



LABORATOIRE D'HISTOIRE DES THÉORIES LINGUISTIQUES

# A terminographic study of ideophonic lexemes in Kiranti language descriptions

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- Defining “ideophone”
- Patterns and characteristics of ideophones in Thulung
- Identification of lexemes showing similar characteristics in Kiranti descriptions and their terminology
- Comparison of patterns across Kiranti descriptions
- Conclusion

Two goals:

- evolution of the terms used for these lexemes in descriptions of Kiranti languages
- relevance of the concept and terms for these languages, i.e. does it help us to call these 'ideophones' in terms of the identification and description of these words?

“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)

“an open lexical class of marked words that depict sensory imagery” (Dingemanse 2019)

Depicting sensory imagery = iconic, sound-symbolic

increasingly popular research topic: books, workshops, articles, blog (<https://ideophone.org>)

## Increase in number of studies on sound-symbolism

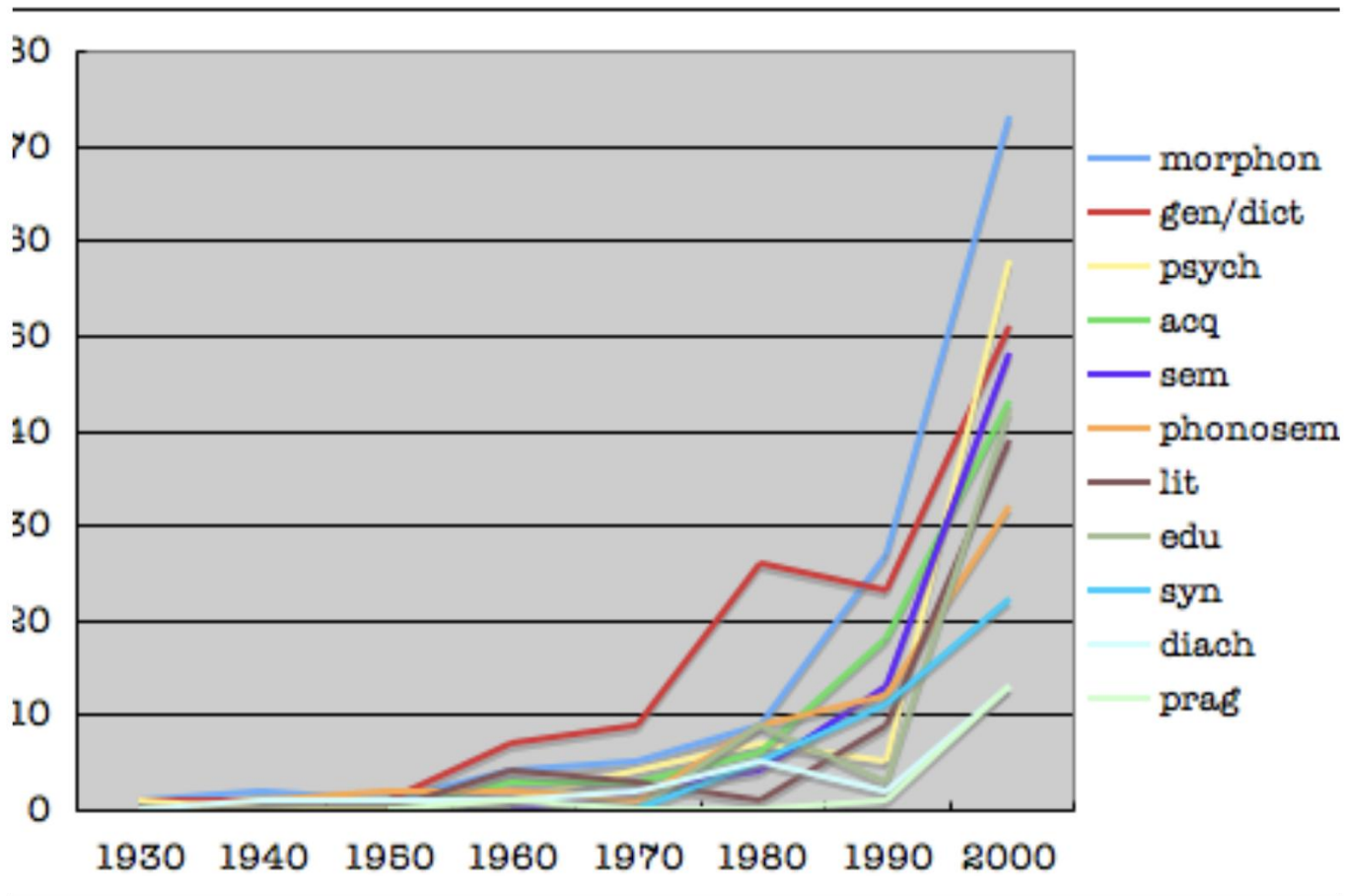


Figure 1. Growth of sound symbolism research in the 20th century

Graphs from Kimi Akita's website, <https://sites.google.com/site/akitambo/Home/biblio>

## Dingemanse (2012) **implicational hierarchy**:

sound < movement < visual patterns < other sensory perceptions < inner feelings and cognitive states

[If language has any ideophones, it will have sound ideophones at least (onomatopoeia).]

Idea that **native speakers** are best placed to identify ideophones:

“it is hard to find another linguistic phenomenon that has seen so much sustained scholarly input from linguists who are also native speakers. The native speaker sensibilities of these scholars has enabled them to highlight key properties of ideophones, while their scholarly instincts helped them to see gaps and biases in traditional coverage.” (Dingemanse 2018)

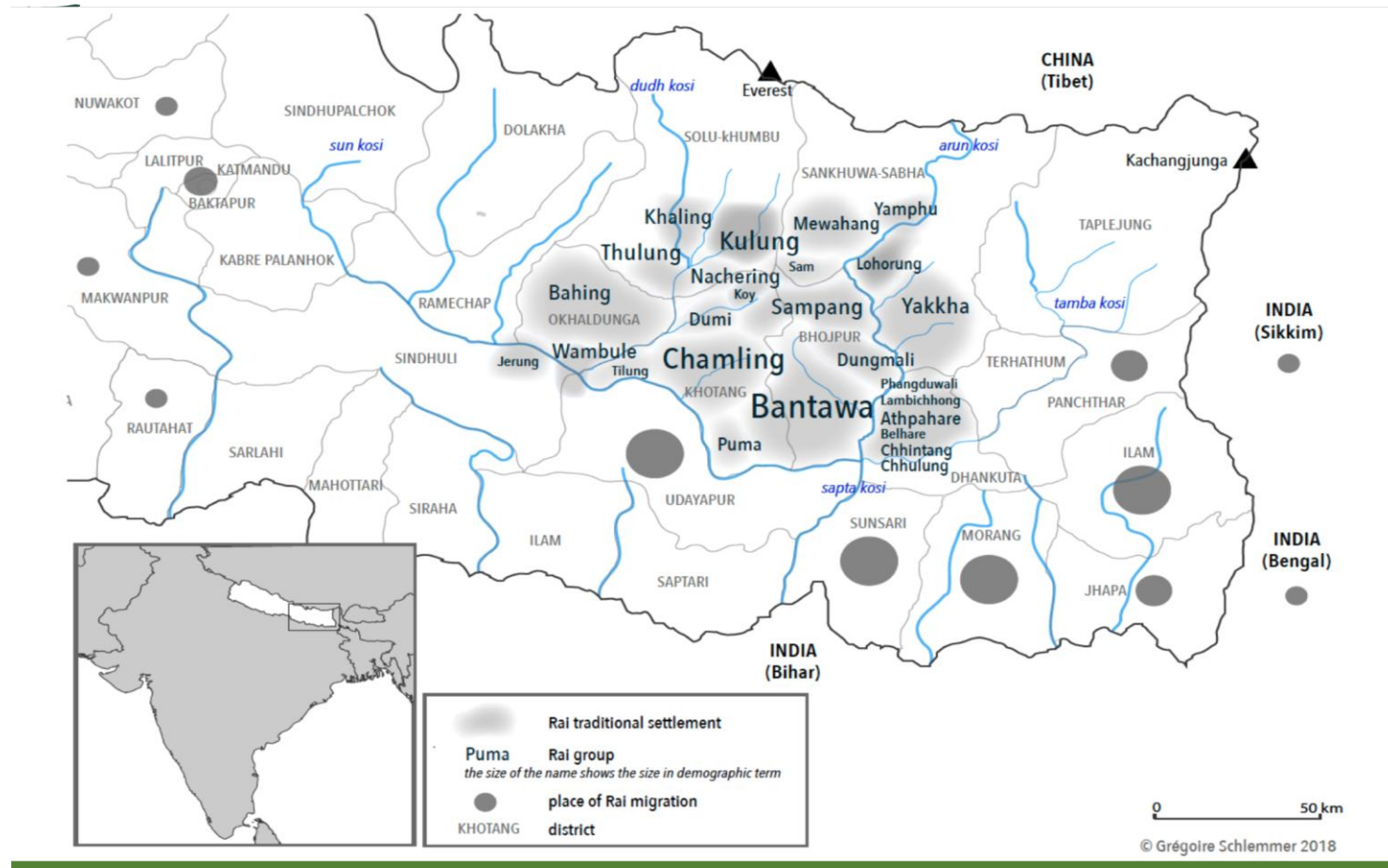
Lexemes of this type are found in South Asia:

across the linguistic area, scholars (Emeneau 1969; Masica 1976; Dahal 1999; Pokharel 1993; Abbi 2018) have noted the presence of words, often marked by reduplication, that are expressive of sound but also other senses.

These words were labeled “onomatopoetics” by Emeneau 1969; he later used “expressive” (of which ideophones are a “subclass in which the symbolism is phonological”) (1980: 7)

Two recent volumes focusing on South Asia (*Expressives in the South Asian Linguistic Area*, Badenoch & Choksi eds. 2021; *Expressive morphology in the languages of South Asia*, Williams ed. 2021) suggest that 'expressive' is well established in the area.

## Kiranti subgroup (Sino-Tibetan)





4 different types, characterized by:

Morphophonological pattern

Prosodic phenomena

Different degrees of morphosyntactic integration

Expression of different sensory domains

Data is from a 10-hour corpus, which yielded 90 occurrences of these lexemes

- Mostly mono-syllabic in shape
- Always carry same meaning, i.e. ‘abruptly’
- Collocate with one (or a small number of) verb

**la:** tha:mu, pull out abruptly

**tshi** pro:mu jump abruptly

**khotse** jummu, suck in abruptly

**lep** bo:mu, push abruptly

**tsər** krwamu, stuff abruptly

**puli** tsarmu, fall abruptly

**piri** nammu, squeeze abruptly

**rəp** tsɛmmu, catch abruptly

**rəp** dzenmu, hold abruptly

**tsha** ghro:mu, throw abruptly

**səle** hanmu, pour abruptly

**phle** lu:mu, come out abruptly

**dzhonj** konmu, lift abruptly

**phe:** hemmu, disappear abruptly

**tsoko** dɛmu, pick up abruptly

**hu** bl:mu, get up abruptly

**thonj** konmu, pick up abruptly

**sep** bl:mu, sweep away abruptly

**tshɛt** bommu, repair abruptly

**phali** termu, knock over abruptly

(1)

<i>hu</i>	<i>ɓɒk-ta</i>	<i>tsɒŋ-lan̄ka</i>	<i>ɒs-ta</i>	<i>hu</i>	<i>ɓɒk-ta</i>	<i>ma</i>
IDEO_1	rise-3SG.PST	back-ABL	go-3SG.PST	IDEO_1	rise-3SG.PST	CONJ
<i>me</i>	<i>thɒ:sa-ku</i>	<i>thɒŋki</i>	<i>dzhon̄ kos-tɕ</i>		<i>ma</i>	
DIST.DEM	pine-GEN	resin	IDEO_1 pick.up-3SG>3SG.PST		CONJ	
<i>thon̄</i>	<i>koŋ-dɕ</i>	<i>ʔe</i>	<i>u-bui-dɒ:la</i>			
IDEO_1	pour-3SG>3SG.PST	HS	3SG.POSS-head-over			

"He **suddenly got up**, he went from her backside and **got up suddenly**, and **picked up** the pine resin **suddenly**, and **poured it suddenly** onto the top of her head."

Distinct pattern includes fully reduplicated or partially reduplicated material  
(never occur in unreduplicated form; this is definitional criterion)

*Fully reduplicated:*

CV<sub>1</sub>(C).CV<sub>1</sub>(C)

phwa:kphwa:k, making sound phwakphwak [sound]

phwiphwi, like the wind [sound, movement]

lala, red [visual pattern]

ʔomʔom, yellow [visual pattern]

tɒtɒ, in a row [visual pattern]

khrekhre, bumpy [other sensory perception]

plɒplɒ, smooth [other sensory perception]

CV<sub>1</sub>CV<sub>1</sub>(C).CV<sub>1</sub>CV<sub>1</sub>(C)

tsʌrjaktsʌrjak ‘making  
sound of hard thread’

khurukhuru ‘continuously’  
[movement]

khʌʈʌrkʌʈʌr ‘superficially  
(eg hoeing)’ [visual pattern]

kʌkʌkʌkʌ ‘few’

phujemphujem ‘fluffy’

phʌsjakphʌsjak ‘loose’

*Partially reduplicated:*

CV<sub>1</sub>CV<sub>1</sub>C.CV<sub>2</sub>CV<sub>2</sub>C

garaŋguruŋ ‘lumpy’

Can optionally take derivational suffix -ja (ADV; no change in function) or -m (NMLZ) for attributive use

Morphophonological pattern  $C_1V_1.C_2V_1.C_2V_1(C_2V_1)....$

- Can take derivational suffix -maksi (ADV, only used with IDEO3)
- Can be reduced to CVCV(CV...)-maksi or extended

(2) *me*      *ne*      *ne*      ***tsiriririri-maksi***      *u-khwatsep-ra*  
 DIST.DEM    TOP      TOP      **small.insect.bite.like-ADV**      3SG.POSS-stomach-LOC

*khre-sat-dʰ*                      *retsʌ*                      *ʔe*  
 bite-APPL-3SG>3SG.PST      it.seems                      HS  
 'It bit her in the stomach **with small-insect-like bites.**'

(3) *u-sem*                      *ne*      ***tələlələlə***      *thus-tʰ*  
 3SG.POSS-hair              TOP      so.long                      pull-3SG>3SG.PST  
 'He pulled his hair very long.'

## **Semantics:** have lexical meanings

khjarjarjarja, with a scraping sound

lʌtʌtʌtʌ, with dripping sound

tsjarjarjarja, with high pitched sound

dzhwararara, with hissing sound

tølələlə, very long [visual pattern]

tsiriri, like small insect bites

Pattern: end in -CCλ(i)

brwassli, with burning sound [sound]

grwappri, forcefully [movement]

[thakkli, exactly

λλkkli, further off

tshλλkkli, in a surprised way

lɪtλλkkɪ, really

ρλλkkli, definitely, surely

thjappɪ, tightly

tswaɾɿli, abruptly]



(4)      miksi-ra      **brwassai**                      tsa-idɬ                      ʔe  
             eye-LOC      **burning.sound**                      burn-3SG>3SG.PST                      HS  
             'She burned her eye **severely**.'

(5)      *u-miksi-ra*                      *memsaka-ŋa*      *suk-tɬ*                      ʔe                      **grwappai**  
             3SG.POSS-eye-LOC      like.that-INT      stick.in-3SG>3SG.PST                      HS                      **forcefully**  
             *suk-tɬ*    ʔe  
             stick.in-3SG>3SG.PST                      HS  
             'She stuck it in his eye like that, she **forcefully** stuck it in.'



# summary of Thulung ideophone types

	Type 1, ideophonic preverbs	Type 2, reduplicated ideophones	Type 3, partially triplicated ideophones	Type 4, geminated ideophones
<b>morpho-phonological pattern</b>	CV(C) or CVCV	CV(C).CV(C), CVCV(C).CVCV(C)	C <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub> .C <sub>2</sub> V <sub>1</sub> .C <sub>2</sub> V <sub>1</sub> (C <sub>2</sub> V <sub>1</sub> ...)	...CCΛ(i)
<b>derivational possibilities</b>	No derivation possible	Derivation with nominalizer <i>-m</i> (into nouns, adjectives); with adverbializer <i>-ja</i> (function unchanged)	Derivation with <i>-maks</i> (function unchanged)	No derivation possible
<b>semantics</b>	collocate with specific verbs; semantics conveying abruptness of action; cannot be negated	convey manner qualified by sound, visual pattern, other sensory perception [eg. texture]	convey manner qualified by sound, visual pattern, other sensory perception	convey manner qualified by sound, movement
<b>syntax</b>	always in preverbal position (no intervening material)	can occur with light verbs	can occur with light verbs, mostly preverbal	preverbal position
<b>prosody</b>	form a single prosodic unit with verb	no particular prosodic marking	in most cases, prosodically marked	in most cases, prosodically marked

# III. Similar lexemes in other Kiranti lgs

Source	Type	Source	Type
Thulung (Allen 1975)	Grammar	Kulung (Tolsma 2006)	Grammar
Bantawa (Rai 1984)	Grammar	Sunwar (Borchers 2008)	Grammar
Limbu (van Driem 1987)	Grammar	Bantawa (Doornenbal 2009)	Grammar
Hayu (Michailovsky 1988)	Grammar	Puma (Sharma 2014)	Grammar (PhD)
Dumi (van Driem 1993)	Grammar	Yakkha (Schackow 2015)	Grammar
Belhare (Bickel 1996)	Book	Chintang (Paudyal 2015)	Grammar (PhD)
Bantawa (Rai and Winter 1997)	Focused article	Dumi (Rai 2016)	Grammar (PhD)
Athpare (Ebert 1997)	Grammar	Khaling (Lahaussois 2017)	Focused article
Camling (Ebert 1997, Ebert 2000)	Grammar/T exts	Thulung (Lahaussois 2023)	Focused article
Yamphu (Rutgers 1998)	Grammar		
Wambule (Opgenort 2004)	Grammar		
Jero (Opgenort 2005)	Grammar		
Chintang (Rai et al. 2005)	Focused article		

## Methodology

Searched through corpus for any reference to iconic lexemes (key words: iconic, sound symbolism, onomatopoeion, expressive, ideophones, phonesthetic, paralexeme, mimetic, non-prosaic...) and recorded both the term used and the morphophonological pattern and meaning;

When there were none of above, searched for lexemes described without reference to iconicity, but which had morphophonological patterns matching those found in Thulung (key words: reduplication, triplication, adverb, adjective...);

The goal was to collect data which was both metalinguistic (terminology use) and linguistic.

Language (resource)	associated term(s)
Thulung (Allen 1975)	expressive resources: adverbs of abruptness, reduplicated adjectives and adverbs
Bantawa (Rai 1984)	reduplicated adverbs from onomatopoetic stems; triplicated onomatopoetic adverbs; onomatopoeic adverbs
Limbu (van Driem 1987)	onomatopeia (as gloss onom.)
Hayu (Michailovsky 1988)	mot phonesthétique
Dumi (van Driem 1993)	onomatopoeia (in glossary)
Belhare (Bickel 1996)	ideophone (as gloss 'IDEOPH')
Bantawa (Rai & Winter 1997)	triplicated verbal adjunct, paralexeme
Athpare (Ebert 1997)	ideophone (as gloss 'IDEO')
Camling (Ebert 1997, Ebert 2000)	ideophone (as gloss 'IDEO')
Yamphu (Rutgers 1998)	onomatopoeic adverb (as gloss 'adv. onom')
Wambule (Opgenort 2004)	adverbial proclitic of manner; adverb (as gloss)
Chintang (Rai et al. 2005)	ideophones
Bantawa (Doornenbal 2009)	ideophonic, onomatopoeic, paralexemic, mimetic
Puma (Sharma 2014)	idiophones [sic]
Yakkha (Schackow 2015)	ideophonic
Chintang (Paudyal 2015)	ideophones
Dumi (Rai 2016)	expressive adverbs, onomatopoeic
Khaling (Lahaussais 2017)	ideophone
Thulung (Lahaussais 2023)	ideophone

- Bantawa & Chintang

Onomatopoeic stems exist alongside nominal/verbal stems, with both found in a template involving full triplication (+wa)

Term “paralexeme” used for Bantawa, “ideophone” (output of pattern is an adverb) for Chintang

- Thulung & Khaling

Morphophonological patterns can be identified which have ideophonic properties

Interesting phonotactics sometimes associated with ideophones, but nothing not also found in prosaic vocabulary (i.e. nothing to identify any roots as specifically ideophonic)

Term “ideophone” used to refer to word class which divides into subclasses for each pattern

Rai and Winter 1997 book chapter  
“**Triplicated verbal adjuncts in Bantawa**”

“nucleus (kernel) K is repeated twice so that a triplet KKK (followed by a suffix – wa) results” (1997: 119); These triplets “specify the manner of the verbal action alluded to” (1997: 132)

Two types: those derived from verbal roots and nouns, and those from elements not found in the basic lexicon and often with unusual onsets and phonotactics; the latter are labeled **paralexemes**

dengdengdengwa (‘so loudly’ in context of beating drum)

Both the nucleus and the output are referred to as paralexemic.

The triplets are also described as iconic, on account of their shape which involves repetition.

Another example of iconicity:

sets differing in their initials, specifying manner of action

*pwakk-* (associated with breaking)/ *bhwakk-* (associated with falling down)

*twakk-* (hitting)/*thwakk-* (breaking)/*dhwakk-* (hitting)

Rai et al 2005 article

## **Triplication and ideophones in Chintang**

Introduces 'ideophone' as a term in the Kiranti grammaticographical tradition, anchoring it in typology (definitions are typological)

rep-rep-rep-wa

('very brightly' in context of sun shining)

Triplicated words described are a type of adverb; **ideophones** are one of the admissible types of base for triplication  
Triplication “contributes to intensify the meaning and is to some degree iconic.”



Rai 1984 (Bantawa): onomatopoeic adverbs

Michailovsky 1988 (Hayu): phonesthetic words

Doornenbal 2009 (Bantawa): paralexemes

Sharma 2014 (Puma): ideophones

Schackow 2015: ideophonic adverbs

Paudyal 2015 (Chintang): ideophones, ideophonic bases/roots

Rai 2016 (Dumi): expressive adverbs, onomatopoeic nouns

## Bantawa (Rai 1984)

- Complete and partially reduplicated adverbs from common stems or from **onomatopoeic stems**

eg. yaNsop ‘light (weight)’ → yaNsopsop(wa)

Complete reduplication deintensifies meaning, partial reduplication intensifies meaning

- Triplicated adverbs from nominal and verbal roots (mUkmUkmUkwa ‘(weep) profusely’ (from muk ‘eye’)) and triplicated **onomatopoetic adverbs** (with no forms as their root)
- Onomatopoeic adverbs: -ni suffix sui yapni ‘abruptly’, bhorakni ‘very loudly’
- Adjectives can be derived from reduplicated and triplicated adverbs (including onomatopoetic) with –ko/-wo

## Hayu (Michailovsky 1988)

- [my trans.] “‘**phonesthetic**’ possibly preferable to onomatopoetic for class of words which are characterized by their use of their phonic nature, which is often but not always unusual, to reinforce their meaning” (1988: 72)
- Mentions adverbial use and pronunciation with a bit of emphasis or interruption in the intonational curve.

Examples include total and partial reduplication:

plomplom ‘flavorless’

krap-krup ‘(eat) voraciously’

## Wambule (Opgenort 2004)

‘adverbial proclitic of manner’ (section of grammar, p 243 ff)

ADVERB	ENGLISH
<i>ba</i>	‘manner of setting up or putting down’
<i>bla</i>	‘manner of erecting, placing or standing up slowly’
<i>bo</i>	‘intensified manner of collecting’
<i>cim</i>	‘intensified manner of cutting’
<i>co</i>	‘manner of covering or going forward all of a sudden’
<i>dam</i>	‘immediately’
<i>do</i>	‘intensified manner of retaining or holding’
<i>dyam</i>	‘immediately’
<i>gil</i>	‘manner of falling right down’
<i>glo</i>	‘manner of heaping up in one place’
<i>grway</i>	‘completely’
<i>gway</i>	‘abruptly’

and

‘adv.’ as gloss (in glossary)

for what correspond to different types

No explicit connection made with iconicity, but included because of similarity to patterns in Thulung and Khaling (morphophonological patterns and semantics)

## Yakkha (Schackow 2015)

Reduplicated patterns found for adjectives and adverbs: bases are mostly verbal, but can also be adverbial or **ideophonic** (2015, 174)

chekchek ‘deep, low, narrow’ (> chekt ‘close’)

Triplicated patterns mostly take **ideophonic** bases (2015, 179)

khiriri ‘spinning, revolving’

lututu ‘[dough, soup] being too thin’

Also a separate category of ideophonic adverbs: reduplicated, but also non-reduplicating mono- and bisyllabic

boʔle-boʔle ‘[manner of] stuttering, stammering’

chok ‘suddenly [piercing]’

“only those that modify punctual events do not occur in reduplicated form”  
(ibid, 181)

## Dumi (Rai 2016)

A number of categories of adverbs, of which expressive adverbs are a subclass

### Onomatopoeic nouns, p 178

- a. *d<sup>h</sup>iriri* ‘shouting loudly’
- b. *suk-suk* ‘weeping with voice controlled’
- c. *tʃɪlɔkto* ‘crying sharply and loudly’
- d. *rinini* ‘insects’ sound’
- e. *sɔnɔnɔ* ‘sound of water flowing’

### Expressive adv., p 300

Some derived from verb roots; others have onomatopoeic sources: *dhiriri*, *hunumaksi* Others also ‘onomatopoeic’, eg. *hinini*, *ɾɔkɔmaksɪ* (cf. adjective *ɾɔkɔkɔ*, ‘rushed’ p 206)?

- a. *d<sup>h</sup>awa* ‘hurriedly’
- b. *d<sup>z</sup>ak<sup>h</sup>a* ‘slowly’
- c. *sumu-sumu* ‘quietly’
- d. *pispitʃi* ‘little by little’
- e. *wajewaje* ‘patiently’
- f. *hɔɔmaksɪ* ‘growing rapidly’
- g. *d<sup>z</sup>ed<sup>z</sup>eja* ‘smiley’
- h. *gragraja* ‘shiningly’
- i. *d<sup>z</sup>od<sup>z</sup>o-bobo* ‘in a great hurry’
- j. *sjakjakja* ‘walking fast in group’
- k. *ljaptjarni* ‘suddenly’
- l. *hinini* ‘growing nicely’
- m. *d<sup>h</sup>iriri* ‘way of shouting’
- n. *hunumaksi* ‘way of shooting with arrows’
- o. *ɾɔkɔmaksɪ* ‘moving actively’

- Presence of ideophones (and related) through glosses but insufficient to identify all existing patterns, prosodic, morphological, syntactic behavior:

van Driem 1987 on Limbu 'onom', van Driem 1993 on Dumi 'onomatopoeia', Bickel 1996 on Belhare 'IDEOPH', Ebert 1997 a and b on Chamling and Athpare 'IDEO', Rutgers 1998 on Yamphu 'adv onom'

- No mention whatsoever:

Jero (Opgenort 2005), Kulung (Tolsma 2006) and Sunwar (Borchers 2008)

## Summary

A number of terms used, tending to converge recently on “ideophone”;

More complete descriptions make clear connection with iconicity and with sensory domains going beyond just sound;

One important question is whether it is the root or the entire lexeme which is considered to be ideophonic:

Bantawa, Yakkha, Chintang: root as ideophonic

Others: not specified or entire lexeme

One interpretational difficulty is that in some cases, output analyzed as *iconic*, even if not described as ideophonic; does this count?



# IV. Comparison of patterns across Kiranti

Language	monosyllabic preverbal	reduplicated		triplicated		Geminate + a(i)
		fully	partially	fully	partially	
Thulung	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
Bantawa		Y	Y	Y		
Limbu		Y				
Hayu		Y	Y			
Belhare		Y	Y			
Athpare		Y				
Camling		Y	Y			
Yamphu		Y	Y		Y	Y
Wambule	Y	Y	Y			
Puma		Y	Y			
Yakkha	Y	Y			Y	
Chintang		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dumi		Y			Y	
Khaling	Y	Y			Y	

We find repeating patterns:

- reduplication, full and partial: most common pattern, with full found everywhere;
- triplication, both partial and full: in this sample, languages seem to favor one or the other (but not always, cf. Chintang);
- monosyllabic preverbs: found in a few languages (often poorly/not exemplified) but I suspect exist in more;
- geminate pattern: described for some languages without reference to loan status, but not clear how productive pattern is.

## Why do we find similar patterns across the languages?

This could be a question of shared matter or of shared patterns (Matras and Sakel (2007a, 2007b))

If shared matter:

- could be a result of **cognacy** (is cognacy possible for ideophones? by definition these are non-arbitrary, iconic means of representation, so perhaps outside bounds of regular sound change)

If cognacy, then we need to resolve question of whether the root or the output is the ideophone

- could be a result of **borrowing**

If shared pattern:

- could be inherited
- could be borrowed, with patterns—but not the phonological material that is inserted into the patterns—spreading through the area

Shared matter, in different languages? Some...

Example 1:

Bantawa *dükdükdükwa*, used with a description of a shaman shivering continuously

Chintang *dikdikdikwa*, used with a sentence describing someone seriously ill

A number of other shared triplicated forms, but from nominal/verbal bases (i.e. cognates)

Example 2:

Wambule

*phlu* “adv emphatic word” (Opgenort 2004: 698)

+ *bwarcam* “drive out, take out, cause to come out, pluck out” (ibid: 575)

Thulung

*phl̥: lu:mu* ‘exit abruptly’

→ good match of both the form of the ideophone and the semantics of its paired verb

This suggests matter borrowing. Larger-scale comparisons are needed.

The very nature of ideophonic lexemes makes this difficult: they are tricky to translate, so how do we know when we've found a match?

In order to consider the question of **pattern** vs. **matter** diffusion, as well as question of cognacy and which part is ideophonic, we need more complete descriptions of the full range of ideophonic lexemes in different languages

(Remember the comment about native speakers being best placed to do this)

Perhaps the four types I identify for Thulung/Khaling are a good starting point.

Two initial goals:

- evolution of the terms used for these lexemes in descriptions of Kiranti languages
- relevance of the concept and terms for these languages, i.e. does it help us to have the term ideophone in terms of the identification and description of these words?

Evolution of terminology in Kiranti descriptions:

- Originally “onomatopeion” (Rai 1984)
- Then “phonesthetic words”: makes clear that more than just iconicity based on sound (Michailovsky 1988)
- “Paralexeme” (Rai 1997)
- “Ideophone” appears as a gloss (Bickel 1996) then as full term (Rai et al 2005)

[NB. 2002 Caughley article "ideophones in Chepang" may have had influence]

Use of term “ideophone” and description of the class seem to be spreading in descriptions



## Relevance of adopting term “ideophone”:

- tapping into and contributing to the growing literature on ideophones in order to identify language internal and cross-linguistic characteristics ; among useful tools: implicational hierarchy; concept of morphosyntactic integration being linked to loss of iconicity and expressiveness;
- If we adapt/develop methodologies for collection/analysis of ideophonic lexemes, it is likely that more linguists—and ideally native linguists— will attempt to collect them, contributing to our understanding of the areal dimension in Nepal, the Himalayas, South Asia.

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## Himalayan Languages Symposium

to be held in Paris

September 4th-6th

Call for papers online:

<https://sites.google.com/view/hls26/home>

(deadline late February)

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THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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