Report on "Hindi ideophones"

Summary

This thesis is a descriptive study of ideophones in Hindi. It consists of four main parts: (1) an introduction characterising ideophones; (2) a description of some morphosyntactic properties of ideophones in Hindi; (3) a field investigation using stimulus-based elicitation; (4) a frame semantics-inspired discussion of the lexical meanings of ideophones. There are several good things about this thesis. It offers a description of a topic that hitherto has received scant attention in descriptive studies of Hindi. It is written in an argumentative style which clearly conveys the passion and conviction of the author. A list of ideophones is included in an appendix, enabling verification of some of the claims made. The coverage is broad, from morphosyntax to semantics, and multiple methods are used, from corpus searches to elicitation and frame-semantic analysis. One cannot help but admire the energy with which a large literature has been mastered and whole fields of study are drawn into the discussion. However, perhaps the project is too ambitious. With its broad coverage comes almost inevitably a lack of depth, leading to several analytical lacunae —the main target of the following.

Critical evaluation and questions

1. The thesis cites functional-typological approaches to language in support of the point that it can be hard to "find some structural features which would sharply delimit ideophones from the rest of the vocabulary", and therefore that it is "more fruitful to use semantic criteria" (p. 9). Puzzlingly, the cross-linguistic definition subsequently adopted from Dingemanse *does* offer a combination of structural and semantic criteria (cf. Dingemanse 2011:23-8). This passes without further notice. More puzzlingly, later on we learn that in collecting Hindi ideophones, the author has not used a strictly semantic definition but has relied on structural features (p. 21). In the end, the reader is kept in the dark about how exactly the class of ideophones is defined in Hindi: structural criteria have clearly been used to collect a large set of words, but these are not described in detail (except for some patterns of reduplication). In fact, numerous structural features well-known from the ideophone literature are clearly relevant in Hindi ideophones (including monovocality of roots, templatic morphology of word forms, and vocalic ablaut) — yet they remain unmentioned.

    Is it possible to define ideophones in semantic terms only? If not, what are some of the structural features, besides reduplication, by which we can recognise ideophones in Hindi?

2. The author puts forward the daring thesis that ideophones are one of a kind with interjections (pp. 12-17). This is a major departure from prior analyses, and it would require ample justification; however, the evidence is severely lacking. Could it be that the author gets carried away by a loose metaphor of "closeness to the original perception" (p. 13) and in the process overlooks a crucial semiotic distinction between INDEXICALITY (when a sign stands in a relation of causal-temporal contiguity to that what it refers to) and ICONICITY (when a sign stands in a relation of resemblance to that what it refers to)? Consider this. Perhaps it is true that an interjection such as 'yum' "involves the imagination … in a much more vivid way than the word simple [sic] 'tasty' does" (p. 11), but the semiotic process by which this happens is that of indexicality, not iconicity. There is no resemblance between the perception of tastiness and the word 'yum' — rather there is a conventional causal-temporal link between them which, when followed the other way, makes it possible for the word to evoke the perception. Ideophones are different: here, we *can* see a relation of resemblance between, say, the perception of puffing and

the word '$p^h\tilde{u}{:}p^h\tilde{u}{:}$'. So even if both are close in some way to a perception, they are for different reasons, and by means of different processes. (The discussion of how interjections are not always immediate responses recapitulates a well-known analysis of interjections (Kockelman 2003) but is largely besides the point: this does not make them more like ideophones, but less.) A whole class of words not normally considered part of the ideophone inventory is elevated to being the prime example of the class. And yet the argument is not taken to its logical conclusion: we find no interjections included in the appendix and after this section they make no further appearance. This alone sheds major doubt on the claims and should be reason to reconsider them critically.

To what extent might Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index and symbol help to illuminate the relation between ideophones and interjections?

3. It remains unclear what exactly 'depiction' means and what makes ideophones so effective in evoking sensory meanings. The analogy with interjections fails to illuminate this. Conspicuously absent from the whole discussion is the notion of iconicity. We learn that "the ideophone *dʒɪdʒak* depicts how the experiencer who hesitates feels" (p. 19) and that "the ideophone *dʒɪlmɪla:ta:* helps the hearer to evoke the whole scene and the special way the light is emitted" (p. 20) — but exactly how these ideophones do that is left unexplained. Is the claim that merely hearing the word evokes the imagery? By what mechanism could this work? From the wide range of literature cited it is clear that the author certainly must have encountered the notion of iconicity, and the various ways in which speech can iconically depict aspects of sensory imagery. It is therefore surprising that this notion does not play a more prominent role in the analysis.

How exactly do Hindi ideophones manage to 'evoke' or 'depict' the sensory imagery they are said to express? Could the notion of iconicity help to clarify how ideophones work?

4. In the description of the morphosyntactic behaviour of ideophones in Hindi, the author notes that some ideophones pattern with other types of words like adjectives or nouns, while others seem to form their own class. The first type is then declared "not that interesting" and is not further investigated. This seems to reveal a certain predilection for the exceptional — something that has been diagnosed by Newman (2001) as a problem inherent in work on ideophones.

What can we learn from the Hindi ideophones that behave like members of other major word classes? What is the relation between those and the ones that appear to be more independent?

5. In the third part, it is very helpful that the elicitation prompts are provided. This allows us to see that they are quite divergent across the sensory domains. Some of them push for a subjective evaluation; some of them push for the description of a type; and some push for a description of a manner. That the prompts do not always lead to the expected results is seen in the fact that "subjects sometimes tended to explain stimuli by simply describing instead of uttering ideophones" (p. 32-3). The conclusion that "the color domain proved to contain no ideophones at all" (p. 35) seems too strong given the tentative nature of the tasks.

Would you expect different results if the elicitation prompts were brought in line with each other to make them systematically comparable across the domains?

6. The final part of the thesis is about Frame Semantics (FS). This is an important approach to meaning, and the literature review is well done. However, the chapter fails to make clear what distinctive contribution FS could make to the study of ideophones specifically. Essentially what the chapter does is (1) describe the Perception frame; (2) agree with prior work that it is helpful

to analyse utterances with perceptual words in terms of this frame; (3) argue that ideophones, therefore, can also be analysed in terms of this frame; (4) proceed to duplicate the Perception frame and call it the Vivid Sensation frame; and (5) claim that we now have a better understanding of ideophones. Up to step 3, there is no quarrel: of course FS can be used to analyse perceptual words, including ideophones. But things get muddy at steps 4-5. No arguments are provided as to why ideophones would need their own frame. There appears to be no substantial difference between the Vivid Sensation frame and the Perception frame. The Percept frame element does not specify what makes the sensation vivid, and the addition of Modality is not specific to ideophones. From the discussion in the chapter, it is hard to understand what these terminological moves are buying us in terms of advancing our understanding of ideophones. But it does seem that there *is* a viable contribution that a FS approach could make. This would be to draw attention to the high semantic specificity of ideophones and to analyse collocations featuring ideophones in these terms, as Akita (2012) does for Japanese ideophones.

What is the aim of introducing the Vivid Sensation frame, how does it differ from the Perception frame, and how can Frame Semantics advance our understanding of ideophones?

7. Overlooking the thesis as a whole, there is a notable lack of integration across the different parts. Arguments about the ideophonic status of interjections in part 1 do not make an impact on the remaining descriptive parts 2, 3 and 4. Insights from the description (2) do not figure in the analysis of the elicitation (3), and vice versa. The constructions described in part 2 do not return in the frame semantic analysis of part 4. While the candidate has clearly shown his ability to raid a large body of literature, the broad coverage makes the analysis more superficial than it could have been. One feels there are too many stipulations and not enough demonstrations — that is, too much rhetoric and hand-waving, and too little in-depth analysis that could have resulted in rock-solid generalisations and explanations. What would the thesis have been like if the author had focused his argumentative and analytical skills at one or two closely related areas, rather than four rather disparate ones? This leads me to the final question:

If you would get the chance of mercilessly pruning some of the more sketchy parts of the thesis to focus on strengthening one or two of the areas it covers, what would you choose? In which area do you feel lie the most substantial contributions of this thesis?

Style

The thesis does not always maintain a strictly objective tone. For instance, it is unnecessary to describe the work of a historical linguist as devoid of "any rigid linguistic analytic tools" (p. 7) — scholars have different goals and work with different methods, and it would have been more constructive to call attention to the fact that Chevillard's work provides important textual evidence for ideophonic words going back many centuries. Nor is it necessary to sing the praises of the work of others (e.g. "very well summed up", p. 8, "very good definition", p. 11). Careful adoption of terms and definitions would in itself be a sign of approval which needs no further comment. Some claims are too rash: in chapter 4 we learn that "no one has ever examined ideophones from the perspective of Frame Semantics", but this overlooks a prominent analysis of ideophones in Cognitive Linguistics (Akita 2012). A good rule of scholarly discourse is to show rather than tell.

The text is marred by several typos (effects > affects, lintuistics > linguistics, etc.), and could use another round of editing. Consider references that are missing (Konrad 1994) or misspelt (Elsik 2006

for Elsik & Matras, with no year in the references), or the various spellings of Dingemanse (Dingemnase, Dinegamense). Finally, there are some uses of English that are unknown to this reviewer (what is the "footback" stimulus? isn't the word 'idiosyncratic' used in an idiosyncratic way?).

This concludes my evaluative comments. In closing I should reiterate that one can hardly avoid being impressed by the vigour and energy displayed by the author. Though the end result may be uneven in quality, the work as a whole is certainly a sign of the industriousness and initiative of the author. Some judicious revisions would do it much good.

References cited in this report

Akita, Kimi. 2012. "Toward a frame-semantic definition of sound-symbolic words: A collocational analysis of Japanese mimetics." *Cognitive Linguistics* 23 (1): 67–90. doi:10.1515/cog-2012-0003.
Kockelman, Paul. 2003. "The Meanings of Interjections in Q'eqchi' Maya: From Emotive Reaction to Social and Discursive Action." *Current Anthropology* 44 (4): 467–497.
Newman, Paul. 2001. Are Ideophones Really as Weird and Extra-Systematic as Linguists Make them Out to Be? In *Ideophones*, ed by. F. K. Erhard Voeltz and Christa Kilian-Hatz, 251–258. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Final recommendation

I recommend the thesis to go to the defense.

I suggest a classification of 3 "Good" (60-74%).

Motivation. The suggested classification might have been higher had the thesis shown stronger empirical specialisation or more analytical depth — things that usually go together. A revision could probably remedy several of the lacunae indicated, but I will leave that to the committee to decide.