

## SOME ASPECTS OF THE IDEOPHONE IN NDEBELE

J. ZONDO

*Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Zimbabwe*

MANY LINGUISTS HAVE written on the ideophone; and the major emphasis seems to be laid on its phonological and morphological features, to the consequent neglect of semantic and syntactic features. Von Staden, however, has thrown considerable light on the ideophone in Zulu; and, because of the close relationship of Zulu to Ndebele, most of the features of the ideophone that he analyses in his article are relevant to any discussion of Ndebele ideophones.<sup>1</sup> But rather than repeat Von Staden's approach this article will discuss a feature which Von Staden seems not to have examined to maximum effect, the syntactic feature of the ideophone. Some light will be thrown on the semantic feature of the ideophone in Ndebele alongside the syntactic analysis. A socio-linguistic treatment will be given towards the end of the article, and an appendix, less detailed, will also be given on the phonological and morphological features of the ideophone in Ndebele.

### SYNTAX

There are many constructions in which ideophones are used in Ndebele. Some of the constructions have been pursued by Von Staden in his article on Zulu ideophones. The constructions which he has left out and which seem to be widely used in Ndebele will be discussed below.

1. One of the commonest constructions in Ndebele in which ideophones are used is when a descriptive stem inflected by a subjectival concord of noun class 17 /ku/ precedes an ideophone:

- (1) *Kumnyama tshu.* (It is really dark.)  
*Kubomvu gebhu.* (It is really red.)  
*Kumhlophe nke.* (It is really white.)  
*Kuluhlaza tshoko.* (It is really green.)

The subjectival concord of class 17 /ku/ bears a high tone in each of the four combinations above where it is a constituent. The inherent high tone is an inflectional mode. The inflection process turns the whole expression into a copulative. The ideophone in the expression has a copulative usage. It serves the role of highlighting and dramatizing, in each respective example, darkness, redness, whiteness or greenness; the ideophones used for these three items are, respectively, /tshu/, /gebhu/, /nke/ and /tshoko/.

<sup>1</sup>P.M.S. von Staden, 'Some remarks on ideophones in Zulu', *African Studies*, (1977), XXXVI, 195-224.

In each of the instances where an ideophone appears in the above examples, it is an expression of quality, somewhat defining the substance that the speaker or hearer is confronted with. It can be said then that the ideophone in the construction is an intensity morpheme clearly delineating the quality of the features under description, adding a punch and clarity of expression not provided by any other grammatical feature. The vividness of expression can easily be noticed in the examples below as the intensity of description mounts from the identificative copulative, to a reduplicated ideophone appearing after the same descriptive:

- (2) a. *Kumnyama*. (It is dark.)  
 b. *Kumnyama tshu*. (It is really dark.)  
 c. *Kumnyama tshu tshu*. (It is extremely dark.)
- (3) a. *Kubomvu*. (It is red.)  
 b. *Kubomvu gebhu*. (It is really red.)  
 c. *Kubomvu gebhu gebhu*. (It is bright red.)

The type of darkness—that known by a rural population unacquainted with the blessing of electric lighting, expressed by (2) b and (2) c, is so obvious and so concrete when expressed through the medium of an ideophone that it cannot escape even the most casual reader. Examples (2) b and (2) c are expressions used respectively of a summer night when storm clouds are either quietly or threateningly floating in a rural sky. Prefixing the class 17 subjectival concord to the descriptive stem and adding an ideophone after the inflected forms makes the whole expression an identificative copulative ideophonic clause.

2. The copulative inflection of a descriptive is still the base for the second appearance of an ideophone to be treated here. The ideophone in the construction is introduced by the verb /-*thi*/. The radical /-*thi*/ has an element of perpetual 'doing' in it, be it in the past, present or future tense; in fact, it appears in many instances where ideophones are used, and it seems to carry the function of introducing, stating the dramatic element within the ideophone. It is to be noticed also that the verb /-*thi*/ carries all forms of inflection on behalf of the ideophone. It is the medium through which the mood, the tense, aspect, positive and negative nature of the ideophones are expressed. Since it has the undeniable cordial relationship with the ideophone the verb /-*thi*/ is therefore used in the copulative inflected ideophonic clauses.

- (4) *Kumnyama kuthe tshu*. (It is extremely dark.)  
*Kubomvu kuthe gebhu*. (It is extremely red.)  
*Kumhlophe kuthe nke*. (It is extremely white.)  
*Kuluhlaza kuthe tshoko*. (It is extremely green.)

What can be noticed from the outset is the verb /-*thi*/ adds to the intensification in the meaning of the ideophone in the four expressions above. In other words, the ideophone together with the verb /-*thi*/ expresses all there is to

blackness, redness, whiteness, etc. The quality of each of the colours is made more vivid and made far more obvious than if there was no usage of the two constituents.

Once again the ideophone can be repeated adding even further colour to the qualities under description. One can notice in the examples below the mounting of the descriptive quality from a minimal to a maximal quality:

- (5) a. *Kumnyama*. (It is dark.)  
 b. *Kumnyama tshu*. (It is really dark.)  
 c. *Kumnyama kuthe tshu*. (It is extremely dark.)  
 d. *Kumnyama kuthe tshu tshu*. (It is excessively dark.)
- (6) a. *Kubomvu*. (It is red.)  
 b. *Kubomvu gebhu*. (It is really red.)  
 c. *Kubomvu kuthe gebhu*. (It is extremely red.)  
 d. *Kubomvu kuthe gebhu gebhu*. (It is excessively red.)

In terms of structure this construction consists of the following constituents:  
 copulative descriptive + /-*thi*/ + ideophone.

The verb /-*thi*/ and the descriptive are in concordial agreement. The concordance is brought about by the subjectival concord of noun class 17 /-*ku*/. The opening descriptive and the accompanying verb make a clause which is eventually completed by an ideophone.

The verb /-*thi*/ in the expressions above is in the perfect tense using one of the allomorphic forms of the perfect tense, the vowel /-*e*/. The verb phrase /*kuthe*/ in each of the expressions above thus describes the ideophone, in the perfect. The 'extreme' or the 'excessive' nature of each quality under description is in a state of completeness. It is a state that has obtained, perpetuating itself in the context of observation.

To emphasize the vividness of description of the perfect tense verb /-*the*/ bears a high tone in its two elements /*ku*-/ and /-*the*/. The inflected verb can therefore be described as a sequence of high tones. It bears the emphatic pitch that is a major feature of introducing ideophones. After the articulation of the verb /*kuthe*/ there is a general pause made by the speaker before the ideophone can be uttered. It may be noticed that prosodically ideophones bear their own tones and display their own pitch variations in any form of expression. If, for example, they are high-toned and utterance-final, they will still bear their high tone, so violating the general rules of tone in Ndebele:

- (7) a. *Kumhlóphe kúthé*. (It is extremely white.)  
 b. *Kumnyáma kúthé tshú*. (It is extremely dark.)  
 c. *Kúhúhlaza kúthé tshókó*. (It is extremely green.)

Each of the examples in (7) has an ideophone bearing a high tone. The ideophones are utterance-final yet each one of them bears a high tone. The general rule in Ndebele is that an item that is utterance-final in any sentence experiences a

downdrift intonation in the process of articulation. In other words the ideophones in (7) ought to be bearing some form of realization of low tone, or a high tone gradually becoming lower if the utterance is more than one syllable.

3. The subjectival concord of class 17 is not used only with descriptives to combine with an ideophone, but also appears with verbs in the perfect tense. It will still be prefixal in nature:

- (8) *Kúgcwéle*. (It is full.)  
*Kúthúle*. (It is quiet.)  
*Kúqóndile*. (It is straight.)  
*Kúvátèkile*. (It is shut.)

As is evident in the examples in (8), the /ku-/ carries a high tone which, as has been stated earlier, is an inflectionary mode. All the verbs are in the perfect tense, using the terminal morphemes, /-ile/ and /-e/. To dramatize the degree of finality of action, quality, state, etc. in most forms of the perfect verb, an ideophone can be added immediately after the copulative inflected perfect verb. It is also possible to introduce the ideophone with the perfect form of the verb /-thi/ i.e. /kuthé/:

- (9) *Kugcwele phamu*. (It is really full.)  
*Kuthule zwi*. (It is very quiet.)  
*Kuqonde nta*. (It is so straight.)  
*Kuvaleke ngci*. (It is totally shut.)  
  
*Kugcwele kuthé phamu*. (It is full to the brim.)  
*Kuthule kuthé zwi*. (It is deadly quiet.)  
*Kuqonde kuthé nta*. (It is excessively straight.)  
*Kuvaleke kuthé ngci*. (It is undeniably shut.)

The examples in (9) once again show the emphasis in meaning that is brought about by the inclusion of the perfect /kuthé/ in the expressions.

However, /ku-/ is not used only with the perfect form of the verb. It can be used with the participial mood of the verb in the present tense, after which an ideophone is added:

- (10) *Kugwala phamu* . . . (It fills up . . . )  
*Kuthula zwi* . . . (It becomes quiet . . . )  
*Kuqonda nta* . . . (It becomes straight . . . )  
*Kuvaleka ngci* . . . (It closes up . . . ).

Naturally, the verb /-thi/ can follow the participial clause, and in this case it will almost always be in the present tense:

- (11) *Kugwala kuthi phamu* . . . (It fills to the brim . . . )  
*Kuthula kuthi zwi* . . . (It becomes deadly quiet . . . )  
*Kuqonda kuthi nta* . . . (It becomes really straight . . . )  
*Kuvaleka kuthi ngci* . . . (It closes tight . . . ).

Most other forms of verbs can appear before an ideophone with or without the verb /-*thi*/. In each appearance of the verb in its mood and tense, the verb /-*thi*/ will change prosodically according to that mood and tense before the ideophone can be introduced:

- (12) a. *Kwágcwála phamu.* (It filled up.)  
*Kwágcwála kwáthí phamu.* (It really filled up.)  
 b. *Kúzágcwála phamu.* (It will fill up.)  
*Kúzágcwála kúthí phamu.* (It will fill to the brim.)  
 c. *Kúságcwála kusathi phamu.* (It is filling up.)  
*Kúságcwála phamu.* (It is filling up to the brim.) › brim.)  
 d. *Kúságcwála phamu.* (When it was still filling up.)  
*Kúságcwála kusáthi phamu.* (When it was still really filling up.)<sup>2</sup>

4. Another construction where an ideophone is used is after an inflected form of the absolute pronoun. Fortune has made an interesting note on the form in Shona, to the effect that, 'Irrespective of the topic being discussed . . . the invariable form *ndíye* is used, never *ndíro*, *ndíyo*, &., as one might have expected, with the substitutes agreeing with the topics.'<sup>3</sup> He goes on to point out that the ideophone in Shona can appear also after the inflected form *ndíko*, an inflected form of the absolute pronoun substitute of class 15.

What might be true for Shona does not seem to hold for Ndebele. Each of the seventeen noun classes in Ndebele has an equivalent inflected form of the absolute pronoun substitute. An ideophone can be used after each one of the absolute pronoun inflections. The absolute pronoun can be inflected in several ways in Ndebele, by an associative morpheme /*la-*/:

- |                             |                        |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| (13) <i>laye</i> (with him) | cp. <i>yena</i> (him)  |
| <i>lazo</i> (with them)     | cp. <i>zona</i> (them) |
| <i>laso</i> (with it)       | cp. <i>sona</i> (it)   |
| <i>lakho</i> (with it)      | cp. <i>khona</i> (it)  |

or by a locative morpheme /*ku-*/:

- |                                   |                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| (14) <i>kubo</i> (where they are) | cp. <i>bona</i> (them) |
| <i>kulo</i> (where it is)         | cp. <i>lona</i> (it)   |
| <i>kuye</i> (where he is)         | cp. <i>yena</i> (him)  |
| <i>kuwe</i> (where you are)       | cp. <i>wena</i> (you)  |

<sup>2</sup> One might notice as well, after looking closely at the examples above, that /*ku-*/, when used with descriptives, does not show any allomorphic forms. But when it is used with verbs it displays several allomorphic forms, /*kw-*/ before vowel-commencing radicals of /*a-*/, /*e-*/, /*i-*/ shapes and before past tense verbs, /*k-*/ before radicals commencing with /*o*/, and /*u*/; /*ku-*/ before most forms of radicals of any syllabic form:

*Kw-* *agwala phamu.* (It filled up.)  
*Kw-* *ega ntshompo.* (It is jumping.)  
*K-* *oma qha.* (It is drying up.)  
*Ku-* *gcwele phamu.* (It is really full.)

<sup>3</sup> G. Fortune, *Ideophones in Shona* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), 11.

or with copulative morphemes /*yi-*/ and /*ngu-*/:

- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (15) <i>Nguye.</i> (It is him.) | cp. <i>yena</i> (him)   |
| <i>Yiso.</i> (It is it.)        | cp. <i>sona</i> (it)    |
| <i>Nguwe.</i> (It is you.)      | cp. <i>wena</i> (you)   |
| <i>Yizo.</i> (It is them.)      | cp. <i>zona</i> (them). |

In each of these examples, when the absolute pronoun is inflected by, for an example, /*la-*/ of association, /*ku-*/ of location, /*ngu-*/ or /*yi-*/ copulative morphemes, it loses, elides or drops one of its essential elements /-*na*/, which is a pronoun 'stabilizer' that helps the pronoun to form a phonological word of two syllables capable of carrying the penultimate accent.

The last of these three inflections summarized above is also used as an ideophonic base. Where Shona uses *ndiye* for nearly all the topics being discussed, Ndebele uses all the substitutes that agree with the topic:

- (16) Persons: *Yimi lothu.* (I stood up; lit., it was I, standing up.)  
*Nguye hlasi.* (He grabs; lit., it is him, grabbing.)  
*Yiyo lavu.* (It burns; it is burning.)  
*Nguwe zwi.* (You keep quiet; lit., it is you, keeping quiet.)
- (17) Animals *Yilo phogo.* (It [the stick] breaks; lit., it is the stick breaking.)  
*Yithi goje.* (We [the dogs] drink; lit., it is us, drinking up.)  
*Yiso fohlo.* (It [the basket] breaks; lit., it is it, breaking.)  
*Yizo xhafuxhafu.* (They [the dogs] eat; lit., it is them, eating.)

When used in the examples in (16) and (17) the ideophone, through the inflected form of the absolute pronoun, directs particular attention to the subject(s) performing a particular action. The centre of attraction becomes the subject, and the activity of the subject, through the agent of the ideophone, tops the attraction.

In many uses of this form of construction, a verb in the participial mood is often placed after the ideophone. The ideophone as usual would be dramatizing the action described by the verb it precedes:

- (18) *Nguye, mpuntsbu, ephuma.* (He jumps out.)  
*Yizo fahla, zisephuka.* (The sticks break.)  
*Yithi gojogoje, sinatha.* (We drink the beer.)  
*Yini zwi, lithula.* (You keep quiet.)

Two verbs in the participial mood can be used after the ideophone. The first verb earns its vividness from the ideophone. The second verb is usually a statement of what takes or has taken place after the initial dramatic activity:

- (19) *Nguye lothu, esukuma ehamba.* (He stands up and leaves.)  
*Yizo muu, zikhala zingena esibayeni.* (The cows low, and get into the kraal.)  
*Yithi ntshobe, singena sisithela.* (We get in and disappear into the cave.)  
*Yiwo lavu, ulumatha ubhebha.* (The fire catches, crackles and burns.)

In many other cases, the participial verb coming after the ideophone, takes its own adjuncts and complements which aid in defining and clarifying the drama that has been introduced by the ideophone in terms of time, place, manner, and so on as the situation demands.

Since in the majority of cases ideophones are used after the verb /-thi/, the verb seems to intrude now and then in the construction under description:

- (20) *Yizo zisithi muu.* (They [the cows] are lowing.)  
*Nguye esithi lothu.* (He is standing up.)  
*Yiwo usithi lavu.* (The fire is burning.)  
*Yithi sisithi ntshobe.* (We are getting in.)

After the ideophone, the verb in the participial can come in with its various objects, adjuncts and complements. What one notices about the usage of the introduction verb /-thi/ is that it comes immediately after the inflection of the absolute pronoun. The verb in this instance is inflected by the participial subject concord and the infix /-si-/:

- (21)  $SC^P + Si + R$
- |           |           |                                |
|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| <i>e</i>  | <i>si</i> | <i>thi</i> (lit., him, doing)  |
| <i>zi</i> | <i>si</i> | <i>thi</i> (lit., them, doing) |
| <i>u</i>  | <i>si</i> | <i>thi</i> (lit., it, doing)   |
| <i>si</i> | <i>si</i> | <i>thi</i> (lit., us, doing).  |

The introduction of the verb further directs attention to the action, pin-pointing the drama within the action which is finalized in the ideophone.

It is interesting to note that the ideophone can be used after the copulatively inflected noun where it takes the place of a verb:

- (22) *Ngumuntu lothu.* (The person stands; lit., it is the person standing.)  
*Yinja xhaka.* (The dog, it bites; lit., it is the dog biting.)  
*Yimvu mee.* (The sheep bleats; lit., it is the sheep bleating.)  
*Ngumvundla ndzwe.* (The hare dodges; lit., it is the hare dodging.)

In each of the cases where an ideophone is used after a copulatively inflected noun, attention is directed both to the subject in action and to the action performed by that subject. After the ideophone a wide range of adjuncts and complements can come but the most variously used is the verb in the participial mood. As has already been pointed out, the participial verb can be in many forms, as in the examples in (19).

The absolute pronoun substitute, inflected, cannot be assigned to a special class for use with a variety of topics in Ndebele. Instead, the inflection of any other class combines with a wide variety of ideophones to express the topic under discussion. The possibilities are as wide as the number of pronoun prefixes. And, as has been noted, in a wide variety of cases the copulatively inflected noun can precede an ideophone in the third type of ideophone construction that has been isolated.

5. Another construction in Ndebele in which ideophones appear is one introduced by a demonstrative copulative, second position:

- (23) *Nampo gozololo.* (They sit down.)  
*Nanso hlephu.* (The bread breaks; lit., there is the bread breaking.)  
*Nanko mbo.* (It covers; lit., there it is covering.)  
*Nanzo bhazalala.* (The sheep sleep; lit., there they are the sheep sleeping.)

Since the ideophone takes the place of the verb in this construction, it does everything that a verb would have done in that context. In other words, the context of the activity performed by the subject of the expression can be deduced only from the ideophone. The demonstrative copulative identifies the subject and the ideophone embellishes the identification by stating the action of the subject.

The demonstrative copulative does identify the subject of the expression, but, to further emphasize the subject of the topic in the clauses, a noun is sometimes placed after the ideophone. The noun has an initial vowel which particularizes the subject of reference:

- (24) *Nanso hlephu, isinkwa.* (The bread breaks.)  
*Nanko mbo, umthombo.* (The well covers up.)  
*Nanzo bhazalala, izimvu.* (The sheep go to sleep.)  
*Nanto ntshobe, igwababa.* (The lizard goes in.)

The copulative demonstrative is made up of a copulative indicator *NaN* plus the prefix-proper of a noun class and a second position morpheme /-o/. This use of the ideophone in fact makes the noun redundant, as is evident in the examples in (23). However, the noun is hinted at and can be guessed from the prefix-proper within the demonstrative copulative. It might be noted that the prefix-proper will be in several allophonic forms which are determined by the morphophonemic changes brought about by the combination of the second nasal in *NaN* and the commencing consonant of the prefix-proper:

e.g.  $NaN + PP + O$  ( $O =$  position 2 morpheme)

- (25) a. *nan - si - o* (cl. 7) *nanso* (there it is) with elision of /-i-/.  
 b. *nan - mu - o* (cl. 1) *nango* (there he is) with consonantalization of /-m-/ into /-g-/ and elision of /-u-/.



- c. *nan - mu - o* (cl. 3) *nanko* (there it is) with consonantization of /-m-/ into /-k-/ and elision of /-u-/.  
 d. *nan - zi - o* (cl. 10) *nanzo* (there they are) with elision of /-i-/.

The phonemes /-si-/ in 'a', /-g-/ in 'b', /-k-/ in 'c', and /-z-/ in 'd' all hint to the possible noun that can be used with any sentence involving these demonstrative copulatives. One can use *isitha* for 'a', *umuntu* for 'b', *umuzi* for 'c', and *izinto* for 'd'. The respective phonemes /s/, /g/, /k/, and /z/ will all be allomorphic forms of the class affixes /-si-/ in *isitha* (cl. 7), /-mu-/ in *umuntu* (cl. 1), /-mu-/ in *umuzi* (cl. 3), and /-zi-/ in *izinto* (cl. 10). The ideophone, appearing after a demonstrative copulative, can be followed by a radical in the participial mood, and usually in the present tense:

- (26) *Nango phunyu, ezihambela uMvundla.* (Mr Hare slips and goes away.)  
*Nanso bhazalala, izilalela inyoka.* (The snake sleeps.)  
*Nanto ntshobe, lingena ebhalwini igwababa.* (The lizard gets into the cave.)  
*Nanzo vadla, zisephuka izigodo.* (The sticks break.)

What can be of particular interest in the examples in (26) is that each one of the sentences has a postponed subject: respectively, *uMvundla* (Hare), *inyoka* (snake), *igwababa* (lizard) and *izigodo* (the sticks). All four subjects have been relegated to the extreme right. Usually in Ndebele, the four elements would have been given a position of prominence since they are the headwords of the four examples above. But they have been delayed in realization adding a punch to the fact that, in each one of the examples of the type in (26), prominence is being placed on the ideophone and its ability to clarify the activity of the subject. There is no doubt that in the examples in (26) there is more of the dramatization of action than a qualification of the four respective delayed or postponed subjects. It is becoming much clearer at this stage that there is more predication within an ideophone than has been recognized previously. This is clearly demonstrated in the first example above, where there is greater emphasis on how the hare 'slips' than on what it is, and in the second, where there is more emphasis on how the snake 'sleeps' than on what it is; and so on.

6. A further construction in which ideophones appear is in the infinitive usage. The verb in this usage is inflected by the infinitive morpheme /uku-/ meaning 'to do'. The ideophone is usually placed immediately after the verb in the infinitive mood:

- (27) *Ukudinginga nya, umvundla.* (To look for the hare [is] never to find it.)  
*Ukuzonda, zwi abantu ukuphendula.* (He gets angry but the people keep quiet and do not answer him.)

*Ukuphunyuka, phunyu, ezihambela.* (He becomes free from the grip and moves away.)

*Ukuhlasela hlase!* (To attack!)

*Ukuthi lothu, umfana.* (The boy stands up.)

*Ukuthi dlephu!* (Scratching.)

Each of the examples needs some form of comment.

In the first, the noun *umvundla* (hare) is the postponed subject of the sentence. Prominence is given to the search and the subsequent climax of that search—not finding the hare. The ideophone in the expression helps to highlight the negative result of the search. In its context in the story from which the example was taken, the ideophone helps toward revealing the desperate and highly charged emotions resulting from the obvious trickery that the hare has played on the search party.

The second uses an ideophone *zwi*. But its infinitive counterpart is the second verb *ukuphendula* (to answer). The ideophone explains the sudden keeping quiet of the people. It serves to show the sharp contrast between the man confronted by the seemingly mute crowd. His deep anger is contrasted with the seemingly emotionless stance of the crowd.

The ideophone *phunyu* in the third example is the basis for the infinitive verb *ukuphunyuka* by the suffixing of /-ka/. Its inclusion in the sentence helps to dramatize the manner in which the boy, man, etc. has freed himself from the grip. Notice that the ideophone in the expression is followed by a verb *ezihambela* (going), in the participial mood.

The ideophone *hlase* (attacking) in the fourth example is also the basis for the infinitive verb *ukuhlasela* (to attack) and works toward intensifying the 'attack' action.

The two remaining examples use the infinitive form of the verb /-thi/ which, as has been noted earlier, invariably introduces a wide range of syntactic appearances of ideophones. A postponed subject can be used, as in *ukuthi lothu umfana*. The visual impression, and the conceptual impressions, brought about by this usage, can elude even the most casual reader in the actual context of ideophonic usage.

Since an ideophone can appear after the above mood, the nonfinite infinitive, it can also appear after another of the nonfinite moods, the imperative:

- (28) *Valeka ngci!* (Close tightly!)  
*Manzisa te!* (Wet completely!)  
*Vuleka gengelezi!* (Open widely!)  
*Bopha mfi!* (Tie tightly!)

In each of the examples in (28), the ideophone has an adverbial usage, where it is actually an adverbial modifier of the preceding imperative verb. There seems to be a major emphasis on the ideophone when it appears in the imperative context. It

seems to express the high pitch of command and can be called the height of imperative expression.

In the syntax where the ideophone has been analysed, it seems to give itself prominence as a means of highlighting an action: it dramatizes and gives particular colour to the activity of which it is a predicate. It is, therefore, that element of grammatical drama that enriches the expressive system of the Ndebele language. It is the boiling point of action. It is a predicate of profound effect on the structure of the language.

### THE SEMANTIC FEATURE *-IYANI(E)*

Von Staden has given about three short paragraphs on the form *-iyani(e)*. He prefers to call it an intensity morpheme because he feels that it 'has a semantic aspect of intensity'.<sup>4</sup> It never appears with verbs and can, therefore, be called an ideophonizing morpheme. From a number of examples considered in Ndebele, the morpheme does not seem to have the semantic aspect that Von Staden has used of it. The item 'intensity' suggests some magnitude of strength, force, or energy. Indeed, Von Staden seems to have the same idea in mind. He gives two examples of the *-iyani(e)* forms compared to their verbal counterparts: *-phela* (get finished), *-pheliyani* (get completely finished); *-bona* (see), *boniyani* (of seeing well). He goes on to suggest that *pheliyani* and *boniyani*, as ideophones, can be considered as deverbative derivatives, the intensity morpheme *-iyani* being suffixed to the verbal root. True enough, the items will be seen to be deverbative since *-iyani(e)* is attached to the radical minus its terminal vowel. But the idea of intensity does not appear to go at all well with this form of ideophone.

Whenever an *-iyani(e)* ideophone appears in Ndebele, it always has the semantic aspect of suddenness. It always indicates an element of surprise in the turn of events and the *-iyani(e)* form has always been used as the grammatical form which best captures the essence of the turn. The suddenness of the occasion, turn of events, etc., is always accompanied by an element of ease. There is a possibility of 'swiftness' in the action. Thus *-iyani(e)* is an element expressing a total contrast to crowd, audience, hearer, expectations—introducing ease to an action which might have otherwise been thought of as taxing, difficult to achieve and/or perform.

In fact the examples given by Von Staden in illustration of his viewpoint and the present author's understanding of those examples plainly indicate that the *-iyani(e)* form has, to a large extent, been labelled somewhat carelessly. *Pheliyani* and *boniyani* in the context in which they are used by Von Staden mean 'get suddenly finished' and 'seeing swiftly', and not 'get completely finished' and 'of seeing well', as Von Staden suggests.

The *-iyani(e)* forms can be considered in the light of this article as a seventh form of construction in which ideophones are used. As Von Staden has said, the

<sup>4</sup> Von Staden, 'Some remarks on ideophones in Zulu', 207.

*-iyani(e)* form is suffixed to a verbal root. The verb will usually be in the imperative mood. The ideophone of this nature is a stable form. It conveys a complete thought. It is used independently without any aid of object, subject, modifier, or verb etc. In its context, it expresses all there is to the turn of events independently of any other forms. It is sentential in its own way.

It is very difficult in Ndebele to point out with absolute certainty those ideophones which have been derived from verbs. With the *-iyani(e)* suffix, however, it becomes possible to identify absolutely deverbative derivatives. Every verb in Ndebele is capable of being turned into an ideophone by suffixing *-iyani(e)/* to it, but in context:

(29) <i>pheliyane</i> (get surprisingly finished)	cp. <i>phela</i> (get finished)
<i>dobhiyane</i> (pick suddenly)	cp. <i>dobha</i> (pick)
<i>dluliyane</i> (pass easily)	cp. <i>dlula</i> (pass)
<i>fhliyane</i> (hide swiftly)	cp. <i>fhla</i> (hide)
<i>tshaiyani</i> (hit swiftly)	cp. <i>tshaya</i> (hit)
<i>balekiyani</i> (run away easily)	cp. <i>baleka</i> (run away)
<i>valiyani</i> (close suddenly)	cp. <i>vala</i> (close)
<i>dubuliyani</i> (shoot surprisingly)	cp. <i>dubula</i> (shoot).

The *-iyani(e)/* forms are definitely an effective means of identifying the morphemic element within deverbative derivatives.

### SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF IDEOPHONES

Ideophones can be considered as an element of discourse. Wherever they appear in a discussion, the narration of an event, a story, or an incident in a sermon, in a drinking session, in fact in a wide variety of situations where language is used, the ideophones are an essential part of that speech event.

It is obvious, therefore, that the use of ideophones in any speech event requires a certain sophistication of linguistic competence of both speaker and hearer. The speaker or hearer needs to know when to bring in the ideophone which is the linguistic variable within the discourse. The acquired linguistic rules of ideophone usage need to be put into appropriate use with, of course, a wide variety of other rules that make the innate grammar of a community.

At the same time both ought to know the social situation when any form of ideophone may be applied. The status of each individual engaged in the discourse ought to be known or presumed with safety. The profound influence of outlook and personality of each ought to be mutually recognized and appreciated before any effective usage of an ideophone can be established. The social skills which permit an appropriate choice of code elements so as to facilitate the process of communication should be known. Most of all, the ideophone in usage should to a large extent be known to both speaker and hearer: it should be within the repertoire of both. Thus, all that each needs to do in an information-exchange situation

involving ideophones is to see to it that the ideophone to be used is possible, appropriate to the situation, and feasible. The success of the ideophone in its import will, therefore, be dependent on the individual systems of speaker and hearer, and on the shared socio-linguistic systems of both. There is a need, therefore, for a convergent communication.

To a wide extent, the convergent system depends on the gestures that accompany the use of ideophones. The gesture, which almost always accompanies an ideophone, is a direct indication that socio-linguistic competence, is not all that is needed in ideophone usage, i.e., communicative competence, but para-linguistic competence as well. Gesture and body movement are of vital importance to the overall semantic import of an ideophone. It is of profound necessity, therefore, for the speaker and hearer to be imbued with adequate competence to know that the gesture is possible, appropriate, and feasible in an information-exchange situation. The element of gesture has been pursued by Kunene.<sup>5</sup> The gesture can even replace an ideophone—a clear-cut indication of the necessity of adequate knowledge of both ideophone and social etiquette prior to actual application of the knowledge.

The gesture element clearly suggests that speaker and hearer are both actors and observers in an information-exchange situation in which ideophones are used. As a predicative element that colours, dramatizes, clarifies an action, an ideophone, therefore, demands a situation that calls for performance. The speaker is as much a performer in the circumstances as a hearer is an observer. There is more to it, therefore, than uttering an ideophone. Apart from a possible appropriate gesture, the ideophone might be accompanied by an equally appropriate tone pattern. The voice-quality directly contributes toward the overall effect of the ideophone. In the situation, event, or context in which it is used, the ideophone might carry a great weight of meaning on its own, in total isolation, because an appropriate voice quality would have been used in the circumstances.

It becomes possible, therefore, in an article on the ideophone in Ndebele, not to give the most appropriate meaning to an ideophone. Its exact meaning might be dependent on context. The appropriate mental response, the feedback, expected of the hearer is as much determined by the ideophone as it is by the situation and the speaker in any information-exchange situation.

## CONCLUSION

Speakers able to exploit a wide range of ideophones, therefore, are effective in communicating the semantic and dramatic aspects of a language situation which depend on a repertoire shared by speaker and hearer, and on the linguistic and social competence, and the para-linguistic competence, of both. Notably, the ideophone provides such an element of drama, colour and intensity in predication,

<sup>5</sup>D.P. Kunene, 'The ideophones in Southern Sotho: I', *Journal of African Languages* (1965), IV, 19-39.

that it can be termed the grammatical element that dramatizes the familiar life-situation. The element of dramatization is so imbued with ideophone, and is so well expressed by ideophone that Kunene has decided that they should be called 'dramalogues'.<sup>6</sup> And what better term can be used of them?

### Appendix

#### A BRIEF SURVEY OF NDEBELE IDEOPHONES

##### Phonology

Ideophones are of a varied syllabic nature:

Monosyllabic forms:

- du* (keeping quiet)
- zwi* (keeping quiet)
- nta* (straightness)
- ntwe* (gliding)
- pho* (hitting on the head)
- mbo* (covering).

Disyllabic forms:

- bhidi* (falling)
- chifi* (bashing)
- cibi* (treading on foot)
- ntshobe* (disappearing)
- takla* (falling)
- gebhu* (redness).

Trisyllabic forms:

- gamanxa* (filling up to three-quarters of)
- chaphatsha* (splashing)
- phaphapha* (flapping of wings)
- yekethi* (weakness).

Quadrisyllabic forms:

- botoboto* (softness)
- bhalakaxa* (falling sprawling out)
- chaphachapha* (splashing)
- vutshalala* (falling weak)
- xhafuxhafu* (chewing)
- bhadalala* (falling).

Exotic forms:

- bham* (bang, e.g. of gun)
- prrrr* (flying, e.g. of a bird)
- mprrrr* (flying, e.g. of a bird)
- brrrr* (flapping of wings, etc.).

Onomatopoeic forms:

- nyewunyewu!* (meowing)
- o-i-o-i-o-i-o-i!* (braying)

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 33.

*kikiligili!* (crowing)  
*wowu wowu wowu!* (barking)  
*dududu!* (roaring, e.g. of motorcycle)  
*tshiyo tshiyo!* (cackling, e.g. of chicken).

Tendency toward assonance:

*phaqa* (breaking)  
*wathalala* (spreading out)  
*pheqe* (turning)  
*khehlekhehle* (noisy passage, e.g. of old cart)  
*dinsi* (sitting down heavily)  
*nikilili* (spreading all over)  
*phogo* (breaking)  
*votshololo* (sitting down heavily)  
*vumbu* (emerging)  
*dluthudluthu* (snatching).

### Morphology

Reduplication:

*khihlikhihli* (concerted crying)  
*vumbuvumbu* (incessant emergence)  
*xhafuxhafu* (rapid chewing)  
*thalathala* (sudden looking in all directions)  
*nephunephu* (concerted struggle)  
*didididi* (running in all directions).

Ideophonizing morpheme:

*/-i/* with verb derivation

<i>dlali</i> (playing)	cp. <i>dlala</i> (play)
<i>futhi</i> (throwing away)	cp. <i>futha</i> (throw away)
<i>dobhi</i> (picking)	cp. <i>dobha</i> (pick)
<i>hlasi</i> (looking)	cp. <i>hlasela</i> (look).

*-iyani(e)* with verb derivatives

<i>dobhiyane</i> (picking)	cp. <i>dobha</i> (pick)
<i>boniyani</i> (seeing)	cp. <i>bona</i> (see)
<i>dubuliyane</i> (shooting)	cp. <i>dubula</i> (shoot)
<i>bondiyani</i> (stirring)	cp. <i>bonda</i> (stir)
<i>hlomiyane</i> (sticking in)	cp. <i>hloma</i> (stick in)
<i>valiyani</i> (closing)	cp. <i>vala</i> (close).

Derivation of verbs from ideophones (by suffixing of */-ka/*, */-za/*, or */-la/* to the ideophonic stem:

<i>bhansula</i> (slap)	cp. <i>bhansu</i> (slapping)
<i>chifiza</i> (bash)	cp. <i>chifi</i> (bashing)
<i>fotoza</i> (press)	cp. <i>foto</i> (pressing)
<i>dazuka</i> (be split)	cp. <i>dazu</i> (splitting)
<i>nyomuka</i> (pull out)	cp. <i>nyomu</i> (pulling out).

Derivation of nouns from ideophones (by adding or prefixing a noun class prefix to an ideophonic stem):

- umbani* (lightning, cl. 3) cp. *bani* (flashing)  
*imbobo* (holes, cl. 9) cp. *bhobo* (making a hole)  
*isibhamu* (gun, cl. 7) cp. *bham* (sound of a gun).

Most of the nouns derived from ideophones use the noun class 14 prefix /*ubu-*/.

The stem is almost always reduplicated:

- ubukhehkeheke* (noise of a cart)  
*ububihlibihli* (stoutness)  
*ubunyemfunyemfu* (laziness)  
*ubunembunembu* (slipperiness)  
*ubugebhugebhu* (extreme redness)  
*ububotoboto* (softness).