. gobaf fo a big shot (Hall)
f. kif-kif identical (an eye for an eye)
g. moumou a woman’s dress
h. nanman the pulp, the inside of a fruit; the word “food” in baby talk
i. pataflow a slap (my informant)
j. pataswèl a bellow, a box on the ear (Peleman); a slap (informant)
k. pépè old clothes (Peleman)
l. poul-poul a poultry flea (Editions Caraibes). shy; timid
m. rablabla to talk nonsense
n. tataloto a person (esp. a woman) who makes her living by sweet talking (informant); some one always ready to insult people (Peleman)
Haitian Creole Ideophones

o. techotech a thing; money (paper bill because of the noise it makes when shuffling)

The items above in examples (7a-o) appear to be regular nouns, although I did not test them all. Without careful testing for usage rules, it is almost impossible to determine whether certain of the reduplicative ideophones presented in the earlier list (ideophones without single forms, of unclear grammatical class [reduplication of ideophones]) should be included with the group above. I have considered "voun-voun" (a large beetle; a case of polysemy, and listed it in both groups. Perhaps a word such as "tenten" (noise, tumult, fuss, scandal), with both a visceral meaning and a more abstract one is in progress from the group of idiomatic ideophones to the class of regular nouns.

8. Ideophonic Verbs: Usage in Haitian Creole

In the following section I will discuss a number of types of Haitian Creole ideophonic verbs; some have been observed in progress, others have not. Some of the types of ideophonic verbs discussed are known (at least to me) only from diachronic correspondences they have given rise to. I will assume that they are gradual—just like the similar types of ideophonic processes, which happen to have been observed—whenever it is appropriate. Since my concerns are with the ideophonic verbs discussed as types, it will not be possible to consider more than a few of them in any detail. To conserve time and space, I will mostly deal with ideophonic verb usage schematically as semantic changes in polar values—i.e., as semantic changes of a magnitude of potential ideophonic significance. But I do this with the understanding that when such changes occur in reality, they are gradual.

When single-syllable ideophones are analyzed in terms of their distinctive class, it becomes possible to describe with considerable accuracy the lexical diversity which the single (underlying) forms present as they develop. Some ideophones clearly belong to the verb class. One such example is "ra" (to go quickly, to 'take off'). My subjects accept the following constructions in examples (8a-b-c) with ease:

(8) a. Li ra or Li rap.
   He/she [IDEOPHONE] He takes off. HC
   b. Li ra devan li.
   He/she [IDEOPHONE] in front of him/her He runs in front of him/her. HC
   c. Li ra li kouri.
   He/she [IDEOPHONE] he runs He takes off and he runs. HC

Two of my subjects commented that this is essentially a combination of two complete sentences "Li ra" and "Li kouri". For this reason, one could predict the following sentence as in example (8d):
All the subjects involved in the research rejected these adjectival and adverbial forms in examples (8e) and (8f) with asterisk:

e. [Li kouri ra.]*
S/he runs [IDEOPHONE]
He runs a take off.

f. [Li fe ra.]*
S/he makes [IDEOPHONE]
He makes a take off.

It may be noted here that my subjects accepted the following construction as in the example (8g) below:

g. [Li fe ra li kouri.]
S/he makes [IDEOPHONE] s/he runs.
He runs and makes a take off.

Thus, the usage of “ra” is unambiguously verbal. This seems unusual in Haitian Creole since we could find very few ideophonic verbs that cannot also be used as nouns, adverbs, or in some other patterns. It is significant that the subjects felt strongly that the verb is ideophonic in nature.

There are also a limited number of ideophonic nouns that are made into verbs by the addition of the prefix “e,” so that they morphologically parallel the many verbs with French roots, as in examples: (8h), (8i), (8j), (8k), (8l), (8m).

h. Chwip (n.) A sound made to express disgust, disapproval.
i. chwipe (v.) To make the sound “chwip.”
j. Tak (n.) For a thump; a small amount, a drop (of water, etc.).
k. take (v.) To latch a door with a bolt.
l. Ték (n.) For a knock with marbles.
m. Teke (v.) To play with marbles.

These words accord with the pattern of French-based verbs: “noun + e.” If these verbs were indeed formed in Haiti as part of the creolization process, then that pattern must have been abstracted from other Creole verbs and applied to new words. This is evidence that morphology is not derived only from the substrata of a Creole language. Rather, morphological rules of Creole languages are derived from whatever can be abstracted from any languages that the speakers know at the time.

We were unable to confirm the existence of any other ideophone limited to use as a verb, as is “ra” in example (8a), or modifiable into a verb, as with “take” and “chwipe” in examples (8h) and (8k) respectively. However, as an aside we did note the verb “lolo” (to sweet-talk, to cajole) as in example (8n) below:
(8) n. Li ap lolo li pou li jwenn lajan. He butters him up to get the money. HC 3sg PROG. [IDEOPHONE] l/e'r in order to 3sg find money

My subjects felt that this word was not ideophonic. This is interesting in view of the fact that Pelman’s dictionary lists as alternatives, “lola” and “lole.” Bentolfia’s dictionary lists only “lola.” The presence of minimal pairs as synonyms makes it tempting to contradict the subjects and suggest that [lolo/lola/lole] are ideophones in the process of conforming to the French-based pattern, ending in “e.” However it is equally plausible that the verb was borrowed in three different forms, or that perhaps “lolo” was derived from “lola,” or “lolo” simply because of the suggestive quality of the sonorance. Then it would be ideophonic, yet not purely mimicry of the sound of sweet-talks. Nonetheless, such examples deserve further inquiry, as they may shed light on ideophonic process as a contributing factor in lexical expansion.

9. Haitian Creole Ideophones and Universal Grammar

We have seen that Haitian Creole ideophones form a homogeneous class. As we have observed to some degree, when attempting to sort ideophones into different grammatical parts of speech we confront chaos. Avoiding such chaotic situations will require (a) data showing that ideophones have been recently created and (b) data on the intuition of native speakers, as to whether they will accept new arbitrary ideophones. Some phrases may be idiomatic. My subjects also initially accepted a few sentences, which I produced to test the limits of usage of a word, and then later rejected these same sentences as unnatural. Haitian Creole dictionaries are less helpful; some contend to classify a word (if they list it at all) as “onomat.” Rarely are examples provided.

These factors, in addition to the variance in meaning or association found from speaker to speaker, point to the argument that ideophones are a dynamic area of the language and an integral part of the lexic. Like exclamations, they fall in the wilderness area of language close to sound and gesture. These are words that are not really considered language. One gets the impression of a dynamic, variable pool of morphs becoming more and more consistently associated with their connotations until some are actually defined. These ideophones enter the common usage with a flexible grammatical function and then are limited to a particular part or parts of speech afterwards. This type of ideophonic process should probably be understood as a manifestation of universal principle governing the distribution of intensity. Awolayoé (1997:16) in rejecting the thesis of Maduka (1983) that Igbo ideophones do not need part of Igbo Lexicon, claimed that “ideophones have always been thought as words that speakers can conjure on the spur of the moment.” In other words, ideophones belong to the familiar, relaxed mood. They
are constantly created for personal use and consequently seldom receive official recognition. This shows that, for the native speaker, ideophones indeed form an open-class.

Let us consider one ideophone, which appears to be firmly defined in meaning, and in the process of becoming defined as a part of speech. In our examples (9a) and (9b) where “bip” behaves as an intransitive verb:

(9) a. Li *bip.*
   S/he [IDEOPHONE]
   He goes “bip” (making a sound.)

b. Li *bip pou li.*
   S/he [IDEOPHONE] for him/her
   He gives him a whack. HC

As a rule, we can say that single-syllable ideophones also frequently occur in the pattern:

**NP1-IDEOPHONE-NPI-V.**

c. Li *bip* li tonbe.
   S/he [IDEOPHONE] s/he falls
   He falls down boom. HC

We are again led to believe that “bip” is an intransitive verb, because this pattern is similar to the **NP1-V1-NPI-V2** pattern. However, in the latter V1 and V2 are reversible as in the following examples (9d) and (9e):

d. Li rele *annwe* li kouri.
   S/he calls [IDEOPHONE] s/he runs
   He calls for help and he runs. HC

e. Li kouri li rele *annwe.*
   S/he runs s/he calls [IDEOPHONE]
   He runs and he calls for help. HC

Yet our subjects reject the reversed form of the **NP1-IDEOPHONE-NP2-V** pattern with “bip” in example (9f), while they accept the sentence in example (9g):

f. [Li tonbe li *bip.*]
   S/he falls s/he IDEOPHONE

g. [“Li tonbe *bip.*”]
   S/he falls down boom. HC
   S/he falls IDEOPHONE

In fact, the sentence in example (9f) produces the feeling that NP2 is intended as the direct object of the verb.

This explanation is perhaps illustrated more clearly by sentences such as examples (9f) above and (9h) below:

h. [“Li *kouri li ra.*”]
   S/he runs s/he IDEOPHONE
Haitian Creole Ideophones

These two sentences appear to be ungrammatical and would be equally nonsensical, but the juxtaposition does not create problems with example (9d) "Li rele ammwe li kouri." Also breaking the sentence in example (9f) into two sentences, the clauses are accepted by all my subjects as in example (9i) below:

i. Li tonbe. Li bip. He falls. He goes boom. HC
   S/he falls. S/he [IDEOPHONE]

While both sentences in example (9i) appear ambiguous, two of my subjects offered a more natural sentence in example (9j):

j. Li tonbe bip. He falls down boom. HC
   S/he falls IDEOPHONE

Thus the sentence in example (9j), while it functions as a verb, in certain cases "bip" does not seem to have full fledged verb status but behaves like an adverb. And it is also a noun as in example (9k):

k. M tande yon bip. I hear a ‘boom’. HC
   IDEOPHONE

Furthermore, it can be used with “fè” (to make; to do) although given that a determiner is not always necessary to indicate a noun (at least with ideophone; see discussion of “pligidip” to follow). Any native speaker of Haitian Creole can identify the following part of speech in example (9l):

l. Kè l fe bip. His heart makes a beep sound. HC
   Heart his/her make IDEOPHONE

The use of the verb ‘fè’ (to make; to do) as an auxiliary is optional at times. With the ideophonic verb “ra," for instance, one of my subjects produced sentence (9m) below on one occasion as we discussed the various meanings of Haitian-Creole ideophone:

m. Li fè ra li kouri. He starts running very rapidly. HC
   3sg make IDEOPHONE 3sg run

After a subsequent examination of some additional sentences to the sentence in example (9m) to determine proper usage of the ideophone “ra,” two other subjects rejected it in favor of the sentence in example (9n):

n. Li ra li kouri. He starts running very rapidly. HC
   3sg IDEOPHONE 3sg run
A similar situation arises in the case of the ideophone "wounouwounou" (for mumbling). This ideophone can be used as a verb, a noun, or an adjective as shown by the sentences in examples (9o), (9p) and (9q):

o. Li wounou-wounou. He mumbles. HC
   3sg [IDEOPHONE]

p. M tande yon wounou-wounou. I hear a mumuring. HC
   1 hear a [IDEOPHONE]

q. Li pale wounou-wounou ak pwofesè-a. He mumbles to the professor. HC
   3sg speak [IDEOPHONE] with teacher the

As for usage with the auxiliary "fe," all my subjects acknowledged that it was comprehensible, but not grammatically correct as in example (9r):

r. [Li fe wounou-wounou.] He does mumbling.
   3sg make [IDEOPHONE]

However, all my subjects accepted the following sentence:

s. ["L ap fe chwichwi-chwichwi."] He is whispering. HC
   3sg PROG make [IDEOPHONE]

The ideophone “Pligidip-pligidip” associated with the sound of a horse galloping shed light on the usage of “fe.” “Pligidip-pligidip” can be used as a noun (with or without the determiner), an adjective, or a verb with or without “fe” as an auxiliary.

t. M tande pligidip-pligidip nan lakou-a. I hear clip-clopping in the yard. HC
   1 hear [IDEOPHONE] in yard the

u. M tande yon pligidip-pligidip nan lakou-a. I hear (a) clip-clopping in the yard. HC
   1 hear a [IDEOPHONE] in yard the

v. Chwal la kouri “pligidip-pligidip.” The horse gallops clip-clop. HC
   Horse the run [IDEOPHONE]

w. Chwal la fe “pligidip-pligidip.” The horse goes clip-clop. HC
   Horse the make [IDEOPHONE]

x. Chwal-la “pligidip-pligidip.” The horse clip-clops. HC
   Horse the [IDEOPHONE]

There is an alternative form of “pligidip-pligidip” which is less common, according to my subjects. This is “plōkōtōp.” One of my subjects informed me that this form ought to be used with “fe,” although it is not unthinkable to use it alone.

y. Chwal-la fe plōkōtōp. The horse goes clop-clop. HC
   Horse the make [IDEOPHONE]
Thus, 'fe' becomes less necessary as an auxiliary as the word becomes more common. With further research involving more informants, we could discover whether usage of 'fe' falls into a consistent continuum, and whether it is also associated with regularity in the other usage areas of the words in question.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper is an exploratory analysis of the status of ideophones in Haitian Creole. In conclusion, we would like to stress that it is legitimate to consider ideophones as a natural process in any language. It would appear, however, that ideophones as a process in modern Haitian Creole are traceable to the African languages of Ewe, Yoruba and Fon. It shows that ideophones in Haitian Creole constitute an open word-class. The description of the processes of change and variations provides some insight into the productive function of ideophonic rules in Haitian Creole. These rules are strikingly different from the rules usually postulated in Haitian Creole, which caused the language to diverge structurally, phonologically, and lexically not only from the contemporary standard but also from the various *linguae francæ* from which it was derived.

Given the extremely doubtful status of ideophonic processes, the problems of usage and grammatical function are important because it is reasonable to assume that the processes of language growth now are (with the exception of word borrowing) the same as at the very dawn of language. If we can describe most ideophones as sounds on their way to becoming words, then by exploring the principles that govern their regularization and entry into the language proper, we can understand the principles through which the first words and languages were made. There is no reason to suppose that the language strategies that gave birth to the first languages are now defunct. Further investigation promises to reveal the nature of early language and the significance of the capacity for language.

There are many challenges in the big puzzle that ideophonic processes have presented to many linguists. One of the first challenges has to do with the question of social attitudes towards the use of such lexical items. The mere existence of several ideophones in Haitian Creole made it impossible to consider them as peripheral lexical items in the language. Finally, I have undertaken this inquiry with the firm conviction that ideophones can be a way to the mind. I truly believe that if ideophones are systematically inquired into with sincerity, we will one day achieve our objective to better understand the emergence of new words into a language and the process of language development as well as the nature of the minds of those who participate in this.
References


Acknowledgments

A special thanks to all my informants: Oscar Fanfan, (66 years); Jean Lubin, (32 years); Chantale Dieudonne, (24 years), and Agnes Fanfan, my mother (82 years), who patiently answered my questions on Haitian Creole ideophones, produced and evaluated sample sentences and offered analyses of them. I am grateful to them for the many hours they spent with me which formed the basis of this research.