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# The Sound-Symbolic Expression of Animacy in Amazonian Ecuador

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**Abstract:** Several anthropologists of Amazonian societies in Ecuador have claimed that for Achuar [1] and Quichua speaking Runa [2-4] there is no fundamental distinction between humans on the one hand, and plants and animals on the other. A related observation is that Runa and Achuar people share an animistic cosmology whereby animals, plants, and even seemingly inert entities such as rocks and stones are believed to have a life force or essence with a subjectivity that can be expressed. This paper will focus on Quichua speaking Runa to seek linguistic evidence for animacy by examining the sound-symbolic properties of a class of expressions called ideophones. I argue that structural features of ideophones such as canonical length and diversity of sound segments as well as type of sound segments, help express the animism of the Runa lifeworld. Moreover, although these features are not indicative of any essential distinctions between plants and animals, they may be indicative of a scalar view of animacy, along the lines suggested by Descola who first proposed a continuum or 'ladder of animacy' for the Achuar [1, pp. 321-326]. Ideophones, then, may be understood as one set of linguistic tools for coming to terms with the diversity of their ecological setting, a setting which spans highly animate humans and animals, through less animate plants, trees, and rocks.

**Keywords:** animacy; Quichua; ideophones; sound symbolism

## 1. Introduction

Quichua speaking people in Eastern Amazonian Ecuador have a way of expressing themselves which departs from models of conversation clarified by Levinson [5], but indebted to Gumperz, and taken for granted by many, many others as well. This model divides conversational discourse into foregrounded and backgrounded components which are generally conceived as follows:

**Table 1.** Conversation's division of labor.

| Foreground | Background |
|---|---|
| Lexico-syntactic | Particles, modifiers, prosody |
| Propositional | Kinesics, gesture |
| Communicative | General, vague, non-propositional |
| Salient | Metacommunicative |
| Conscious | Inconspicuous, unconscious |

According to this model, people interpret each others' utterances by making sense of a combination of foregrounded, lexico-syntactic, propositional content, all of which is contextualized or nudged along, by sets of cues, which they may be only vaguely aware of, and are therefore classified as background. These background components of discourse may be linguistic elements such as particles, or they may be prosodic, gestural, or kinesic. Although the specific details of how this all works are not yet well understood, it is assumed that this general framework has cross-cultural validity.

I will discuss some important ways in which Runa people may stray from this model when they speak, and about the implications that all of this has for their linguaculture[1]. In particular, I'd like to consider some possible ways of approaching Runa interrelations with the nonhuman lifeworld through their engagement in a type of performative language involving ideophones. To repeat the definition of a former student: ideophones give "a sense of life" to language. This succinct characterization is far more appealing for my present purposes than is the wealth of observations made by linguists who often mention an assortment of structural details. Onomatopoeic words like *thwack*, an idea of the sound of forceful impact, *arf arf*, a dog's bark, and *ka-ching*, an idea of an old-fashioned cash register sound, are examples of English ideophones. Contexts where ideophones are likely to occur in the English language are both literate and spoken. Typical literate sources include comic books and picture books for children. However, careful observers can find written and spoken examples of ideophones used by diverse types of individuals, including architects and other types of pictorial and verbal artists, as well as journalists and news reporters. One aspect of ideophones that makes them so versatile is that they capture what is aesthetically salient and absolutely true, and what is emotionally riveting and objectively factual.

Among Quichua speaking Runa, ideophones are part of their everyday spoken language as well as their narrative art. Whether they are communicating a vivid but ordinary perception or a highly stylized description from a mythic or traditional narrative, ideophones depart from the model of

conversation I just outlined because they are often performatively embellished through prosodic and gestural means. This performative embellishment has the effect of reconfiguring what are conventionally understood as background components of conversation into the foreground. For Quichua speaking Runa, an ideophonic performance involves intonational dynamism as well as iconic and indexical gestures, which are not at all out of interlocutors' awareness, but directly in the spotlight of their awareness. English language ideophones may also undergo performance. Since they are such a restricted form of verbal art in English, as well as in Standard Average European cultures, however, their deviation from this model has not attracted much attention.

It has become almost a truism to state that the models of language structure conceived by our dominant linguistic paradigms have not been able to accommodate such iconic forms of sound-symbolic communication. What has not often been noticed, however, is that even our models of language use in social contexts have not been entirely comfortable with analogical modes of communication such as gesture and intonation, pushing them into the background of conversational interaction[2]. All of this has made it easy for linguists to ignore ideophony and its possible sociocultural import.

Moreover, when Quichua people take the trouble to imitate sounds of splashing water or trees falling to the ground, they are expressing what might seem to be, from a linguistic anthropologist's perspective, a fairly trivial observation about happenings in their immediate environment. What I am claiming however, is that such observations are tied to a deeper cultural disposition to endow all forms of life with a perspective and an ability to communicate. Consider the following example which I first heard many years ago while conducting dissertation fieldwork. In this example my friend and consultant Luisa Cadena, described the dramatic impression made by a tree which finally succumbs to being chopped down:

*Gʸauuuuuuuuuŋŋ blʰuuuuuu putʰuŋŋŋŋŋ! urma-gri-n*

'(Creaking) *gʸauuuuuuuuuŋŋ* and (falling) *blʰuuuuuu* it goes and hits (the ground) *putʰuŋŋŋŋ*.'

This description features a series of three ideophones, each describing a facet of the event: its creaking sound; its falling movement; and its impact with the ground. The performative extension of vocalic sounds in *gʸauŋ* imitates the prolongation of the tree's creaking sound. The aspiration in *blʰu* imitates an idea of the sudden rupture of the tree from its position in the ground. At the same time, the lack of consonantal obstruction in this ideophone's word final position extends the description of the initial rupture into a prolonged falling motion toward the ground. Finally, the velar nasal -ŋ in the second syllable of *putʰuŋ*, imitates an idea of resonant, reverberative impact with the ground. For the purposes of my argument, this description is interesting because when I re-elicited this example from Luisa in the summer of 2008 during a discussion at the Andes and Amazon Field School in Napo, Ecuador, she paraphrased *gʸauŋ* as a sad sound, and described it as a type of crying on the part of the tree. This crying, however, was said to be indicative of the future success of the agricultural field: the more the tree 'cries' the greater will be the productivity of the agricultural field, according to Luisa. Although it took me twenty years to realize this, the description of the tree's falling with all of the dramatic sound imitation that accompanied it, was not simply a vivid aesthetic description. It

communicated something about that tree's reaction to being acted upon by humans. The tree was endowed with a subjective perspective that 'commented' ideophonically, on its own state as well as indicating something about the subsequent unfolding of human activities.

We may understand the greater significance of this example and those to follow, in the context of past studies of sound symbolism. So far, the most acknowledged type of sound symbolism has been magnitude sound symbolism, and one of the most influential explanations for it has been the hypothesis of the frequency code proposed by Ohala who accounts for the magnitude symbolism of vowels, consonants, tones and intonation. Ohala's theory synthesizes data from many different languages as well as from various nonhuman species, to argue that the high fundamental frequency of the high front vowels i and I in such endings as '–itsy' are sound-symbolic of smallness, a non-threatening attitude, and desire for the goodwill of the receiver. Low fundamental frequency, by contrast, is sound-symbolic of largeness, threat, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency [6, p. 343] Ohala hypothesizes that magnitude sound symbolism develops because of physiological changes at sexual maturation which evolved as an adaptation for males to compete against each other for the favor of females. Whether or not one accepts the details of this explanation, magnitude sound symbolism has been so widely documented that it has achieved the status of a universal, and is often mentioned in introductory linguistic textbooks as an exception to the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign.

While magnitude sound symbolism has informed insightful analyses of ethnozoological nomenclature [7], it has been the focus of sound-symbolic studies for some time now. The sound symbolism of motion is another domain that ought to receive more universal acknowledgement from linguists and linguistic anthropologists. Hinton, Nichols and Ohala [8] consider movement imitatives as a special subcategory of imitative sound symbolism within their broader typology. Ibarretxe-Antuñano [9] has found that movement imitatives are an extremely large and productive class of ideophones in Basque. This is particularly important, I am claiming, because the sound symbolism of motion is one area where we can postulate linkages between cosmological constructs such as animacy and discursive practices of sound-symbolic production. When movement of any kind is imitated, whether it is observed physical movements or auditorily perceived movements of sound waves, speakers are enacting a performance of life. My specific claim, then, is that the syllabic weight of sound-symbolic words, including the numbers of syllables, the diversity of sound segments, and the types of sound segments, may be enlisted by speakers to performatively foreground the diverse kinds of 'aliveness-es' exhibited by varieties of nonhuman life. Moreover, when Runa sound-symbolically imitate the movements of nonhuman life, they are not simply making an observation about those movements. They are, at the same time, endowing that nonhuman life with an ability to 'express' a kind of subjective perspective on its alive-ness.

The endowment of nonhuman nature with subjectivity is a defining feature of animacy, and the idea that ideophony might be enlisted to express animacy was first noticed for South American peoples by Basso [10] She presents a framework in which ideophonic sounds are part of a continuum of expressive possibilities for animate beings, ranging from music to spoken language to calls and a variety of other sounds. Although more recent work has not made explicit reference to animacy hierarchies or continuae, there is reason to think that a culture's active use of ideophones may be linked with animistic cosmologies in other parts of the world as well. K. David Harrison [11] has found that for nomadic herding Tuvan speakers of South Siberia, onomatopoeic ideophones are

generally important for interacting with the nonhuman lifeworld through hunting calls and animal domestication songs which employ stylized sounds to bring about a desired mental state or behavior in an animal. Sound imitation is also enlisted by Tuvan to classify, name, interpret and predict the patterns of their nonhuman natural world. Such observations are also found in earlier ethnobiological work such as that of Berlin and O'Neill [12] whose survey of Jivaroan onomatopoeia found that more than a third of bird names were onomatopoeic. They consider such names to have a mnemonic function which helps people sort out varieties of birds by their signaling habits. The work of Hunn on Tzeltal Mayans' classifications of nonhuman life makes frequent reference to onomatopoeic terms that are part of the auditory signaling behaviors of animals [13, pp. 83-84]. It seems clear, then, that onomatopoeic terms in a variety of cultures function, in part, to express the sounds of ecologically salient happenings. Such links were suggested some time ago by Feld [14], as well, concerning Kaluli ideophony within the rainforest ecosystem of Papua New Guinea.

The salience of nonhuman nature is not, however, only sonic. In Pastaza Quichua, ideophones communicate a variety of sensations including movement and its cessation, instantaneousness and completiveness, all of which assist in expressing grammatical notions as well. How then are imitations of movement by means of sound connected with animacy? We need to distinguish first of all, between linguists' conceptions of animacy and the sound-symbolic conception being developed here. For linguists, animacy is a hierarchically based conceptual distinction of nouns which may be only partly overt, and which influences a variety of grammatical phenomena including case markings, verbal agreement and semantic roles, through a universal oppositional scale involving animate humans at one end, and inanimate things on the other [15, p.41].

The sound-symbolic conception of animacy being developed here is motivated by different goals: it is intended to link the sound symbolism of ideophones with animacy as a cosmological construct. In order to do this, we must make a couple of assumptions which would be difficult to prove empirically, since Runa interest in metalinguistic explanations is minimal, but which, I believe, are valid nevertheless. First of all, I assume that cosmological animacy for Runa is scalar, and applies in a gradient way to varieties of nonhuman life. A corollary of this assumption is that ideophones are part of what Runa use to express their scalar conception of animacy. Ideophones exhibit high animacy when they imitate volitional, controlled sounds or movements, such as those made by humans and many nonhumans as well. Less animate forms of life such as trees and other types of flora exhibit qualities of aliveness involving movements that are more difficult to observe and relatively constrained by their natural surroundings. We need to establish a scale of animacy that does not privilege human over nonhuman agents, but one which does recognize that humans and animals have more freedom of movement than arboreal forms of life.

My second assumption is that animacy as a cosmological construct is linked for Runa, with the ability to make sound or to exhibit movement or responsiveness to surroundings. These abilities may be concomitants of each other, or they may be independent. In other words, the making of movements may be accompanied by sounds, or movements may be independent of any sound making capacity. Sounds may be perceived even though no visible movements have taken place or they may accompany movements. And there are innumerable ways that responsiveness to surroundings may be manifest. Trees and smaller plants for example, exhibit responses to atmospheric phenomena. Some are immediately evident as when branches are swayed by strong winds. Others take time to show up, such

as the slower changes of maturation and senescence. Even stones may 'respond' to their immediate environment. Luisa Cadena told me that the aliveness of a stone is evident by the tiny drops of water which accumulate on it when it is gripped tightly in one's hand.

## 2. The Ideophonic Expression of Animacy

Whether a nonhuman form of life is evaluated as high or not in animacy, I will assume that animacy is ranked by Runa as most high when a lifeform exhibits an auditory communication system. For humans, of course this system is exhibited by language. For nonhumans it is exhibited with signaling systems of various kinds that may find expression in onomatopoeic terms. I assume then, that beings highest in animacy will be people, with birds and other signalers following. If we look to ideophones for clues about animacy, we find a number of indicators. In Pastaza Quichua, ideophones express animacy sound-symbolically through linguistic features of syllable structure which are foregrounded through performative techniques like reduplication and multiple repetition, all of which may be intonationally prominent as well. In order to rank the animacy of a sound-symbolic form, I use the concept of weight conceived by Lehmann [16, pp. 5-6] who explains that it is a property which "renders (a form) distinct from the members of its class and endows it with prominence in the syntagm". For Lehmann, the 'weight' of a word may be thought of as a metaphor for its semantic and phonological complexity. For our purposes, this means that the more sound segments a sound-symbolic word has and the more diverse types of segments it has, the more complex will be its meaning and the 'heavier' will be its weight.

### 2.1. The Onomatopoeic Sound Symbolism of Nonhuman Life

We begin by dividing Quichua ideophones into two basic categories: onomatopoeic calls uttered by nonhuman lifeforms and all other sound-symbolic words[3]. Once we make this primary division, we notice at the outset, that there is a noticeable tendency for birds to be named, classified, and recognized by their characteristic signals. Out of 131 birds that I inquired about, thirty-one had names that imitated their characteristic signal, and more were described as having characteristic sounds. On the surface this doesn't seem surprising since birds are very vocal organisms and their signals are fairly diverse. Yet other forms of life also make sounds: small primates, snakes, frogs, and insects all have sonic capacities. People do, however, seem to attend more closely to the sounds of birds than to any other lifeform's sounds. A related observation is that in Pastaza Quichua culture, birds seem to have a special relationship with humans. People often conceptualize themselves as metaphorical birds, especially in love magic songs [3]. It is also the case that birds are considered able to communicate with people in order to help them. This is true for mythic birds as well as for everyday birds who may 'warn' people through their chirping, that a jaguar is nearby[4] or that someone is coming to harm them [17[5]] They do this by communicating indexically, through the qualities of their sounds, a message that is interpreted as metalinguistic, since it comments on the words of others. The *čikwaŋ* bird, for example is said to utter one kind of cry, consisting of multiple repetitions of či when people speak truthfully, which is then paraphrased as the metalinguistic utterance: *Ciertomi ningi* 'You speak truly'. When people say or think what is not true, however, the bird utters the cry *čikwaŋ* which is

paraphrased as *Yangami ningi* 'you speak wrongly, uselessly'. In keeping with their highly animate status, birds are often represented as expressing relatively weightier messages.

The following implicational tendency will therefore be postulated: If we examine the onomatopoeic 'utterances' of nonhuman lifeforms, those that have the most weight will be the utterances of birds[6]. Onomatopoeic calls of birds, at their most complex, will have three or possibly four syllables which can vary quite a bit in the diversity of their sound segments. Table 2 below lists the varieties of bird call sound structures that I have been able to identify. The complexity of a bird's call is related to both the number of syllables as well as the number of different types of sounds featured in its canonical form. By these criteria, the most complex calls are those of the *tuwiŋkulu* and the *iskundulu* birds because they each consist of four syllables with five different consonantal sounds in their calls. An additional feature of bird call complexity is that the patterns by which all or part of a call undergoes partial or complete repetition is more varied for birds than for other lifeforms. Some bird calls simply undergo multiple repetitions. Others undergo partial repetitions, most typically of the final syllable, but in the case of the *hiluku* bird, the call involves performative lengthening of the second syllable as well as repetition and lengthening of the final syllable. These syllables can be structured in any of the following ways:

**Table 2.** Bird call sound structures.

| |
|---|
| 1.$C_1VC_2$ ʃaŋ-multiple repetitions |
| 2.CVCV titi-multiple repetitions |
| 3.$C_1V_1C_2V_2$ $C_1V_1C_2V_2$ kali kali-multiple repetitions |
| 4.$C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3V_2$ hiluku - hiluuuukuukuukuuuu |
| 5.$C_1VC_2V_2C_3$ čikwaŋ- multiple repetitions |
| 6.$CVCVC_2V_2$,kukuli - kukukukuliiiii |
| 7.$C_1VC_2C_1VC_2$ kʷalkʷal – multiple repetitions |
| 8.$C_1V_1C_2V_2C_2V_2C_3$ wiluluŋ- wiluluuuuŋŋŋŋ |
| 9.$C_1VC_2VC_3VC_3V$ bulʸukuku- bulʸukukukuuukuuukuuuku |
| 10.$C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3C_4V_1C_5V_1$ tuwiŋkulu- tuwiŋkuluuluuluulu |
| 11.$C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3$ $C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3$ suraŋ suraŋ-multiple repetitions |
| 12.$C_1V_1C_2C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3V_3$ čukčukiya- čukčukiyaaaaa |
| 13.$V_1C_1C_2V_2C_3C_4V_2C_5V_2$ iskundulu-iskunduluuuuu |

If we compare the onomatopoic names of snakes and frogs, by contrast, we see that they will have at most two syllable names, and these syllables will be relatively simpler in canonical structure than those of bird names. The performative realization of these calls is also simpler, since it consists only of multiple repetitions:

**Table 3.** Snake and frog call structures.

| |
|---|
| 1.$C_1V_1$ ču – multiple repetitions |
| 2. $C_1V_1C_2$ giŋ – multiple repetitions |
| 3.$C_1V_1C_2V_2$ kuwa – multiple repetitions |

The much simpler inventory of call structures for snakes and frogs is congenial with their lesser communicative importance in human affairs. I have never heard of anyone relating that a snake or frog's sounds were semiotically complex or potent with significance for humans. Snakes' sounds will often be interpreted as threatening to people, and frogs' sounds will often be heard in conjunction with rain, as when the *tamya sapo* or 'rain frog' repeats *giŋ* over and over during a rainfall. I have never heard of a snake or a frog interactively communicating with people the way birds are reported to, however.

*2.2. The Synaesthetic Sound Symbolism of Motion and Sound*

Once we leave the domain of auditory signaling systems, we find another type of sound symbolism, one that is integrated with the grammatical system of the Quechua verb [18] This category of sound symbolism consists of approximately fifty different ideophones which are more synaesthetic than the mainly auditory calls of birds snakes and frogs because they use linguistic sound to imitate not only sounds, but also other sensory perceptions. For convenience I will refer to these synaesthetic sound-symbolic words simply as 'ideophones' to distinguish them from the onomatopoeic ideophones discussed earlier. For these ideophones, syllable structure together with performative foregrounding through repetition, lengthening and high rising terminal pitch are all exploited for the expression of ongoingness, repetition, resonance and reverberation, extendedness in space, movement through pliable substances, various types of deformative actions and events, instantaneousness, duration and termination. Sound imitation is not as important for this group of ideophones as it was for the onomatopoeic bird calls in section two. Most of these ideophones imitate the relatively soundless movements of people, plants and animals, as well as atmospheric and elemental phenomena. Within this group there are no ideophones used exclusively for plants or animals. Every ideophone that describes arboreal lifeforms also describes nonarboreal forms of life. How then are distinctions in animacy encoded within this group? When we examine the sound symbolism of animate motion we have to ask ourselves a series of questions. First of all, is the canonical form of the ideophone composed of two syllables or one syllable? Secondly and irrespective of whether it is composed of one syllable or two syllables, we have to ask whether the ideophone ends in a consonant or vowel. And lastly, if that ideophone ends in a consonant, does it end in a stop, a fricative, or a nasal consonant?

Let's first of all consider syllable structure. Within this group of ideophones, there will be a canonical structure of either one syllable or two syllables. Tables four and five below display the varieties of syllable structure that are possible for this group[7].

**Table 4.** Monosyllabic ideophone structures.

| |
|---|
| 1.VC aŋ-upgliding intonation and/ or multiple repetition |
| 2. CV sa- upgliding intonation, extension or multiple repetition |
| 3. $C_1VC_2$ tak- upgliding intonation, and/or multiple repetition |

**Table 5.** Disyllabic ideophone structures.

| |
|---|
| 1.$CV_1V_2$ toa – upglide of second syllable |
| 2.$C_1V_1C_2V_2C_3$ polaŋ – upglide on second syllable, extension of second syllable |
| 3.$C_1V_1C_2V_1C_3$ pataŋ – extension of second syllable |
| 4. $C_1V_1C_2V_2$ t$^y$api- upglide on second syllable |
| 5.$C_1V_1C_2V_1$ ʃaka –upglide or extension of second syllable, expressive aspiration of first syllable |
| 6.$V_1CV_2$ aki –accented first syllable, multiple repetition |
| 7.$C_1V_1C_2C_3V^2$ činda –multiple repetition |
| 8. $V_1C_1V_2C_2$ awiŋ – upglide on second syllable |

It is immediately apparent that synaesthetic ideophones do not have the diversity of structures that the onomatopoeic bird sounds have. The numbers of syllable types is fewer. The absolute number of syllables possible is lower. The diversity of sound segments is fewer. However, in general, it is possible to say that disyllabic ideophones tend to be involved in a more complex representation of events involving more than one entity or being, one of which is higher in animacy and acts upon an entity that is lower in animacy. Monosyllabic ideophones, by contrast, often focus on an instantaneous, or momentary happening within a complex event. Although monosyllabic ideophones may be involved in the depiction of processes that are complex, they tend to focus on micromoments within such processes.

The following description constitutes an example of a relatively complex event that occurred at night when Luisa Cadena was fishing with her husband. They had just managed to spear a large turtle and her husband had gone to get help while Luisa stayed behind to make sure that the turtle didn't escape. While her husband was gone, she heard the sounds of multiple entities falling into the water and swimming not far from her. She describes this perception with the ideophone *tsupu*, which describes a falling into water, and also, a splashing motion while swimming through water. Although she is frightened initially, she soon realizes that it's a group of *lomochas*, which are Amazonian rodents:

*Chiga kucha sapimanda uyakpi, tsup$^h$uuuuuuu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupuuuu tsupuuuu uyarimura*

'And so from that end of the pond they were heard going *tsup$^h$uuuuuuu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupu tsupuuuu tsupuuuu*'.

The ideophone *tsupu* is disyllabic in structure, and I analyze it as a diagram of, first of all, the pre-fall state indicated by the first syllable *tsu-*, and then the moment of the fall, indicated by the second syllable *–pu*. This second syllable may be expressively aspirated to give an idea of the force of the fall, which is linked with an impression of the size of what falls. The second syllable may also be expressively lengthened to indicate the durativity of the falling motion as well as its extended trajectory. The fact that the second syllable does not end in a consonant is appropriate for its meaning, if we remember that consonants tend to obstruct the airstream, and what we have here is a depiction of a free flowing movement through the water. After the initial *tsupu* is uttered, the subsequent tokens of it are repeated to communicate multiplicity, and their repetition is quite fast, which communicates the rapidity of their swimming and splashing.

Examining the range of monosyllabic ideophones, we find that although they are not exclusively reserved for plants, there are many that are used to describe the ways that plants and plant like substances react to being manipulated by highly animate beings. The ideophone *tau* describes the sound made by a large tree trunk that is being worked on with a metal tool used by a man who is carving the tree into a canoe:

*Tau tau tau tau asioľⁱaŋ aľⁱaukpi; aswata upik shamwi nikpi . . .*

'As he was digging with the planer (going) *tau tau tau tau*, I said 'Come and drink some *aswa*''.

We have here a complex event consisting of a highly animate being in the form of a person acting upon a less animate entity, namely a tree trunk. Nevertheless, the description focuses on the less animate entity's reaction to being acted upon. The ideophone *tau* describes each micromoment of the tree trunk's hollow, resonant reaction to being struck by the man's carving tool. A similar ideophone *kau* describes the sound made when stepping down on dried up leaves while walking through the forest. In the following description both *kau* and another ideophone *taras* describe the same happening: a walk through the forest when it's very quiet, allowing the sounds of dried up vegetation to                                                                                                                                 be heard easily:

*Manachu chunľⁱa akpi taras taras kau kau purishkas, karota uyarik an sachaiga?*

'You know how when it's quiet you can hear someone walking, going *taras taras kau kau*, from far away in the forest?'

In this depiction, we have two perspectives represented. The disyllabic ideophone represents the animate being that is walking through the forest going *taras*, with each step taken. Here, the initial syllable *ta-* imitates the act of moving one's step down toward the ground, while the second syllable—*ras*, imitates the rustling-like sound of stepping down. The ideophone *kau*, on the other hand, represents the hollow-like, sonic reaction of the vegetation to being stepped upon. We have then, a juxtaposition of two ideophones to describe one happening. By breaking up the description into two separate components, Luisa Cadena focusses on this event from two different perspectives: that of the

more animate being who is walking through the forest as well as the less animate vegetation that is responding to the presence of the more animate being.

Both *tau* and *kau* communicate something about the dried up, and no longer growing stage of the lifeform represented: *tau* of the tree trunk, and *kau* of the dried up vegetation. Generally, it seems to be the case that monosyllabic ideophones ending in an open syllable, that is vowel final, rather than closed with a final consonant, index a lower in animacy lifeform. Another ideophone *shau* also fits this pattern. It describes the ease with which dried bark peels away from a surface, or the way latex that has been spread on a surface and dried, may be pulled away *shau* as a whole sheet.

It is instructive, in this regard, to compare the ideophone *tus*, which does end in a consonant, and which describes any small fleshy type of thing, such as fruit, but also including head lice, which can be burst apart by a high animacy being. A fruit or a berry can be burst apart *tus*. When people are de-licing each other, they talk about biting into the lice, making them burst apart *tus*. Since this type of interaction is complex, consisting in a highly animate person acting upon a less animate louse, it should, according to my criteria be represented with a disyllabic ideophone. I believe, however, that the monosyllabicity of *tus* is meant to focus on the instantaneousness of the burst, rather than on the more complex action of biting. Furthermore, by its consonant final ending, this ideophone indicates that something more substantial and more full of life is being altered or affected in some way. And lastly, the fact that this final consonant is a fricative, which is a continuous sound, is also significant. Consider an analogous case of bursting—such as a firework that explodes. There is an instantaneousness about the explosion, but also a durative dimension because whatever explodes has to continue moving since it has been displaced from a center: the exploded bits continue to stream through the air after their initial bursting out. The final fricative –s, which is a continuous sound, is appropriate for representing the movements which occur in the aftermath of an explosive burst.

Another ideophone that structurally resembles *tus* is *tsuk*. Like *tus* it is monosyllabic and consonant final. *Tsuk* is used to communicate an idea of the sound or sensation of something that has been definitively severed from its source. Typically it describes what we would call in English a plucking motion. But in English we have a verb which communicates this meaning. In Quechua it is communicated with the verb *aisana* "to pull", in combination with the ideophone *tsuk*. By its structure, the ideophone *tsuk* indicates that what has just happened has happened in a decisive and final way, in other words, a clean break. *Tsuk* focusses on the resultative micromoment of the pluck. This is imitatively communicated by the final stop consonant which for a moment, completely stops the airflow.

## 3. The Transanimacy of Ideophones

Having just outlined ways that the structures of ideophones iconically communicate differences between high animacy beings and low animacy beings, I will now explain how the 'same' phenomenon may be represented differently, according to whether a high or low animacy being is involved. If we consider the ideophones for falling motions and for final contact made by whatever falls, we find that their structures are indicative of both low and high animacy beings. The essential meaning of the ideophone *palay* is that a collection of things falls in a pelting manner: the pellets defecated by sloths perched in trees, as well as the seeds thrown by an animal. Since this type of

falling is catalyzed by animate beings, it is appropriate that it is represented with a disyllabic ideophone. There is, however, a monosyllabic ideophone, '*tu*', which is used to describe the fall of less animate raindrops. In the following description, it undergoes multiple repetitions and occurs with another ideophone *sai*, which describes the extendedness in space of the rainfall:

*Rupai tamya s^haaaiiiiiii tutututu s^haaaiiiiiii pahota rara, rikungi ma!*

'And you would see how the sunshowers portended danger, going *s^haaaiiiiiii tutututu s^haaaiiiiiii*!'

At times, one and the same ideophone may describe a range of animate beings. The disyllabic ideophone *pataŋ* describes the way something that is typically high in animacy might fall to the ground without losing its structural integrity. Something falls to the ground pataŋ without having the main qualities of its shape reconfigured or altered by the fall. If a snake flings its tail out to catch something and misses its target, the tail would be described as falling to the ground *pataŋ*. A person falling to the ground in a faint would fall *pataŋ*. A bird shot and killed would fall out of a tree *pataŋ* to the ground. Trees that fall to the ground in a thunderstorm also fall *pataŋ* (cf example 1). And there is a myth which describes ears of corn growing on their stalks so profusely, that they also fall to the ground *pataŋ*. The final velar nasal communicates the resonance and reverberation of whatever has fallen[8]. The ideophone *pataŋ* contrasts with another ideophone *pak* which describes the resultative splat of something whose shape has been rearranged or violated by the act of falling. Cooked pieces of fish that have become spoiled, for example, will fall to the ground *pak*.

The four ideophones for different types of falling that have been discussed here reveal that the sound-symbolic depiction of falling may vary, depending upon the relative animacy of what has fallen, as well as upon the aspect of falling that is focused upon. The two disyllabic ideophones *palay* and *pataŋ* are both for relatively higher in animacy falls. *Palay* represents the falling motion of entities thrown or expelled by an animal, and *pataŋ* represents the moment when what has fallen makes impact with the ground and reverberates with it. The endings of these two ideophones are iconically appropriate for what they are depicting. The approximant –y of palay is a dynamic, unstable sound that is articulatorily appropriate for representing a fall in progress. The velar nasal –ŋ is a resonant sound and is iconic of the resonance of higher animacy beings that retain their structural integrity when falling. These two disyllabic ideophones contrast with the monosyllabic tu of raindrops falling and pak of the moment of impact made by substances that fall. The monosyllabic, vowel-final syllable of tu is iconically appropriate for the lesser substantiality of raindrops falling, and it is also appropriate for the continuousness of the falling motion of the rain. The final stop consonant of *pak*, by contrast, is iconically representative of the decisive moment when the fall has come to an end.

## 4. The Relative Animacies of the World

I have been arguing that ideophones help Runa focus on the relative animacy of various phenomena in a world that is inherently full of life, and that we may understand as involving a continuum ranging from humans and animals at the high end, with arboreal forms of life in the middle, and with rocks and stones at the low end. In this final section I want to make clear the relativity of animacy for Runa. The

previous section's discussion of different ideophones for falling already alluded to this in the discussion of the ideophone *pataŋ*. This ideophone is used to describe the way a variety of entities may reverberate when making impact with the ground: a snake's tail, a shot bird, a felled tree trunk, people in a faint, and even ears of corn. What is made clear by the wide range of things said to fall in a *pataŋ*-like way, is that this ideophone is used to foreground the integral solidity of whatever falls, irrespective of that being's ability to communicate or to exhibit movement. We must remember, then, that animacy as a cosmological construct, allows Runa not only to endow nonhuman nature with a perspective, but it also allows Runa to inhabit various perspectives on nonhuman nature.

If we consider the animacy scale of our hypothetical continuum, for example, we might be tempted to feel that we are on solid ground when we assign stones and rocks to the low end of this scale. And there is evidence from what people say, to justify this feeling of security. Runa are not particularly lavish in their use of metaphors, but I do have a recorded instance of a person's immobile state compared with a rock, because of the impossibility of getting him to move. This example comes from a family story which has been told and retold countless times by various members of Luisa Cadena's family [17.] The story concerns the killing of her uncle who was a powerful shaman at the time, and whose magic, it was alleged, had caused the deaths of people from another tribe. Although the victim's wife and others knew that he was in danger and tried to get him to leave, he refused to budge from his hammock. Luisa suggested that the killers had stupefied him with magical singing, making him as immobile 'as a rock':

*"Haku! kaᵇ'pashun!" Ña rumi shiiiina*

'Let's go! Let's run!' (they said) Well he was like a rock.'

The metaphorical comparison of a person's immobile state with a rock is one which presents no cognitive difficulties whatsoever. The normally low animacy of rocks makes this metaphor immediately successful for our understanding of the situation. Yet, there are instances when a *rumi*, a word which applies to both rocks and stones, may be perceived as highly animate, potent, and even volitional. Luisa Cadena related an incident to me involving the discovery of a stone while she was a child. The stone had vivid markings and patterns and she was told by adult members of her household that it was a *runa mikug* or a 'person eating' stone, which means that it had the capacity to harm her. She gets rid of it, but discovers another stone as an adult. She decides to keep it but she begins to notice unusual occurrences, including dreams, as well as auditory sounds coming from the box where she has put the stone. She describes the sounds she hears coming from the box at night as follows[9]:

*Ña amsayaunmi las seis kahon ukwi tulululululululululululululululululu purig mara; imatacha mandzharishkani!*

'Then as it was becoming dusk, inside the box it moved (going) tulululululululululululululululululu; how frightened I became!'

She then explains that the magic stone had not only been rolling around inside the box, but it also had been breaking the other, nonmagical stones she had collected and kept inside the box with it. This is not the place to discuss the status of this perception, nor to attempt a reconciliation between her perception and our understanding of what might have 'really' happened. What is important about this example is that through her ideophonic description, she was able to animate those stones, and make them move into the mental space of her interlocutor, thereby indicating their life force, and also their danger. The disyllabic structure of the ideophone *tulu* is fitting for the stone's more animate-than-normal status. Its partial reduplication which undergoes multiple repetition, imitates an idea of a movement that is not too varied, but is consistent and durative. My claim that ideophones help express the diverse animacies of human and nonhuman nature was foreshadowed by Fortune [19: 41] who analyzed ideophones in the Bantu language, Shona. Fortune reported that their use revealed "a concern to give concrete and adequate expression to what they see of the forces and energies of the world". I have attempted to substantiate Fortune's insight by analyzing the different types of structures that ideophones in Quechua may assume, and to show how these structures may be enlisted to imitate ideas of animate diversity.

## 5. Conclusion

The sound symbolism of movement ought to receive more universal acknowledgement from linguists and linguistic anthropologists, particularly as it links up with cosmological issues of animacy. If it is true that languages are most alike in their iconic expressions as Lehmann [16] has claimed, then the patterns identified here ought to show up in more linguistic cultures. An additional issue for further investigation is the matter of the connection between linguistic animacy and the cosmological animacy that is given sound-symbolic expression through ideophones. Does the grammar of Quichua acknowledge, through its morphology and agreement systems, the kind of cosmological animacy that is sound-symbolically rendered? Many more questions loom about ideophones in general, however. Does the implicational tendency that has been postulated here find support in other linguistic cultures? Do the canonical forms of ideophones typically align with animacy distinctions in other linguistic cultures? How would a theory which accounts for ideophony by reference to animistic cultures explain its existence in complex societies such as Japan? Are there unofficial animistic cosmologies in all societies, even those that have developed mechanisms of technological complexity? More careful scrutiny of the links between ideophonic structures and the diverse structures of life may help build the foundation for a theory of ideophones which has eluded linguists for some time now [cf. 20]

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**Notes**

1.  The term *Runa* denotes 'person' in Quechua and is commonly used as an ethnonym by Quechua speakers to refer to their cultural group. In this work I switch back and forth between using the term Quichua, which specifies the Ecuadorian dialects, and Quechua, which emphasizes the transnational linguistic continuities. The variety of Quechua represented in this work is Quechua IIB, following the classifications of Torero [21].

2.  The work of David McNeill [22], Adam Kendon [23] and others is an important exception to this generalization, however.

3.  The data for this portion of the analysis was gathered through five months of structured interviews with Luisa Cadena during 1988. We went through Orr and Wrisley's [24] list of floral and faunal names, and I asked her to free associate about each lifeform listed. Although I did not specifically ask her to tell me about the sounds that each lifeform made, she usually offered this information when it was relevant.

4.  Hunn [12, p. 160], also reports the existence of a bird which is said to indicate the presence of a jaguar for the Tzeltal Maya.

5.  Basso [6] reports that the Kalapalo of Central Brazil believe that qualities inherent to certain bird calls could create the unfolding of unfortunate events for people at some future time.

6.  Since this is an implicational tendency, I am only making a limited type of claim here, namely, that given the existence of a canonical form with more weight, that form will tend to be a bird call. However, the reverse statement is not applicable: Given that a canonical form is a bird call, it will have more weight.

7.  The semantics of each of these ideophones is discussed in detail in [15].

8.  Rhodes [25, p. 284] describes the velar nasal ŋ as depicting an idea of extended decay (of sound) in the English words ding, clang, bong, and bang. Oswalt [26, p. 304] notes many English ideophones with final velar nasals, all of which indicate continuous vibration.

9.  All of the examples in this paper may be found in [17], except for this one, which is from the author's Tape IIA, in the collections of tapes from Luisa Cadena. This particular example comes from the author's Transcript File, page 68.

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