

Manchu-Sibe Ideophones in Areal and Genetic Perspective*

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Abstract

Ideophones have been a rich topic for cross-linguistic investigation, in both global and East Asian contexts. The present study examines the phonology and morphosyntax of ideophones in Manchu-Sibe (Tungusic, China), using both existing literature (Zakharov 1879, Möllendorf 1892, Stary 1981, Gorelova 2002) and newly elicited data from Sibe-speakers. A preliminary comparison of reduplication in Manchu-Sibe ideophones and those of five other northeast Asian languages (Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Tuvan, Udihe) reveals that Manchu-Sibe ideophones exhibit an exceptionally broad range of reduplicative patterns. An examination of the syntax of ideophones in Manchu-Sibe finds many points of both similarity and contrast with its Tungusic relative Udihe. The most typologically-significant difference is the presence of ideophones in non-“witnessed” contexts in Manchu-Sibe, despite the total absence of Udihe ideophones in comparable environments (Tolskaya 2011). More generally, Manchu-Sibe data demonstrate the potential for fine-grained typological variation in the grammar of ideophones even among close genetic relatives and areal neighbors within a known sprachbund.

Key words

ideophones, sound symbolism, Tungusic, Altaic sprachbund

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1. Introduction

Ideophones and related mimetic forms have proven a rich subject for cross-linguistic investigation (Voeltz and Killian-Hatz 2001, Dingemanse 2012, Akita and Pardeshi 2019). Within East Asian and Altaic linguistics, extensive studies have examined ideophones in languages such as Japanese (Hamano 1986, Akita 2009), Korean (Lee 1992), and Udihe (Tolskaya 2011), while shorter studies exist for the South Siberian languages Tofalar and Tuvan (Harrison 2004) and for Mongolian (Oberfalzerová 2011). The present study situates the ideophones of Manchu-Sibe,¹ a Tungusic dialect continuum of northern China, within this larger context, by comparing their phonology and morphosyntax with those of ideophones in its areal neighbors. Our primary focus is a comparison of the morphosyntax of ideophones in Manchu-Sibe and its Tungusic relative Udihe.

Existing work on ideophones in Manchu-Sibe has largely focused on meaning-based classifications, classifying (mainly sensory) phenomena that may serve as the referents of ideophones (see Gorelova 2002:335-343 on “onomatopoeic words”; Möllendorf 1892:13; Stary 1981; Zakharov 1879:315-320). Slightly outside this trend is the three-way taxonomy of Stary (1981:210), consisting of *interiezione semplice* ‘simple interjections,’ *interiezione onomatopoeica* ‘onomatopoeic interjections,’ and *interiezione simbolica* ‘symbolic interjections.’ Some idea of the richness of Manchu-Sibe ideophones is given by the expansiveness of Zakharov’s taxonomy, which includes no fewer than 29 categories (Zakharov 1879:315-320, see Gorelova, 2002:336-341 for an English-language summary). Gorelova (2002:334-343) does not give a referent-based taxonomy, but considers interjections and “onomatopoeic words” (equivalent to ideophones in her terminology) to be distinct categories, while acknowledging a certain fuzziness in the boundary between the two. In the existing work on Manchu-Sibe ideophones, three topics are under investigated, (i) the specific sound-symbolic/phonaesthetic associations found within ideophones; (ii) their patterns of reduplication; and (iii) their syntax. While we leave the issue of specific sound-symbolic associations for further work, in this study - after an initial discussion of the phonology of Manchu-Sibe ideophones - we undertake the task of describing their syntax.

This study proceeds as follows. An initial section (2) discusses the conception of ideophone adopted here. A brief section (3) will give some preliminary observations on the phonology of Manchu-Sibe ideophones, followed by a short characterization (4) of the patterns of reduplication found in Manch-Sibe ideophones, in comparison with other “Altaic” languages. The main focus of the study is section (5), a discussion of the syntactic distribution of Manchu-Sibe ideophones in detailed comparison with another Tungusic language, Udihe. Discussion (6) closes the paper.

2. Defining *ideophone*

The cross-linguistic study of ideophones dates back at least to Doke (1935), who coined the term *ideophone* with the following definition:

A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, color, sound, smell, action, state or intensity. (Doke 1935:118)

Clement Doke’s initial definition sought only to capture the nature of ideophones in a Bantu

¹ We employ the term *Manchu-Sibe* to capture the fact that the variety (or varieties) called *Manchu* (Written Manchu or WM) and the variety called *Sibe* are very closely related, so that generalizations made about either Manchu or Sibe most often apply to the other named variety as well. It should be noted that while the extant literature on ideophones in Manchu-Sibe has focused on Manchu, the data elicited for the present study were in Sibe.

context (as noted by Dingemanse 2012:654-655), but has since often been the focus of efforts to define and redefine ideophones as a category. In nearly all instances the depiction of sensory phenomena has been taken as a core or prototypical property of ideophones (see discussion in Dingemanse 2012). Conversely, in its widest conceptions, the term *ideophone* seems merely to encompass descriptive items with heightened expressiveness or heightened evaluation – a position that is, however, still likely compatible with Doke’s original definition. Scholars of Tungusic languages have tended to take a broad view of ideophones and given the label to words with a quite wide range of meanings. Manchu words classified as ideophones in Norman (2013) include *der* ‘many,’ *hing* ‘sincere, serious,’ *hir-hir* ‘morose,’ *sek* ‘suddenly,’ and *ser* ‘tiny,’ while Tolskaya (2011) holds that Udihe ideophones include words within meanings such as ‘thickset,’ ‘strong,’ ‘showing teeth,’ ‘tasty,’ and ‘full to bursting.’ In both Norman (2013) and Tolskaya (2011) the words considered ideophones, though seemingly disparate, are united by several commonalities, all primarily serving as modifiers or predicates and involving elements of heightened intensity, vividness, or evaluation.

A further theoretical and typological issue is whether ideophones should be defined (either cross-linguistically or within any particular language) on solely formal grounds of phonology, morphology, and/or syntax, thus constituting a distinct lexical category. The present study adopts Doke’s (1935) definition of ideophone, thus maintaining consistency with the broader conception of ideophone employed by Norman (2013) and Tolskaya (2011). In the present study we remain agnostic as to whether future research might provide data or analysis that suggests ideophones can be considered a truly distinct word class in Manchu on solely phonological or syntactic grounds (cf. Tolskaya 2011:50).

3. Phonology

Cross-linguistically, ideophones are often found to exhibit exceptional phonological characteristics when compared to non-ideophones, exhibiting phonotactic patterns and sometimes segments that are otherwise absent in a given language’s phonology (cf. Dingemanse 2012: 656-658). As an illustration we may take the example of another Tungusic language, Udihe, in which ideophones have several phonological characteristics not encountered elsewhere in the language, including word-initial /f/, word-initial consonant-clusters, and a phonemic contrast between /i/ and /ɪ/ (Tolskaya 2011:29-30). The most striking exceptional feature of Udihe ideophones is that they are the only words in the language which permit word-final consonants, which are otherwise entirely illicit in Udihe phonotactics (Tolskaya 2011:29).²

A comprehensive analysis of the phonological and morphophonological characteristics of Manchu-Sibe ideophones awaits further work. At present, we can state that, as in Udihe, Manchu-Sibe ideophones are distinctive for the relatively frequent occurrence of final consonants. Generally, final oral consonants are not found in Manchu, with the exception of a few words that are borrowings from Mongolian and Sanskrit (Gorelova 2011:102-103). Word-final oral consonants do occur in Sibe, if only at a phonetic level (Kubo 2008:136), but their frequent occurrence in ideophones is nevertheless conspicuous and marked by the absence of alternative pronunciations with a final vowel.

² However, this is not to say that all Udihe ideophones must have word-final consonants; Udihe ideophones may end in either open or closed syllables (Tolskaya 2011:*passim*). Notably, “most consonant-final ideophones have vowel-final variants that are less expressive” (Tolskaya 2011:30).

4. Reduplication

Ideophones in Manchu-Sibe may be simplex or reduplicated (Gorelova 2002:341). Simplex ideophones include *cir* ‘slippery’ and *hing* ‘apt, conscientious.’ Several patterns of reduplication occur. The most straightforward is exact reduplication, in which the base and reduplicant are identical, e.g. *kert kert* ‘sound of chewing,’ *corok corok* ‘salty,’ *hir hir* ‘morose.’³ There are two varieties of inexact reduplication – vowel mutation and consonant mutation. Vowel mutation may involve various patterns of replacement, e.g. *putur patar* ‘a structure collapsing or crumbling,’ *her har* ‘clearing one’s throat,’ *kaka kiki* ‘happy laughter,’ *kerkin karkan* ‘bumpy, uneven.’ Consonant mutation appears to only involve initial consonants, e.g. *bong tong* ‘surprise.’ Partial reduplication is found in some bisyllabic ideophones, involving only reduplication of the second syllable’s nucleus and coda, e.g. *kuwang-piyang* ‘sound of gunfire’; reduplication of the second-syllable entirely, e.g. *geri fari* ‘unstable’; or reduplication of the second syllable’s consonants but with vowel mutation, e.g. *hunggur cangger* ‘lively.’

Attested patterns of reduplication in ideophones across five additional languages of Northeast Asia are summarized in table 1. As can be seen from this admittedly cursory initial sketch, it would appear that none of the five languages exhibit all of the patterns of reduplication attested in Manchu-Sibe ideophones.

Table 1. Attested patterns of reduplication across five languages of Northeast Asia

Simplex				
Japanese <i>gachan</i> ‘slam’	Korean <i>gumjeok</i> ‘slow, slight’	Mongolian <i>tung</i> ‘explosion’	Tuvan <i>koŋur</i> ‘ringing’	Udihe <i>kefur</i> ‘crunch’
Exact reduplication				
Japanese <i>tokotoko</i> ‘pitter-patter of feet’	Korean <i>donggeul donggeul</i> ‘round’	Mongolian <i>nams nams</i> ‘bending’	Tuvan <i>buzuur</i> ‘tinkling’	Udihe <i>kinde kinde</i> ‘smashed’
Reduplication with vowel mutation				
Japanese	Korean <i>pit^hil-paet^hil</i> ‘twisted’	Mongolian <i>pad ped</i> ‘heavy thump’	Tuvan ⁴ <i>koŋgur-kaŋgur</i> ‘ringing’	Udihe
Reduplication with consonant mutation				
Japanese <i>musya kusya</i> ‘vexed’	Korean	Mongolian <i>xaash-yaash</i> ‘carelessly’	Tuvan	Udihe
Partial reduplication				
Japanese	Korean <i>kalp^haN-cilp^haN</i> ‘indecisive’	Mongolian	Tuvan	Udihe

Notes: The conventions of transcription, spacing, and/or hyphenation are as in the original sources. References, Japanese (Akita 2009); Korean (Lee 1992); Mongolian (Janhunen 2012:214-215; Oberfalzerová 2011); Tuvan (Harrison 2004); Udihe (Tolskaya 2011).⁵

³ Unless noted otherwise, the illustrations are drawn from a list of ideophones compiled for the present study, based largely upon Gorelova (2002:335-342) and Sary (1981), whose analyses of reduplication patterns are not as detailed as the one presented here.

⁴ Harrison (2004: 201-202) notes that to his knowledge vowel mutation as a form of inexact reduplication is elsewhere unattested in Turkic. This would seem to suggest that in Tuvan it is either an independent innovation or an areal feature adopted from neighboring non-Turkic languages.

⁵ Omitted from the table are two patterns found in Udihe that are not present in Manchu-Sibe. These are expressive

5. Syntactic distribution

5.1. Comparison of general syntactic patterns associated with ideophones

In addition to their cross-linguistically most common use as optional manner adjuncts, ideophones occur in many other Manchu-Sibe syntactic constructions and functions. The present section will sketch the syntactic behavior of Manchu-Sibe ideophones by comparing and contrasting their distribution with that of ideophones in its Tungusic relative, Udihe, for which Tolskaya (2011) provides data and detailed analysis.

In many areas the syntactic distribution and function of Manchu-Sibe ideophones and those of its Tungusic relative Udihe are quite similar. In both Udihe and Manchu-Sibe, ideophones frequently occur as resultative complements (1a) and (1b).

- (1) a. (Sibe) muku **potor-potor** feye-mi
 water gurgling.IDPH boil-PFV.FIN
 ‘The water came to a rolling boil’ (elicited)
- b. (Udihe) tue-we teu tokto:-ni **mer-mer**=de
 pole-ACC all chop.PAST-3SG clean-clean.IDPH=FOC
 ‘He cut the pole clean down to the ground’ (Tolskaya 2011:53)

In both languages ideophones may function as attributive modifiers of nouns, as illustrated by Manchu-Sibe example⁶ (2a), in which the ideophone *pyal-pyal* (‘boring’) modifies *jake* ‘man’, and by Udihe example (2b), in which *kagba-kagba* ‘thickset’ modifies *ni:nta* ‘man’.

- (2) a. (Sibe) tere jage šu da eme **pyal-pyal** jage
 that guy simply TOP a boring.IDPH guy
 ‘He is simply a boring guy’ (elicited)
- b. (Udihe) Wakuli **kagba-kagba** ni:nta bi-si-ni
 Wakuli thickset-thickset.IDPH man be-PAST-3SG
 ‘Wakuli was a thickset man’ (Tolskaya 2011:52)

Ideophones occur as complements to a verb meaning ‘become’ in both Sibe (3a) and Udihe (3b).⁷

final -CV reduplication in multisyllabic words (e.g. *käu-ña-ña-ña* ‘shining’)(Tolskaya 2011:47-48) and, with less productivity, initial-syllable reduplication used to create intensified color terms, e.g. *kä-kä-li* ‘very pale’ (cf. *kä-ligi* ‘pale’)(Tolskaya 2011:47-48). For reasons of scope and space we do not include patterns of reduplication that involve the addition of material in the copy, e.g. Korean *ulgeus-bulgeus* ‘bright(ly)’ and Sibe *ededi dadedi* ‘shivering.’

⁶ Leipzig glossing conventions are largely employed, namely: ABL = ablative case; AUX = auxiliary; COMP = complementizer; CNCS = concessive; CVB = converb; DEC = causative; DIR = directive; EV = evidential; FIN = finite; FOC = focus; GEN = genitive; HAB = habitual; IDPH = ideophone; IMP = imperative; INF = infinitive; IPFV = imperfective; LOC = locative case; NEG = negation; PAST = past tense; PFV = perfective; PRP = present participle; PTCP = participle; Q = question particle; QUOT = quotative; SG = singular; TOP = topic marker. All Manchu-Sibe examples are in Möllendorf romanization. All Udihe examples are in the romanization of Tolskaya (2011). Elements within parentheses are (morphosyntactically) optional.

⁷ Compare the following example, in which the Udihe verb *o:-* ‘do’, apparently cognate to the Sibe verb, also occurs:
 (Udihe) omo zugdi **puñarr** o: gune
 one house smoke.IDPH do.PRP EV
 ‘(He sees) a house and the smoke rising up.’ (Tolskaya 2011:51)

- (3) a. (Sibe) muku ni **giliŋ-giliŋ** o-χui
 water TOP clean.IDPH become-PFV.FIN
 ‘The water became clear’ (elicited)
- b. (Udihe) caligi-ni **teŋe-teŋe** ede:-ni
 white-3SG jelly-jelly.IDPH become.PAST-3SG
 ‘The egg white became like jelly’ (Tolskaya 2011:52)

Manchu-Sibe ideophones often occur with the form *se-*, which is also the lexical verb ‘say’ (see 4a). In the present study we generally gloss *se-* as a quotative, but it should be kept in mind that it has semantically and functionally bleached to the point that it may introduce ideophones depicting non-auditory properties, as in (4b-e).

- (4) a. (Sibe) sini age cekseneŋe ji-xei
 2SG.GEN elder.brother yesterday come-PFV.FIN
se-re
 say-IPFV.PTCP
 ‘(I’ve heard that) your elder brother arrived yesterday. (elicited)
- b. (Sibe) buda deri **sur** **se-me** wa
 food ABL good.smell.IDPH QUOT-IPFV.CVB scent
 cici-kei
 come-PFV.FIN
 ‘A good smell was coming from the food’ (elicited)
- c. (Sibe) eme **kekete-qaqta** **se-re** joχun li bi
 one rough.IDPH QUOT-IPFV.PTCP road only exist
 ‘There is only a road with potholes.’ (elicited)
- d. (WM) yacin faitan **yar** **se-me** nilgiyan
 eye eyebrow long.and.thin.IDPH QUOT-IPFV.CVB shiny
 ‘The eyebrow is long and shiny.’ (Hu 1994:825)
- e. (Sibe) tere jaqe naχen-deri **bulk** **se-me**
 that stuff bed-ABL suddenly.IDPH QUOT-IPFV.CVB
 yila-χei
 stand.up-PFV.FIN
 ‘That guy suddenly stood up from the bed.’ (elicited)

Quasi-quotatives in use with ideophones appear to be a common areal feature among the languages of northeast Asia. Similar constructions involve the Japanese quotative *-to* (Akita 2009, *passim*) and Mongolian *g(e)-*, the latter of which (like Manchu-Sibe *se-*) is both a lexical verb ‘say’ and a quotative (Janhunen 2012:215, 284). Many Udihe sentences with ideophones include the word *gune*, derived from *gun-* ‘to say, to tell’, which Tolskaya (2011:102) characterizes as “an evidential and quotative particle” (see also Tolskaya 2011:68). A closer examination reveals some differences between the Udihe and the Sibe constructions, however. The Udihe sentences with *gune* in Tolskaya (2011) also include another primary verb; this, along with the invariant form of *gune*, indicate that it is a particle (5). On the other hand, the verbal status of *sembi* in Manchu-Sibe is evidenced by its occurrence as the sole inflected verb in a clause (as in 6).

- (5) (Udihe) d̥ii-si:-si: bita-la **suar-suar** nix'e gune
listen-PRP-1SG sandspit-LOC babbling.IDPH do.PERF EV
'As I listened, on the sandspit water was babbling.'
(Tolskaya 2011:54)
- (6) (Sibe) bira-i muku **χwan̄ar** se-mi
river-GEN water roar.IDPH QUOT-IPFV.FIN
'The river water roars'
(elicited)

Since Manchu-Sibe lacks comparable clause-final focus particles in simple sentences and matrix clauses, there is no exact analogue to Udihe example (7), in which the clause-final particle *da* focalizes an ideophone functioning as a sentence-level adjunct (Tolskaya 2011:52).

- (7) (Udihe) zugdi ise-kt'e gune **puñarr**=da.
housesee-DEC.PFV EV smoke.IDPH=FOC
'A house appeared, and the smoke was rising up.'
(Tolskaya 2011:52)

5.2. Polarity and “witnessedness”

A central claim of Tolskaya (2011) is that ideophones constitute positive polarity items in Udihe. In Tolskaya's account, this is due to the association of ideophones with “witnessedness”, a property that “...signals direct evidence, or purposefully creates an illusion thereof...” (Tolskaya 2011:iii). Commensurate with their status as both positive polarity items and descriptors of inherently “witnessed” events, ideophones cannot occur in irrealis conditions, specifically (i) negation, (ii) interrogatives, and (iii) conditional constructions, and additionally (iv) do not co-occur with “discourse particles that express doubt or uncertainty” (Tolskaya 2011:iii). In Tolskaya (2011), the ungrammaticality or unacceptability of ideophones with the four preceding linguistic phenomena in Udihe is presented as absolute. The only (perhaps merely seeming) exception to the non-occurrence of Udihe ideophones and negation is metalinguistic negation (à la Horn 1989:434), in which one ideophonic term is negated in preference for a more accurately descriptive term, as demonstrated by (8) (Tolskaya 2011:58).

- (8) (Udihe) kuak-kuak e-ini xuanti, tu:-tu: ŋua-ini.
snore.IDPH NEG-3SG snore, noiseless sleep-3SG
'(She) does not sleep going *kuak-kuak*, she sleeps quietly.'
(Tolskaya 2011:58)

An important finding of the present study is that Manchu-Sibe ideophones - at least in the usage of contemporary speakers of Sibe - are not incompatible with the irrealis and non-“witnessed” contexts described in Tolskaya (2011) for Udihe. Indeed, in elicitation Sibe-speakers will produce sentences in which ideophones (i) co-occur with clausal negation (9); (ii) occur in in both polar questions (10) and alternative questions (11); (iii) occur in a conditional construction (12); and (iv) co-occur with a discourse particle expressing doubt (13).

- (9) (Sibe) tere muku **giliŋ-giliŋ** waqe
that water clean.IDPH NEG
'that water is not clean'
(elicited)

- (10) (Sibe) muku ni **giliŋ-giliŋ** na?
water TOP clear.IDPH Q
'Is the water clear?' (elicited)
- (11) (Sibe) si emdan amtile-me ta-Ø, **doŋ-doŋ** na
2SG once taste-IPFV.CVB look-IMP, hard.IDPH Q
leder-leder na?
rotting.IDPH Q
'Have a taste of this; is it hard (fresh) or rotten?' (elicited)
- (12) (Sibe) meji oχtu maχte-ci da tere muku ni **giliŋ-giliŋ**
little chemical throw-COND TOP that water TOP clean.IDPH
o-mi
become-IPFV.FIN
'The water will be clean if [one] drops some chemicals in it' (elicited)
- (13) (Sibe) twa acewe-χa-qui, tere bo ni **dyaŋ-dyaŋ** aχei
fire set-PFV.PTCP-NEG.FIN that room TOP cold.IDPH still
ba
perhaps
'The room has not been heated, perhaps it's still cold' (elicited)

In addition to positive conditional constructions such as (12), Sibe ideophones may occur in negative conditional sentences (14).

- (14) (Sibe) oχtu maχte-qu o-cini geli tere muku
chemical throw-IPFV.NEG become-CNCS also that water
ni **giliŋ-giliŋ** (o-mi)
TOP clean.IDPH (become-IPFV.FIN)
'Even if you don't throw chemicals into the water, it will still be clean' (elicited)

6. Conclusion

This preliminary study has confirmed the robustness of ideophones as a general typological attribute of Northeast Asian and/or "Altaic" languages by examining the phonological and especially morphosyntactic properties of ideophones in Manchu-Sibe using newly elicited data from Sibe-speakers. At the same time, a comparison of ideophones in Manchu-Sibe and its Tungusic relative Udihe has found many language-specific idiosyncrasies in their grammar in two related languages of northeast Asia. More generally, this study confirms the potential for phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation in ideophones even among genetic relatives and areal neighbors.

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