

# THE PHENOMENON OF IDEOPHONIC PAIRING IN IGBO<sup>1</sup>

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Any linear repeat or doubling of a lexical item in the Igbo language is subsumed under reduplication, which is indeed a very important mechanism in the language (Anagbogu 1995). A closer look at specific Igbo language data, coupled with a comparison with the cross-linguistic types of reduplication identified by Rubino (2005), reveals a particular pattern that does not seem to fit into the cross-linguistic types. It involves a form of reduplication, but with the difference that there is always a high tone base that is not simply reduplicated; instead, a low tone is imposed on the reduplicant, with an attendant semantic change that contrasts with the semantics of the high tone base.

This paper explores this peculiar pattern as a special case of ideophonic pairing. The transparency of the mechanism is most obvious in sound ideophones, but is also to be found in other domains that go beyond sound symbolism, like in some fixed expressions and nouns.

En Igbo, toute répétition d'une unité lexicale est incluse dans le domaine du redoublement morphologique, qui est en effet un important mécanisme dans la langue (Anagbogu 1995). Une analyse plus détaillée des données linguistiques de cette langue, allée aux types de redoublement identifiés dans diverses langues du monde par Rubino (2005), révèle un modèle qui ne semble pas se conformer aux types observés par ce dernier. Ce modèle implique une forme de redoublement, se distinguant par le fait qu'il existe toujours une base ayant un ton haut qui n'est pas tout simplement redoublée, mais où au contraire un ton bas s'impose au terme redoublé, accompagné d'un changement sémantique qui contraste avec le sens du radical ayant un ton haut.

Cet article traite ce modèle particulier, comme étant un cas spécial d'association idéophonique. La transparence de ce mécanisme est le plus marquée au niveau des sons idéophoniques. Par ailleurs, on le retrouve aussi dans des domaines qui dépassent le cadre du symbolisme des sons, parmi lesquels les expressions fixes et les noms.

## 0. INTRODUCTION: FORM AND FUNCTION OF REDUPLICATION

Through a cross linguistic survey, reduplication has been described as the “systematic repetition of phonological material within a word for semantic or grammatical purposes” (Rubino 2005: 11). It is a widely acknowledged phenomenon in Igbo and many other languages of West Africa such as Yoruba (Awoyale 1989; Bamgbose 1966) and Ewe (Ameka 1999). Rubino's (2005) cross-linguistic typology of the form and functions of reduplication shall be used as a basis for summarizing the forms of reduplication in Igbo and also for highlighting a definite structure that does not seem to fit either the cross-linguistic forms or the general description of reduplication in Igbo. Of the many characteristics of reduplicated forms identified by Rubino (2005), mainly those that occur in Igbo shall be compared with his examples. The sources of the author's examples are given in square brackets under the particular example.

The first group is the simple form, where the reduplicant matches the base from which it is copied, but without any phoneme changes or additions. This is also in line with what the author calls full reduplication:

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- (1) Full Word Reduplication: **dayang** madam → **dayangdayang** princess  
 Full Root Reduplication: **mag-bichara** speak → **mag-bichara-bichara**  
 spread rumour, gossip  
 (from Austronesian, Philippines originally cited in Hassan et al 1994)

Presently, mainly full word reduplication without any phoneme changes or additions can be confirmed for Igbo, as in:

- (2) **nmádù** human being → **nmádù nmádù** people; a lot of people  
**ákwúkwó** 'book' → **ákwúkwó ákwúkwó** books

A tonal change can be observed in the initial tone bearing syllable of the base **ákwúkwó** to the reduplicant **ákwúkwó**. This is downstep of the initial high tone of the base. It does not occur with reduplicated forms alone; instead, there is a rule governing its occurrence with NP<sub>1</sub>+NP<sub>2</sub> formations generally. Thus, if NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub> both have lexical high tones, an associative or genitive relationship between them is often marked on NP<sub>2</sub> through downstepping the lexical high. The same applies also to the reduplicated form in example (2) above, where the base retains its lexical tone while the tone of the reduplicant's initial syllable is downstepped. This is not a full phoneme change, as in the change from a high to a low tone, or even a vowel or consonant change, and can therefore be seen as a full reduplication. The relevance of this point shall become clear in section 2 below.

The second form is the complex reduplication, which involves some different phonological material such as vowel or consonant change, addition, or reversal. This is a form of partial reduplication. Two of Rubino's original examples from Ilocano (Austronesian, Philippines) are reproduced below:

- (3) Consonant Gemination: **laláki** male → **lallaki** males'  
**babái** female → **babbái** females  
 Vowel Lengthening: **toó** man → **totóo** people  
 CV-Reduplication: **na-lukmeg** fat → **na-lulukmeg** fat, distributive

An example of a complex, partial reduplication in Igbo is

- (4) **ákwùná** prostitute → **ákwùnákwùná** prostitute [used as an insult]

The Igbo reduplicant most probably arose from a full reduplication of the base. There is a deletion of the initial vowel of the reduplicant, as well as a tonal change in the reduplicant. The change could have taken this form: **ákwùná** → **ákwùnáákwùná** → **ákwùnákwùná**. Note the internal High→Low tonal change: **kwù** → **kwù**. This shall be discussed further in section 2 below.

The last type is the group of imitative reduplications, characterized by the creation of a reduplicant that not only does not exist independently but also differs from the base by a vowel or consonant change, as in the following Indonesian examples:

- (5) **belat** screen → **belat-belit** underhanded  
**ganti** substitute → **gonta-ganti** reciprocal

(Macdonald and Darjowidjojo 1967: 54)

Except for simple phonic play in folk songs or some modern pop music, where in the first place such sounds are used mainly for their rhythmic effects, this form of

reduplication does not seem to exist in the Igbo language. The closest to them are the Igbo ideophonic words that have the nature of ideophones in being used for vivid representation of ideas in sound, whereby such ideas could refer to states, events, emotion, and colour Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz 2001: 3). The Igbo examples are:

- 6) **chóríchórí** small and numerous      **bèlèbèlè** soft  
**nígánígá** slim, emaciated      **féréféré** light, easy

What the above examples have in common with the Indonesian example in (5) is that half of the structures, for example **féré** in **féréféré**, do not exist as independent lexical items of the language. It is only on the basis of such an independent existence that the whole form, **féréféré**, can be analyzed as a full reduplication. Something similar has also been observed in Ewe, where, for example, the reduplicated form **nyanyaanya** ‘trembling’ is described as an ideophonic word that is inherently repetitive, but with no corresponding monosyllabic form. Hence, the possible base for it, **nya**, does not exist (Ameka 1999: 31). With regard to the Igbo examples in (6) above, Maduka-Durunze notes also that “no clear surface/level morphological process can be said to be at work as half-sections of these forms have no meaning in the language”. The author consequently concludes that “reduplication in ideophones in Igbo is not a morphological process” (Maduka-Durunze 1998: 61). Finally, the ideophonic words in (6) above do not also have the kind of High-Low tonal contrast that will be seen in section 2 below as the tonal characteristic of an ideophonic pair.

In addition to the aforementioned forms, Rubino gives the cross-linguistic functions of reduplication, out of which mainly a form of ‘intensification’ has been identified and analyzed for Igbo (Anagbogu 1995). Remarkably, the examples from Anagbogu all involve full reduplication of independent lexical items, as in example (2) above. Examples (7) and (8) below and their glosses are from Anagbogu (1995: 44). The verbs involved are: **-kwù ótó** ‘stand’ and **-chá** ‘have/be COLOUR’. The first verb has the [verb root + NP/PP] structure of a typical Igbo verb, also known as a ‘verbal complex’ (Emenanjo 1975) or ‘inherent complement verb’ (Nwachukwu 1983):

- (7) a. **ó kwù ótó**  
he stand standing  
He is standing.
- b. **ó kwù ótó ̄tó**  
he stands standing standing  
He remains standing.

The same downstep observed in NP+NP formations as in example (2) above is visible in (7b), even though the base, **ótó**, is part of the verbal complex **-kwù ótó**. A similar tonal change can also be observed in (8) below, where a downstep in (8a) is not allowed:

- (8) a. **\*àfè zá nà – àchá ríméē**
- b. **àfè zá nà – àchá ríméé r̄mécé**  
cloth his PROG-white red red  
His cloth is deep red.

The already identified ‘full word reduplication’, with an attendant downstep of the reduplicant’s initial tone, can still be observed. The insight from this example is that, in most circumstances, even where the base is part of a multiword expression, as in this case of a verbal complex, the base is reduplicated as a full word.

Distinct from all of the above examples is the ideophone **Kóí!** ‘short, sharp sound’ and its peculiar forms of reduplication. First of all, it can be given full word reduplication, as in **Kóí! Kóí! Kóí!**, which iconically marks the repetition of the same ‘short, sharp sound’. However, it can also be reduplicated in a different form like **Kóí!Kòì!**, which superficially looks similar to examples (5) and (6) above. The form, **Kóí!Kòì!** is a contrastive high-low ideophonic pair, which has the quality of a symbolic unit in also encoding a semantic contrast. The nature of this contrast and its insight into some aspects of the Igbo language shall become obvious in the course of the paper.

Finally, the paper is organized as follows. Section 1 fully explores the system of ideophonic pairing in the Igbo language, while section 2 demonstrates the formation of such pairs with some fixed expressions and nouns. Section 3 relates the phenomenon to actionsart (lexical aspect), while Section 4 forms the summary and conclusion.

## 1. THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF IDEOPHONIC PAIRING

This section uses sound ideophones to introduce the phenomenon of ideophonic pairing. It shall be seen that in addition to a gradual shift away from the original sound domain where the phenomenon is most transparent, the mechanism is manifested in two forms: as a ‘bound ideophonic pair’ and a ‘separable ideophonic pair’ that allows other lexical items to occur between them.

### 1.1. BOUND IDEOPHONIC PAIRS

As already pointed out in the section above, the definition of an ideophone as a “vivid representation of an idea in sound” does not restrict the represented ideas to sound alone; instead, it could refer to states, events, emotions, and even to the perception of colors, whereby the sound symbolic qualities of mimic sound and onomatopoeia become almost irrelevant (Doke 1935: 118, cited in Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz 2001: 3). Ideophonic pairing, on the other hand, refers to the system of forming a new low tone ideophone, IDEO<sub>2</sub>, from an existing high tone ideophone IDEO<sub>1</sub>, whereby the resultant low tone IDEO<sub>2</sub> does not exist as an independent lexical item in the language. Instead, the resultant pair IDEO<sub>1</sub>IDEO<sub>2</sub> is always systematically used together to express a contrastive, rhythmic schema that is meaningful in the language. The structure is most transparent in sound ideophones, but is not restricted to this domain.

The first example is the already mentioned sound ideophonic pair **Kóí!Kòì!**. This pair differs phonically and semantically from a simple, full reduplication like in examples (5) and (6) above. The first phonic difference is the high tone of the base and the low tone of the reduplicant. Although this high-low tone pair can still be further reduplicated as **Kóí!Kòì!**, **Kóí!Kòì!**, **Kóí!Kòì!**, the low tone reduplicant does not exist as an independent lexical item. Instead, it only co-occurs with its high tone base. Semantically, the structure also differs from the full reduplication of (5) and (6), or even a simple reduplication of its high tone base as in **Kóí! Kóí! Kóí!**, all of which simply iconically mark the repetition of the same short, sharp sound of the base. For example, one can easily hear a disapproving

rhetorical question like: ‘Who is walking **kóí! Kóí! Kóí!** all over the place?’ In such a context the persistent high tone sound is perceived as loud and sharp, and consequently disturbing, but a combination of this high tone base with its low tone reduplicant is perceived differently. An example is in the domain of human mobility, especially with regard to the use of the legs in physical movement. Here the ideophonic high-low pair, **Kóí! kòì!**, would refer to a balanced way of walking, like the gait of a fashion model. The balance is now conceptualized to include both the sound of the feet and the to-and-fro swinging movement of the legs. The continuity of this balanced gait can be iconically expressed in the further repetition of the entire ideophonic pair: **Kóí! kòì! Kóí! kòì!** Finally, this sense of balance can also be used to form a verbal complex **-gá kóí! kòì!** ‘walk **kóí! kòì!**’, whose metaphorical meaning is: ‘walk in a dainty manner’ or ‘walk like one whose world is without problems [i.e. one whose world is complete]’.

Another set of ideophonic pairs that has to do with the manner of walking are (1) **kpákám kpàkàm** and (2) **yághám yàghàm**. Both are similar to **kóí!** in that their half sections also exist as independent ideophonic lexical items of the language; they both involve ‘a disorganized manner of walking’. Their difference is in some fine sound-symbolic aspects. For example, while **kpákám** involves a slightly noisy, careless manner of walking that involves contact with the ground, **yághám** involves a similar carelessness in walking, but has more to do with a carelessness arising from the (possibly oversized and therefore noisy) outfit someone is wearing. As ideophonic pairs (**kpákám kpàkàm** and **yághám yàghàm**) there is definitely a sense of balance in the gait, but in a negative sense. The high tone component is balanced by the low tone component of the same negative manner of walking. Hence, the verbal complex **-gá kpákám kpàkàm/yághám yàghàm** would mean ‘to walk in a completely careless (and almost ill-bred) manner’.

The next illustration of ideophonic pairing from the sound domain is the ideophone **kpám!**, which Igwe (1999) gives the meaning of ‘a light hit; the noise of such a hit’ in his dictionary. But as an ideophonic pair, like **kpám! kpàm!**, it is used to indicate completion. For example, it is normal to indicate that something has run out by simply using any of the two sentences below:

(9) **ókà à - gwú - gó**  
maize Perf. finish – Perf.  
The maize has finished.

(10) **ókà à - gwú - chá - gó**  
maize Perf. - finish – COMP. - Perf.  
The maize has completely finished.

In sentence (10) a little intensification is added through the suffix **-cha** ‘complete’. This can be emphasized through the addition of an ideophonic pair:

(11) **ókà a - gwú - cha - go kpám! kpàm!**  
maize Perf. finish – COMP. - Perf. Ideoph.[TOTALLY]  
The maize has totally finished.

The ideophonic pair **kpám! Kpàm!** adds the sense of ‘totally’, that is, there is not a single one of the objects available, both large (**kpám!**) or small (**kpàm!**). A slight semantic shift

away from the sound domain can be observed here: the high tone base, IDEO<sub>1</sub>, stands for the large objects, while the low tone reduplicant, IDEO<sub>2</sub>, stands for the small ones.

The last example is a proverb; it not only also involves a shift away from the sound domain, but also a metaphorical extension into other domains:

(12) **á sá - wá úkwà, yólólóm yòlòlòm; é ghé - wé yā, kpáí kpàì.**

one wash-INCH breadfruit IDEO<sub>1</sub>IDEO<sub>2</sub> one fry - INCH it IDEO<sub>1</sub>IDEO<sub>2</sub>

When one begins to wash bread fruit, it flows; but when one begins to fry it, it bursts.

A little background information is needed to appreciate the ideophonic pairing involved in this proverb. The breadfruit seeds are usually washed in a porous container (preferably a basket) with a great deal of water. This could be in a stream or at home. The activity involves the side-to-side shaking and massaging of the sticky seeds in the container to remove the slimy substance holding them together. It is this balanced side-to-side movement and massage that goes **yólólóm** to one side, and **yòlòlòm** to the other side. And when the seeds are being fried, they start bursting like popcorn. One would have expected here the normal repetitive sound of continuously bursting popcorn, as in **kpáí kpáí kpáí**. Instead, this is expressed through an ideophonic pair **kpáí kpàì**, which is conceived as the loud (**kpáí**) and soft (**kpàì**) sounds of the exploding seeds. Metaphorically, the meaning of this proverb is as follows: the beginnings of most issues often involve smooth and apparently harmonious and balanced activities [**yólólóm yòlòlòm**], but its catastrophic consequences often affect everybody, including those connected with it, whom it would hit hard [**kpáí**], and those that are not connected with it, whom it would not hit so hard [**kpàì**]. Both ideophonic pairs **yólólóm yòlòlòm** and **kpáí kpàì** now apply to the domain of social interaction and reciprocal justice.

## 1.2. SEPARABLE IDEOPHONIC PAIRS

This group involves ideophonic pairs that can be split, with other lexical items occurring between the pairs; they can be represented as follows: IDEO<sub>1</sub> ... IDEO<sub>2</sub>. Some of them occur both as bound and separable ideophonic pairs, while others occur only as separable ideophonic pairs.

The ideophonic pair, **kóí kòì**, belongs to those that occur both as a bound and as a separable ideophonic pair. The same high-low tonal contrast that correlates with a semantic contrast can be confirmed for both forms. For example, the bound form **kóí! kòì!** involves 'a balance' in its meaning. For the separable form, **kóí ... kòì**, a good example would be a classroom context. If a pupil retaliates to a knock on the head by striking the head of his assailant, it would not be surprising to hear him speak of the event in the following manner

(13) **ó kè - rè m òkpó kóí, m ké - é yā kòì.**

he knock -rV-Past me knock IDEO<sub>1</sub> I knocked -oV-Past him IDEO<sub>2</sub>

He knocked me **kóí!** and I knocked him **kòì!**

The verbal complex involved in example (13) is **-ké òkpó** 'give a knock'. The assailant's knock is given as the high tone form, **kóí**, which contrasts with, and is balanced

out, by the retaliator's low tone **kòì!** An additional point is that the 'inherent complement' to the verb, **òkpó** 'blow', has been left out in the second part of the complex sentence. In fact, the whole sentence can also be used in the appropriate context without the verb's inherent complement:

- (14) **ó kè - rè m kóí, m ké - é yā kòì.**  
 he knock -rV-Past me IDEO<sub>1</sub> I knocked -oV-Past him IDEO<sub>2</sub>  
 He knocked me **kóí!** and I knocked him **kòì!**  
 He gave me a hard knock, and I gave it back to him.

The sense of reciprocal justice in the action overshadows the original sound domain of the ideophone **kóí**.

Similar reciprocal balance of actions can also be confirmed for other separable ideophonic pairs. The first is formed with the verbal complex **-má ùrá** 'slap'. It can be combined with the ideophone **tàwàm** 'sound of landing on something flat' to produce **-má ùrá tàwàm** 'give a loud slap'. However, there is a tonal change when the ideophone, **tàwàm**, is used to form an ideophonic pair, because it then becomes a contrastive high-low tone pair: **táwám ... tàwàm**. As with (14) above, the inherent complement of the verb can also be left out, leading to such sentences as:

- (15) **ó màrà m táwám, m máá yā tàwàm.**  
 he slapped me IDEO<sub>1</sub>, I slapped him IDEO<sub>2</sub>  
 He slapped me **táwám**, and I slapped him **tàwàm**.  
 He gave me a resounding slap, and I gave it back to him.

Another verbal complex that is used in a similar manner is **-kú òkpó** '(to) box'. When combined with the ideophone **gbim** 'the sound of a heavy object landing', one has **-kú òkpó gbim**, or simply **-kú gbim** 'give a heavy blow'. Similar constructions as (14) and (15) can also be formed with it, as in (16):

- (16) **ó kùrù m gbím, m kúó yā gbim.**  
 he hit me IDEO<sub>1</sub>, I hit him IDEO<sub>2</sub>  
 He hit me **gbím**, and I hit him **gbim**.  
 He hit me hard, and I hit him back..

Finally, the examples in this section suffice to demonstrate that, although the mechanism of ideophonic pairing might have its origin within the sound domain, their usage is not restricted to that domain. This shift away from the sound domain is further confirmed in the application of the mechanism to other parts of speech, where it is used to express a similar balance and completion as with the sound ideophones.

## 2. IDEOPHONIC PAIRING WITH FIXED EXPRESSIONS AND NOUNS

Some fixed expressions and nouns can also be used to form ideophonic pairs. Similar to the nature of the already examined ideophonic pairs, the low tone reduplicants of the fixed expressions and nouns are also non-existent as independent lexical items in the language, and the high-low tonal balance between the pairs also correlates with a semantic balance.

An example of a fixed expression is the form for ‘Thank you!’, of which there are many Igbo equivalents, like **Dáálú!** and **Dèémé!**. Of these two, the use of **Dèémé!** to form an ideophonic pair can be identified. The following tonal changes in its use for ideophonic pairing can be confirmed. First of all, its lexical tone is High-Low-High: **Dèémé!**; but + are imposed on it as IDEO<sub>1</sub>, while entirely low tone are imposed on its IDEO<sub>2</sub>. Secondly, the result is a bound ideophonic pair: **Déémé! Dèémè!** Both the entirely high tone base and its low tone reduplicant do not exist as independent lexical items of the language. The semantics of the tonal contrast involved in the pair can be explained as follows. The expression **Déémé! Dèémè!** is very often used to thank a group of people. It is intoned to express a balanced and warm-hearted greeting that is meant for every member of an audience, both large and small. The high tone form, **Déémé!** refers to the large members of the audience, while the low tone form, **Dèémè!**, refers to the small members. This ideophonic pair can also be used to express an intense feeling of gratitude to an individual. Inherent in such a context is the wish for the giver [**Déémé!**] to also become a receiver [**Dèémè!**] of something similar in return.

The next pair involves a noun. It differs slightly from the above examples where the contrast is between entirely high and entirely low tones. Instead, the reduplicant retains the initial high tone of the base noun, but differs in the tones of the remaining syllables. Thus, the first part of the ideophonic pair, IDEO<sub>1</sub>, is all high, while the reduplicant, IDEO<sub>2</sub>, retains the first high tone syllable of the base, but the remainder of the syllables are all low tones. An example is the noun **ńgwónńgwó** ‘property’. The ideophonic pair formed from it is joined by the conjunction **nà** ‘and’, giving rise to the form **ńgwónńgwó nà ńgwòhńgwò**, ‘IDEO<sub>1</sub> and IDEO<sub>2</sub>’. This form does not have the kind of union observed in a bound ideophonic pair, but neither can the ideophonic pairs be moved far apart, as is the case with separable ideophonic pairs. Nevertheless, the reduplicant, IDEO<sub>2</sub>, does not occur as an independent lexical item of the language, and, the pair also expresses the same kind of semantic contrast already identified for other ideophonic pairs. For example, a person who packs his **ńgwónńgwó nà ńgwòhńgwò** when moving house is said to have packed both the largest, **ńgwónńgwó**, and the tiniest, **ńgwòhńgwò**, objects of his/her property.

Similar to the above example is an ideophonic pair that has its origin in an Igbo song of the 90s with the title **òsọ́ ńdí òwé ńdí**, by the Igbo singer Oliver de Coque. It involves the nominalization of some verbal complexes: (1) **-sọ́ ọ́sọ́** ‘be sweet, enjoyable/a pleasure (to someone)’, and (2) **-wé íwé** ‘be angry’. They are nominalized through the addition of the harmonizing noun-forming prefixes **ọ́/o** to the verb roots **-wé** and **-sọ́** respectively (Anagbogu 1990):

Table 1. The Nominalization of Verbal Complexes

VERBAL COMPLEX	NOMINALIZATION	NOMINAL COMPOUNDS
-sò ùsò ‘be sweet, enjoyable/a pleasure’	+ ɔ → òsò ùsò ‘that which is sweet, enjoyable’	òsò ńdí ‘that which is sweet/enjoyable to people’
-wé íwé ‘be angry’	+ o → òwé íwé ‘an angry person’	òwé ńdí ‘that which angers people’

An ideophonic pair in the form of a complex nominal compound is formed from the third column of Table 1, òsò ńdí + òwé ńdí → òsò ńdí òwé ńdí, which can be explained as follows:

- (17) òsò                      ńdí      òwé                      ńdí.  
 that which sweets people that which annoys people  
 ‘That which makes some people happy and makes some others sad.’

The first indication of an ideophonic pairing in (17) is in the tonal contrast of the nominals ńdí and ńdí. The word ńdí is a plural noun that is also used as a plural marker in the language. It has a double high tone as an independent lexical item of the language and can retain this tone in its combination with the deverbalized nouns, as in the two rows of the third column of Table 1 above. Its low tone form does not exist in the language, but is used in (17) like the contrastive low-tone IDEO<sub>2</sub> of an ideophonic pair, where it also has a contrastive special meaning. However, a change of the tonal contrast from ńdí ... ńdí to ńdí ... ńdí as in (18) below is not allowed:

- (18) \*òsò ńdí òwé ńdí

The contrastive meaning in (17) can be explained as follows. Although òsò ńdí òwé ńdí literally means ‘that which makes people happy, that which makes people sad’, it actually does not refer to two different entities that have two different effects on people. Instead, it refers to one object and its two effects on people. In this sense, the sentence should be translated as ‘That which makes some people happy, and makes other people sad.’ Such objects of reference could be any object or event that can awaken joy or envy in people. The affected groups are tonally marked, with the happy group as the high tone ńdí ‘some people’, and the sad group as the low tone ńdí ‘other people’. These meanings of ‘some people’ and ‘other people’ correlate with the tonal contrast of the ideophonic pair ńdí ... ńdí, regardless of the lexical items between them. The nature of this formation as an ideophonic pair is strengthened by the fact that the IDEO<sub>2</sub> ńdí cannot be replaced with ńdí ọzọ, which is used in the language to express ‘the others/other people’.

It is clear from the examples above that the low tone IDEO<sub>2</sub> always involves tonal and semantic contrasts to the high tone IDEO<sub>1</sub>. Such a contrast can also be confirmed for the partial reduplication, ńkwúnàkwúnà ‘prostitute’, cited in example (4) above; but it needs to be spelt out fully in order to recognize that the mechanism of ideophonic pairing is also at work here. First of all, the verb -kwú ‘stand’ is a high tone verb, and the suffix

**nà** has the prepositional-directional meaning of ‘to the side’, which is also realized in some dialects as **là**. This suffix should not be confused with the preposition **nà** ‘in, on, at’, which always heads a prepositional phrase but can never be joined to a verb. The suffix **nà** ‘to the side’ is combined with **-kwù** ‘stand’ to form the compound verb **-kwùnà** which has the literal meaning of ‘stand to the side (of something/somebody)’. This compound form is then nominalized through the nominalization prefix **à** and realized as **àkwùnà** which literally means ‘a person that stands to the side (i.e., to the favour of others)’, → a ‘prostitute’. The idea of prostitutes ‘standing’ around to the favour of one man after the other does not need special emphasis. The connection with the ideophonic pairing mechanism lies in the reduplicated verb root **-kwù**, which is a high tone verb. It is realized twice in **àkwùnàkwùnà**, but each time with a different tone. The first is the low tone **kwù** and the second is the high tone **kwù**. The combination of both iconically marks the ‘standing around’ of the prostitute, one time here with one man [**kwù**], another time there with another [**kwù**].

Finally, the examples in this and the previous section suffice to demonstrate that the original sound symbolic aspects of ideophonic pairs not only become less prominent the more the ideophonic words are used to express some form of contrast, balance, or completion in other domains, but also that words of other parts of speech are subject to the same mechanism. It is however not easy to give a name to the nature of the subtle semantic contrast and balance between the two components of an ideophonic pair. The closest way to approaching to this subtlety is the concept of actionsart (lexical aspect).

### 3. IDEOPHONIC PAIRING AND LEXICAL ASPECT

It is not being argued here that ideophonic pairing is lexical aspect. Instead, the view is that, although actionsart has been given all forms of interpretations differing from its initial meaning of “secondary modifications of basic verb meanings by means of affixes” (Klein: 1994: 17), the concept still suffices to help one have a handle on the nature of the subtle meaning contrasts involved in ideophonic pairing. This section simply summarizes the relevant points of lexical aspect and relates these to the phenomenon of ideophonic pairing.

First of all, in all the efforts to explain actionsart, reference is always made to its “lexical” nature and the need to differentiate it from ‘grammatical aspect’ (Comrie 1976: 7; Jeschull 2003: 119-120), although both still have to do with the same part of speech: verbs. This distinction also obviates the fact that lexical aspect involves “lexical semantics” (Li and Shirai 2000: 14) and its slippery landscape (Klein 1994: 72-79). Nevertheless, I move mainly within the solid layers of the zone, which is built around the concepts static vs. dynamic, punctual vs. durative, telic vs. atelic. It is mainly this contrast that is of importance with regard to the insight it could give into the nature of ideophonic pairing. Actionsart specific verbs have a simple form as their opposites, which are modified through some suffixes, like the contrast between the following German verb pairs:

Table 2. The Lexical Aspect of some German Verbs

Base Form	Modified Form	Added Meaning
<b>lachen</b> ‘laugh’	<b>lächeln</b> ‘smile’	diminutive-iterative
<b>tropfen</b> ‘drip’	<b>tröpfeln</b> ‘trickle’	diminutive-iterative
<b>streichen</b> ‘stroke’	<b>streicheln</b> ‘stroke tenderly’	intensive

The English equivalents are definitely not a great help, but the last example ‘stroke’ versus ‘stroke tenderly’ suffice to indicate that the German **ln** suffix modifies the meaning of the simple form in these examples. The simple forms express the ‘basic meanings’ and as such are unmarked, while the modified forms are morpho-semantically marked, but without changing the reference of the particular activity expressed through the base verb.

A similar contrast without a change of reference exists between the different Igbo ideophonic pairs already presented in the sections above. The table below summarizes them:

Table 3. The Lexical Aspect of Ideophonic Pairs

Simple Form	Modified Form	Added Meaning
<b>kòfì!</b> ‘short, sharp sound’	<b>kòfì!</b> ‘short, hard, slow sound’	balance and completion between both sides
<b>kpám!</b> ‘noise of a light hit’	<b>kpám!</b> , ‘noise of slow light hit’	completion
<b>yòlòlòrń</b> ‘fast grating sound of something slippery’	<b>yòlòlòm</b> ‘slow, grating sound of something slippery’	balance in the physical movement or activity
<b>kpàí</b> ‘loud and sharp sound’	<b>kpàì</b> ‘sharp, slow, soft sound’	balance and reciprocity
<b>táwàrń</b> ‘sound of landing on something flat’	<b>táwàrń tawàrń</b> ‘balance in the sounds of landing on something flat’	balance and reciprocity
<b>gbìrń</b> ‘the sound of a heavy object landing’	<b>gbírń gbìrń</b> ‘balance in the sound of a heavy object landing’	balance and reciprocity
<b>Déémé</b> ‘Thank you’	<b>Déémé! Dèèmè!</b> ‘Thanks to all!’	balance: great and small
<b>ńgwónkwó</b> ‘property’	<b>ńgwòngwò</b> ‘small objects’	large and small objects
<b>ńdí</b> ‘people’	<b>ńdì</b> ‘others’	some and others
<b>àkwùrà</b> ‘prostitute’	<b>kwùrà</b> ‘standing around’	here and there

Both the base forms and the modified forms of the ideophonic pairs in Table 3 have the same reference. This is comparable to the reference of two verbs that only differ in their actionsart. At the acoustic level, the sounds are basically the same, but at the sound ideophonic level they are construed as contrasting the high base with the low, soft, balance

of the reduplicant; and this correlates with a semantic contrast in different domains. The tonal direction is thus from HIGH to LOW, and the formation of the reduplicant involves an imposition of a low tone on the high tone base. Thus, even for the last example of **àkwù̀nàkwù̀nà** discussed at the end of section 3, and which seems to indicate the contrary direction in its formation, [i.e. low→high instead of high→low], the base verb was shown to be the high tone verb **-kwù́** ‘stand’, which also confirms the general high→low direction.

Finally, the high→low direction in the formation of ideophonic pairs also seems to point in the direction of the base tone of the Igbo language. According to Ikekeonwu (2003), the majority of the basic level items of the language are also high tone based. In fact, the author concludes that the base tone of the language is HIGH, because the high tone “has a high functional load” in the language (Ikekeonwu 2003: 621); hence, the tendency for any change is from HIGH to LOW.

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although ideophones have been identified as one of the lexical items of the Igbo language, ideophonic pairing has not been examined as a mechanism arising from them. This paper has tried to identify and describe the phenomenon as a mechanism that is systematically used to express a contrastive, rhythmic schema that is meaningful in the language.

In terms of its formation, an ideophonic pair can be summarized as involving two formation paths. The first involves the formation of a new low tone ideophone, IDEO<sub>2</sub>, from an existing high tone ideophone IDEO<sub>1</sub>, whereby the resultant low tone IDEO<sub>2</sub> does not exist as an independent lexical item in the language but is always used together with IDEO<sub>1</sub> to form either a bound ideophonic pair IDEO<sub>1</sub>IDEO<sub>2</sub> or a separable ideophonic pair IDEO<sub>1</sub>...DEO<sub>2</sub>. The second formation path could involve an ideophone or a word with a mixture of various tonal combinations, from which bound or separable high-low tone ideophonic pairs are formed.

In terms of its productivity, ideophonic pairing can be described as minimally productive, because not many pairs can be confirmed. This could be related to the nature of the ideophonic source, which is often produced on the spur of the moment. Nevertheless, the example of **òsò́ ńdí́ òwé ńdí́** discussed above points to the existence of the pattern as a mechanism of the language that can always be exploited when needed.

Another point that also needs clarification is the difference between ideophonic pairing and reduplication. The bound ideophonic pairs certainly seem to fit Rubino’s (2005: 11) definition of reduplication as the “systematic repetition of phonological material within a word for semantic or grammatical purposes”. This seems all the more so because the bound ideophonic pairs can be compared with full reduplication, as in the Igbo nouns **ńmáđù** ‘human being’ and **àkwù́kwó** ‘book’:

**ńmáđù** human being → **ńmáđù ńmáđù** people; a lot of people  
**àkwù́kwó** book → **àkwù́kwó àkwù́kwó** books

The ideophonic pairs differ from these examples on three counts. The first is that the nouns are simply repeated for plural formation. A simple repetition of an ideophone like

**kòí! kòí!** would be a form of such pluralization because it simply marks the repetition of the same ‘short, sharp sound’. The second point of difference is in the tonal contrast of an ideophonic pair. The reduplicated words do not have a tonal contrast that correlates with a semantic contrast. The third point of difference is their boundedness and separability. The reduplicated words are always bound together; no lexical material occurs between them, either as partial or full reduplication. Ideophonic pairing can involve separability. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of ideophonic pairing can be described with the terminology of reduplication, but without the two being confused. For example, an ideophonic word like **kòí!** that gives rise to the ideophonic pair **kòí! kòì** can be described the source of the whole ideophonic pair and as the base within the pair, while its low tone counterpart can be described as the reduplicant. In other words, the source can be identical with the base. An ideophonic word like **tàwàm**, on the other hand, whose tonal composition is a mixture of high and low tones, can be described as only the source of the high-low ideophonic pair, **táwám tàwàm**; and, with regard to the internal structure of the ideophonic pair **táwám tàwàm**, the high tone component, **táwám**, forms the base while the low tone component **tàwàm** forms the reduplicant. This is also in line with the tendency of a high-low direction of tonal change in the language. Hence, at the most, one can describe ideophonic pairing as a form of reduplication with sound-symbolic peculiarities, including morphological boundedness and separability, but it is not reduplication.

Finally, this paper has only scratched the surface of the phenomenon; it is hoped that the discussion would awaken more interest.

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