Sound symbolism in Iraqw literature[*]

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Abstract
This article discusses the importance of conventionalised sound symbolism such as ideophones in Iraqw oral literature. It is argued that the meaning of ideophones is not referential but rather that they evoke an image. The study of the literary effect of sound symbolism in Iraqw riddles shows that emotive associations are not limited to one of the senses but instead often combine different senses, thereby evoking images such as movement and glitter; reflection and emptiness; tight structure, darkness and suddenness.

Introduction
Sound symbolism clearly has literary effects. Let us illustrate this by the following excerpt from the story about the hare and the hyena: "Hare said: Niece, let's go there, there is *maguguhha, xamumuslá*. When he arrives, he enters with his sister: *cave pú', cave qíp*." The words *maguguhha* and *xamumuslá* evoke the image of something nice to eat, similar to small pieces of roasted meat; the words *pú'* and *qip* are ideophones (lexicalized sound symbolic words) for opening and closing respectively.

The use of sound symbolic words brings life to a story through their expressive force, but also because such words allow for expressive pitch, volume, lengthening, and repetition. All these devices are ingredients for musicality and memorable meaning. In addition ideophones can be chosen or adapted to realise rhyme or rhythm, as is the case in the following riddle: *gamú asleehhí i slidihh 'Under the asleehhi tree slidihh'*; the solution is 'a pot of beer' referring to the sound of fermenting beer**.** However, in this paper we concentrate on sound symbolism as a figure of style in Iraqw oral literature. The literary value of sound symbolism lies not only in the way the sound symbolic elements sound but also in the manner in which they refer, that is, on the kind of meaning that these ideophones have. We show this with examples from stories and from riddles. Riddles make extensive use of the fact that ideophones refer to any situation that fits with the image that the ideophone evokes. We begin with the sound symbolism as an element of style in stories.

Some examples of sound symbolism in stories

Good storytellers make ample use of sound symbolic words. The crucial actions in the story are rendered by sound symbolic verbs or accompanied by ideophones. We illustrate this with a number of examples. One of the best known stories among the Iraqw is the story of "Simbooya" (see Maghway: 1995 for a detailed discussion of this story). When recounting that Simbooya spat on the back of the elephant to see whether he can jump on it, the story teller does not say "Simbooya spat on the back", but instead 'the spittle said *tlix* on the elephant's back.' In another story, that of "Geeso Duqangw", the calf says *baaba a /ipiis* 'father let me suck milk' not using the normal word for 'suck' but instead a verb derived from the ideophone */ip* which is the sound of sucking air in (but also the sound of a short bang with the head, as calves do before sucking). The story is taken from Mous and Sanka (to appear) and is discussed in various aspects in Daudey et al. (2001). In the story of *Gwande/,* a lake appeared where a cow urinated and the formulation is 'the lake *wilahat*' from the ideophone *wilah* for something flat, shining, spreading, compare: *iimi a wilahat* 'it is full day (bright outside)'; this story is published in Berger and Kiessling (1998). In a story about the ogre-monster *Aama Irmí* its movement is described as *ina mandoroqomaamiit* from the ideophone *mandoróq* referring to the slippery movement of a snake and, similarly, in the story of "Numbaay", *gadá' i slidihh*, 'the thing is rumbling, is making the sound of a snake moving in the leaves'. At this point in the story the identity of the "thing" is not yet known but it turns out to be a man who has been half eaten by a snake and thus it is this that the ideophone refers.

Since animals are frequently the actors in stories we can often hear the conventionalised sounds of animals in story telling. For example the cat says *kif* which is the sound that cats make when they are angry before they attack; the crows do *xwaxweeliim* from their call *xwa xwa*, and 'what did I tell you, you said *mee*' is recounted of a sheep in a story about the stupid clan of Qongo, (see Berger and Kiessling:1998).

Sound symbolism often occurs in the fixed elements of a story such as formulas and songs. The standard line with which Simbooya sends away animals who failed to fulfill his request, is '*Uu,* may the milk of my cows kill you; *tsar'eet* (get lost)!' This is after the hyena had answered *buhhuu* to Simboya's question of what it would say at its arrival at the house of Simbooya's parents. The crow also failed, saying *xwa xwa* and hears the same curse containing the de-ideophonic verb *tsar'eét* which is derived from the ideophone *tsaré'* or *tseré'* expressing sudden disappearance, e.g., beyond the horizon, in a deep pit, or a thorn under the skin. In a similar vein, in another story, the formula to open and close the lion's den is "cave *pú',* cave *qíp*". The ideophone *qip* refers to something which closes or becomes dark suddenly in front of you, like turning off the light. The ideophone *pu'* refers to something that opens suddenly before you; it can refer to slitting open the stomach of a slaughtered animal as in *gur'a pu'use*: 'slit the stomach open!' A different ideophone *pú/* refers to the popping of a piece of charcoal as in the statement: 'and she threw him into the fire: *tsuuf pu/*' The latter is from a story of an ogre who throws a body onto the fire; *tsuuf* is an ideophone referring to the dropping of something fatty or liquid onto the fire. All these examples are from what are known as formulas, i.e. standard lines that are characteristic for the story. These are the lines that even people who have forgotten the story remember. Ideophones also occur in the songs of stories.

The song of the story of the hyena and the gazelle contains the line "*Hhimabara hhundara* - at the house of the gazelle, *siwahh* eehee *qolo'* - we eat the children, *siwahh eehee qolo'* - hyena why are you crying?" In this line the ideophone *qoloo'* refers to a sloshing sound in the stomach of the hyena and *siwahh* (a variant of *fitsahh*) refers to children rushing out, and in this song it refers also to the greediness, ravenous eating of the hyena. The hyena is called "niece Hhawú", *hhawúu* is the standard rendering of the noise of the hyena's call. Another version of that same line is: daughter "*Hhawú qoloo', daughter Bifa* (gazelle) *fitsahh.*". The song from the story of "Gwande" contains the line *tsoray tsoray gang*. The word *tsoray* refers to a kind of tree with a strong hard stem; the ideophone *gang* refers to the sound of metal, here the sound of the axe hitting a tree; or to anything empty, as in "when she looked in the house, it said *gang*" which is also taken from the same story of Gwandé/.

In the story about the hare and the elephant, the hare has covered himself with mud in order to be as big as an elephant, and, while walking, the mud falls off: 'When you hear *kut*, you have to say "a strong man's step"'. The ideophone refers to the sound of the mud falling onto the ground; at the same time it is said to refer to the sound of a heavy man walking. The trick is that it refers to both.

Now that we have established that sound symbolism in the form of ideophones is an important figure of speech in Iraqw oral literature, we discuss the referring qualities of such sound symbolism in Iraqw literature.

Referring qualities of sound symbolism
It may be obvious that ideophones are an attractive element for literary texts for their formal characteristics, i.e., for their sound, but this also holds in a more fundamental way. We argue that the ideophone serves a function in the domain of emotive association comparable to that of the metaphor in the domain of cognitive association. The meaning of ideophones is not referential as such but rather they evoke an image. Actually one could say that their meaning is referential to any concrete and specific situation that is consonant with such an image. It is an essential quality of an ideophone that it brings this situation to life which is why some people call them performatives. This reference to concrete situations that share association with an image of a sound is the characteristic of ideophones that is made use of in riddles. If ideophones referred to just one concrete situation, there would be no riddle. The fact that ideophones refer to any situation that can be associated with the sound is why various solutions to these riddles are possible as it was also the case in the example above of the hare with mud. The association is sense related and not cognitive and in this respect it is different from metaphors. The limitations of the association are determined by the fact that ideophones cannot refer to just anything. They typically refer to sounds, evocations of other senses, and in particular colour, movement, position, sudden (dis)appearance. This was already expressed in Cole's definition of ideophones: 'descriptive of sound, colour, smell, manner, appearance, state, action or intensity... [that is] vivid vocal images or representations of visual, auditory and other sensory or mental experiences.'(Cole 1955: 370).

Iraqw riddles often contain ideophones, (see Mous:2000 for a discussion of Iraqw riddles). In fact, some riddles consist only of ideophones. If these ideophones were referring in an exact and specific way, there would be no riddle. The challenge of these riddles lies in the fact that the ideophones can refer to a variety of entities and situations. By studying riddles we might gain some insight in the processes of association in the emotive domain. We will see that these associations are, for example, along the lines of the image of "sharp pain", of "suddenness and heaviness", of "a swaying movement", of "movement and glitter", etc.

A riddle starts with the opening formula *siník* which requires the standard acceptance *geerankay*. Then what follows is the riddle proper, e.g. *itirmoó telelé* 'louse *telele*'… The solution of this riddle is "hot porridge". In this riddle, the ideophone *telelé* refers to something biting or burning or a similar pain; the louse bites too, as does hot porridge. Another possible, and in fact better, answer is *fa/ár da/a/aam* 'burning hot porridge'. There are four types of riddles containing sound symbolism:

- Riddles pertaining to a concrete situation, that have another concrete situation as the solution whereby both situations are associated through sound symbolism.
- Riddles which only contain an image invoked by sound symbolism to which various concrete situations are solutions.
- Riddles which do not describe a concrete specific situation but which contain an image through sound symbolism to which a concrete situation is the solution.
- Riddles consisting of ideophones only.

The first group consists of those riddles in which the sound symbolism provides the association between concrete situations. This is the case in a riddle such as *ufani /ítl* 'the ufani shrub does /ítl', to which the solution is either 'the fart of newly wed women who temporarily return to their parents' or 'the running of old men', or 'the running of a pig', or 'the death of young men'. The ideophone */ítl* or */irítl* refers to an uncontrolled force and *ufani* is a kind of shrub whose roots are cut when it is uprooted forcefully. The associations that link all the solutions to the riddle are along the lines of suddenness and heaviness. The fart is heavy because of the fact that newly wed women are spoiled in this period when they return home briefly and are given a lot of beans to it; it is believed that pigs and old men run without direction and with uncoordinated movements; the death of young men is a big and sudden shock. The association is along multiple lines, combining suddenness with heaviness.

Another riddle that uses similar lines of association, this time of sudden and un-structured movement, is from the fourth category, that is, the riddle consists of ideophones only, *pa/ peerango* 'bang prrrr prrr', to which the solution is "the sling". *Pa/* is an ideophone for a sudden slap, a sudden departure or silence. In this riddle the ideophone refers to the stone leaving the sling. *Peerango* is an ideophone for confusion, which in this riddle, is that of the birds the stone was aimed at.

Several riddles veil their solutions through sound symbolism of both movement and glitter. One example is *pareqmoó wiriwiri* in which the *pareqmoo* bird, similar to a swift, typically goes here and there and the ideophone *wiriwiri* refers to any regular movement specifically one that goes around such as that of a wheel, but also to something glittering. This ideophone captures the solution, which is the wheel of the bicycle, 'the thigh of the bicycle', a common metaphor to the wheel of a car or a bicycle. The wheel of the bicycle goes round and round, reflects in the sun and has a similar sound. A second example of such a riddle is 'the eye of *kalankalay*'. *Kalankalay* is an ideophone for something colourful with various bright colours, or for something swaying. The solution is 'the skirt of a young woman'. When a girl leaves the initiation period she wears a nice skirt with colourful beads. She is supposed to show her beauty to everybody and the skirt swings when she walks. The association is again through both movement and glitter. A variant of this riddle is 'the journey says *kalankalay*' to which the solution is 'a chicken's feather'; a feather is a colourful thing swaying through the air when falling and the association is the same combination of movement and colour. One of the type 4 riddles consisting of sound symbolism only has a similar combination of associations: *windiríq giile*. There are two solutions to this riddle that seem very different at first sight: "water on top of a rock" or "the walking of a snake". What the two solutions have in common is the image that is evoked by the sound symbolism. In this particular case the sound symbolic words are not standard and not specific but evoke an image of

a shining meandering movement such as water streaming down over rocks in bright sunlight or a colourful snake with a similar movement.

Form and movement are often combined in sound symbolism in riddles. In the following riddle (category 3), there is a concrete solution to an image evoked by sound symbolism in the riddle, *aamaá gumbulú', daaqaay fisaáhh* 'Ms Gumbulu, the boys whizzed away'; *gumbulu'* is an ideophone for something bent and *fisaahh* is an ideophone for something spread out, or for fast movement. The solution is "bow and arrows"; the bow is something which is bent and the arrows move quickly through the air.

Several riddles consisting of just sound symbolism refer to a tight structure plus other sensations: *niqiniq qip* has "the nose" as solution because the ideophone *qip* is the sound for something closed and dark, full, while *niqiniq* is the sound of cleaning one's nose when one has the flu; *bangara kíq* has "the fighting of he-goats" as a solution because the way bucks fight is by jumping up in the air (*banqara*) and by intermingling or by getting their horns stuck; *kíq* is the ideophone for something closed tightly.

The sound symbolism in riddles thus often combines associations of different senses, but the association needs not be twofold. In the following riddle, a single image is invoked by the sound symbolism to which various concrete situations are solutions (type 3): '/*Utí* is without a bone' to which the solution is either "stomach" or "tongue" or "cream", all soft materials. In fact /*ut* is an ideophone for a forceful sudden appearance, something that comes out forcefully; /*utí* is the personal name based on this ideophone, which fits with the tongue, but also with the stomach when it refers to having diarrhoea and cream butter coming out of a calabash also makes the sound /*ut*. Another such example is the riddle *Muráy i fiitseeliín, Kuta i ilaohiín* - 'Muray whistles, Kuta answers', i.e. the tall grass and the wind. The verb *fiitseeliim* is derived from the ideophone *fiits* which here refers to the hissing sound of wind going through long grass. Muray and Kuta are neighbouring villages. The area of Muray and Kuta is indeed very windy and the association is through the sound of wind.

Summary and conclusions
We have seen that ideophones are extremely important in Iraqw oral literature. Not only because of their sounds, and not only because they induce a re-experience of the situation but also because they are, by nature of their meaning, an important element of style, on a par with the metaphor but in the emotive rather than cognitive domain. In studying Iraqw riddles that contain ideophones, we find that the emotive associations are not limited to only one of the senses but instead often combine different senses, evoking an image of movement and glitter; reflection and emptiness; tight structure, darkness and suddenness.

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Mous, Maarten & Safari Sanka. to appear *Geesoó Duqangw na hadithi nyingine za Kiiraqw.* [Geeso Duqangw and other Iraqw stories].Dar es Salaam: TUKI