Marta Herget
A theoretical approach on ideophonic variation

Ideophones are an open lexical class of marked words depicting sensory imagery (Dingemanse 2019) that occur unevenly across languages. To account for the variation between so-called ideophonic languages (ILs) and non-ideophonic languages (nILs), I propose a novel approach that combines Brentari & Padden's (2001) model of depictive constructions in American sign language and the parametric hierarchy hypothesis (Biberauer & Roberts 2016). Brentari & Padden distinguish between core and non-core lexical components. Similarly, ILs feature ideophones as stable, core lexical items carrying different grammatical functions, while in nILs they remain peripheral and less conventionalized. The typological variation between ILs and nILs can thus be modelled by the distribution of ideophones across the core and non-core lexicon. The parametric hierarchy partitions parameters into different kinds, allowing for a more fine-grained illustration of ideophonic variation within and across languages.
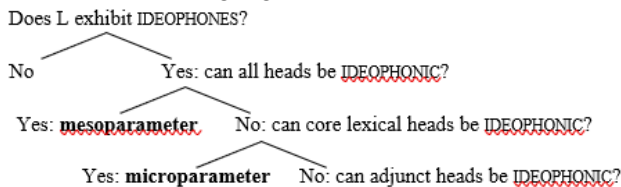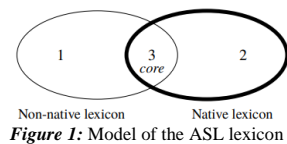

Figure 1: Model of the ASL lexicon

Figure 2: The parametric hierarchy for ideophonic variation

If ideophones occupy more space in the core lexicon, they should be more integrated in the system and therefore carry more grammatical functions. Therefore, more ideophones in core lexical heads (e.g., verbs and nouns) are expected in ILs, whereas in nILs they are largely confined to adjuncts (e.g., adverbials). This new model is not only descriptive but also implicative, as languages that exhibit ideophones in a higher node of the hierarchy are expected to display them at lower levels as well. To explore the possibilities and limitations of this approach, the present study examines to what extend the parametric hierarchy for ideophonic variation is applicable to the languages Changana (Bantu) and German.

References.

Biberauer, T., & Roberts, I. (2016). Parameter typology from a diachronic perspective: the case of Conditional Inversion. In *Theoretical approaches tolinguistic variation* (pp. 259-292). John Benjamins Publishing Company. · Brentari, D., & Padden, C. A. (2001). Native and foreign vocabulary in American Sign Language: A lexicon with multiple origins. In *Foreign vocabulary in sign languages* (pp. 87-119). Psychology Press. · Dingemanse, M. (2019). Chapter 1.'Ideophone'as a comparative concept. In *Ideophones, mimetics and expressives* (pp. 13-34). John Benjamins Publishing Company.