The Systematic stretching and adjusting of ideophonic phonology in Pastaza Quichua

The goal of this paper is to clarify the relationship between ideophonic phonology and prosaic phonology in a dialect of Quichua (aka Kichwa). Our data are derived primarily from field studies within the Pastaza Province of Amazonian Ecuador, with speakers originating from the Montalvo area and the adjacent community of Puka Yaku. Altogether, we have amassed over 2,300 tokens of ideophonic use drawn from casual conversational exchanges, historical legends, folktales and myths.

There have been two main types of observations made by linguists who analyze the relationship between ideophonic phonology and prosaic phonology. It has been commonly observed that ideophones may add a few unusual sounds, features, or phonation practices to a phonemic inventory (Kaufman 1994:64; Matisoff 1994:126; Alpher 1994:162, Childs (1994:181-185); Dingemanse 2011:134. Another observation about the unusualness of ideophones is that they allow phonotactic combinations not seen in the prosaic system (Hamano 1994:154; Newman 1999: 252; Langdon 1994:95; Matisoff 1994:121; Alpher 1994:162; Childs 1994:184; Dingemanse 2011:135; Van Gijm 2010:282-3; Dhorre and Tosco 1998: 127. Our analysis supports both of these observations with some qualifications.

Regarding the sound inventory of ideophones, we find that they add a significant number of different sounds, rather than just a few, but that most of these differences fall into two types: sounds that undergo expressive aspiration, and sounds that undergo palatalization. For example, the ideophone b^hux which depicts a bursting out of water by a large fish, such as a freshwater dolphin, features an expressively aspirated voiced bilabial stop which communicates an idea of a forceful, explosive movement. Altogether, there are 6 consonants among the stops and fricatives, which undergo expressive aspiration only when used in ideophones. Another unusual sound is provided by the example of the ideophone g^jawŋ which simulates the sound of a tree creaking as it falls after being chopped. This ideophone features a palatalized voiced velar stop, which never occurs in the prosaic lexicon. If we consider both the ideophonic and nonideophonic inventories, there are altogether 8 palatalized consonants among the classes of stops and affricates. Of these, 5 occur only in ideophones, and the other 3 occur only rarely in the prosaic lexicon. It appears to be the case, therefore, that the more unusual a sound is in the prosaic lexicon, the more likely it is to occur with greater frequency in the ideophonic inventory.

As for phonotactics, ideophones expand upon the most restricted syllabic patterns allowed by this language. Quichua words typically end in a vowel. Ideophones, however, are most commonly structured using a CVC, CVCC, CVCVC, or a CCVC template. Among the specific sounds occurring word-finally, the least sonorous sounds, namely the voiceless stops and fricatives are the least likely to occur in word-final position in the prosaic lexicon, but occur regularly in ideophones. There are also misplaced allophones among the ideophones, involving allophonic variants which are never supposed to occur in word-final position, but do in ideophones. Additionally, there are cases of sounds that rarely occur in word-initial position in the prosaic lexicon, but do so in the ideophonic lexicon.

We will provide numerical support for these claims of frequency and infrequency of sounds and combinations of sounds, as well as 3 tables which diagram the prosaic consonantal and vowel systems, and the ideophonic system, according to 8 possible variables: An ideophonic sound may be palatalized or aspirated; it may occur with greater or less frequency; it may occur in word-final or word-initial position; it may not occur at all; and finally, it may morph into a very different kind of sound.

Our conclusion is therefore congenial with past studies as well as novel. We adopt the metaphor of 'stretching' first used by Newman (1999) to describe how ideophonic phonology differs from prosaic phonology in Hausa. In Pastaza Quichua, ideophonic variations are 'stretching' the prosaic phonological inventory (rather than deviating from it), in fairly systematic ways that emphasize symmetry across similar types of sounds. Phonotactically, ideophones are expanding upon the most marked structures allowed by this language. We conclude by suggesting some possible social factors that may have had an impact on the ideophonic system, having to do with the history of this language and its speakers' interactions with speakers of unrelated neighboring languages.

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