

[Totonaco-Tepehua; morpho-phonology]

Ideophones and templatic morphology in Totonaco de Filomeno Mata

This paper introduces a new type of ideophone based on the author's field research on Totonaco de Filomeno Mata (TFM), an endangered, underdocumented language of eastern Mexico. TFM exhibits semantically linked morpho-phonological templates of a kind that has not previously been described in the literature on ideophones.

An early attempt to define ideophones describes them as “A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity.” (Doke 1935:118). Phonological characteristics discussed as typical of ideophones in prominent surveys such as Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz (2001) and Hinton, Nichols & Ohala (1994) include (a) reduplication, (b) sound symbolism, (c) violation of the phonotactic constraints of the language, and (d) use of ‘wild’ phonemes not found in the rest of the lexicon (Rhodes 1994).

Ideophones in TFM, which fall into the three main semantic areas of color terms, odor/flavor terms, and manner adverbials, illustrate a fifth type of phonological pattern. They conform to strict prosodic templates, which secondarily involve both sound symbolism and reduplication, and which are fully diagnostic of their semantic fields. The primary color terms provide an illustrative example:

Templatic	Non-templatic
saqaqa <i>white</i>	skayiw'a <i>green</i>
tsitsiqi <i>black</i>	ʃpinini <i>red</i>
tsutsuqu <i>red</i>	
snapapa <i>white</i>	
smukuku <i>yellow</i>	
spupuku <i>gray</i>	
spupunqu <i>blue</i>	
pupunqu <i>purple</i>	

The color term template may be characterized as follows: it consists of three C(C)V syllables, two of which are identical; stress is medial; there is a single vowel melody throughout; the initial or final C must be a member of one of the three ‘intensity’ series – {s, ʃ, ɸ}, {t, tʃ, ts, tl}, or {k,q} – while the remaining consonants are generally limited to labials. Aside from minor color terms derived from the above through alternations in the sound symbolic consonant, no other words in TFM follow this template.

Odor/flavor terms and manner adverbials are also templatic. Odor/flavor terms consist of a closed monosyllable beginning or ending with a member of one of the three sound symbolic series. Many of these terms end in a complex (n)C(C) coda, which is also a characteristic of manner of motion adverbials, and is found only rarely outside the ideophone stratum of the lexicon. Thus all ideophones are associated with a prosodic template; the templates vary by semantic field.

Although the association between prosodic templates and ideophones found in TFM has apparently not previously been documented in other languages, there is some evidence that it may exist in at least a handful of other cases. It is of course true that the individual elements that together comprise the complex TFM ideophonic templates are themselves not unique, occurring separately in ideophones, and in non-ideophonic templates, in other languages. A brief survey shows that languages which have ideophones in which sound symbolism and reduplicative templates co-occur may also exhibit the semantically-linked morpho-phonological templates presented here.