

## ARTICLE

# The Ideophone in Siswati

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## ABSTRACT

South Africa is a multilingual country wherein 12 languages are official, including Siswati. As in other Bantu languages, the ideophone is a unique part of speech in Siswati that is predominantly used by language users in daily conversations for various communicative purposes. Despite the wide use of the Siswati ideophones, few scholars have investigated them in depth from different perspectives. Therefore, this article describes the features of the ideophone in Siswati from phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic perspectives. The investigators used convenience sampling as a method of collecting data. This data was obtained mainly from various Siswati literary works, which are a true representation of the language usage, supplemented by native speakers' intuition. The prototype theory and the systematic functional linguistics approach mainly underpin this study. The gathered corpora were systematically explored to determine the phonological features of ideophones, their use in sentence construction, and the meanings they convey in various contexts. The ideophones were classified based on their syllables and formation, as well as their semantic functions. This study is significant as it brings useful insights into the nature of ideophones in Siswati and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the language. The results show that even though formal speech lacks ideophones, this part of speech is frequently used in normal day-to-day conversations in Siswati to fulfil various linguistic needs.

**Keywords:** Ideophone; Siswati; Prototype Theory; Systematic Functional Linguistics

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# 1. Introduction

An ideophone is a linguistic phenomenon found across many languages, including Siswati, a member of the Nguni Bantu languages and related to isiZulu, isiNdebele and isiXhosa. Siswati is spoken primarily in Eswatini and parts of South Africa<sup>[1, 2]</sup>. As a part of speech, ideophones in Siswati have no equivalence in English, which renders translation very difficult. This problem was also noted in isiZulu, a sister language of Siswati<sup>[3]</sup>. Ideophones are words that vividly describe sensory experiences—such as sounds, actions, colours, textures, or emotions—and often carry a unique, expressive quality<sup>[3, 4]</sup>. These words convey meaning through sound symbolism, where the form of the word suggests the meaning, making them distinct from ordinary lexical items. Siswati ideophones are an integral part of the language's oral and cultural expression, often employed in storytelling and everyday communication. They add depth and vividness to descriptions, making narratives more engaging and dynamic. Greenberg<sup>[5]</sup> suggested that ideophones vividly represent an idea in sound and describe a predicate, qualificative, or adverb in terms of manner, colour, sound, action, state, or intensity. These words are often used to describe natural occurrences such as the sound of thunder or the movement of water. As a result, ideophones create vivid and realistic images in the minds of listeners<sup>[6]</sup>. According to Dingemanse<sup>[7]</sup>, ideophones belong to an open category of lexical items that are marked and express sensory imagery. Therefore, the use of ideophones in Siswati helps speakers create mental imagery, emphasising the sensory and emotional aspects of an experience. Nuckolls<sup>[8]</sup> postulated that the tone used in ideophones can convey feelings of joy, anger, sadness, and even humour. This notion makes ideophones an essential aspect of Siswati culture and communication, making them worth exploring.

## 1.1. Problem Statement

The ideophone is a crucial yet under-explored word category in many African languages, including Siswati. While ideophones contribute significantly to the expressiveness and vividness of spoken Siswati, their linguistic role, structure, and function remain relatively understudied compared to other language components, such as nouns and verbs. The primary issue is that there is limited comprehensive research on how ideophones in Siswati are formed, cate-

gorised, and integrated into everyday language. Without a deeper understanding of these aspects, linguistic descriptions of Siswati remain incomplete, and the cultural significance of ideophones risks being overlooked. Therefore, this article describes Siswati ideophones from phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic perspectives.

## 1.2. Objectives

The objectives of this article are:

- To examine the linguistic structure and patterns of ideophones in Siswati, including their phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties.
- To analyse how these ideophones are formed.
- To describe how ideophones function within the broader structure of the language.

## 1.3. Research Questions

- What are the linguistic features and patterns of ideophones in Siswati, including their phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties?
- How are these ideophones formed?
- How do Siswati speakers use ideophones in daily communication?

## 1.4. Significance of the Study

This study of Siswati ideophones offers significant insights into the nature of ideophones, including phonological patterns, and morphological, semantic, and syntactic properties. It also enables language users to understand how Siswati speakers use ideophones to fulfil a variety of linguistic functions. It thus sheds some light on the socio-cultural nuances expressed through ideophones, and their analysis provides deeper insights into how Siswati speakers experience and interpret their world, including social and environmental interactions.

# 2. Literature Review

In this section, scholarly works on the ideophone in isiZulu and Siswati were reviewed. The inclusion of isiZulu was informed by the fact that it shares high mutual intelligibility with Siswati compared to other Nguni languages and

it was once taught in schools to Swati learners before the introduction of Siswati<sup>[1, 9]</sup>.

Doke<sup>[3]</sup> explored the ideophones in isiZulu and observed that ideophones can be classified based on their syllable structure and tones. The first series of monosyllabic ideophones consists of a rising-falling contour: it begins with a low tone rising to high, then falling to low, as in *bhu* (of hitting out something), *di* (of doing nothing) and *zwi* (of a unit). The second series of monosyllabic ideophones contains a low-falling tone as in *bhe* (of fire burning grass). The third monosyllabic ideophone series has a low-rising tone, as in *ngci* (of the final section). The fourth kind of monosyllabic ideophone has a high tone, as in *nhlo* (of jabbing in the eye). The first kind of disyllabic ideophone has a low tone on the initial syllable and a low-falling tone on the second syllable, as in *báni* (of flashing of light). The second kind of disyllabic ideophone has a mid-tone on the initial syllable and a high tone on the second syllable. The third series has a low-rising tone on the initial syllable and a low tone on the second, as in *bhúbu* (of snatching). The fourth series has a high tone on the initial syllable and a low tone on the second, as in *tánkla* (of hitting in the stomach). The fifth series features a low-rising tone on the first syllable and a lower rising tone on the second syllable, as in *bhúngce* (of shrivelling up). The sixth series consists of a low-rising initial syllable and a high-falling second syllable, as in *thwáxu* (of hitting with a pliable instrument), while the seventh series has a low first syllable and a low-rising second syllable, as in *combi* (of giving a bit). Trisyllabic ideophones are characterised by having the initial syllable bearing the stress and it is short as in *míkiti* (of equality). Quadrisyllabic ideophones are characterised by four short syllables with stress only on the initial syllable, as in *bhábhalala* (of falling on the stomach) and *gózololo* (of staying a little). Quinesyllabic ideophones fall into three types. The first type has five syllables with a low tone first syllable, low tone second syllable, low tone third syllable, a low-falling fourth syllable and a low tone fifth syllable, as in *gómbolokoqo* (turning inside out). The second type has the first syllable being high, the second syllable higher, the third syllable low, the fourth syllable low-falling and the fifth syllable low-level, as in *fóyiyafoco* (wiping out). The third type has a high first syllable, low second syllable, low third syllable, low fourth syllable and high fifth syllable, as in *gímilikici* (of gulping down). Doke also established that

ideophones can be derived from any verb by simply using the suffix */-iyani/* to construct an ideophone that expresses humour or happiness.

Msimang and Poulos<sup>[10]</sup> studied the grammatical and descriptive roles of ideophones in isiZulu. They noted that isiZulu ideophones are not lexically derived from other parts of speech. The ideophone in this language is not only onomatopoeic but co-occurs with the verb root *thi*, such as in the sentence, *Imoto ngayizwa ithi vum, indlula* (I heard the sound of the car's engine as it passed). The ideophone can also co-occur with other verbs and relatives. For example, *impuphu igcwele phama okhambeni* (the clay pot is full to the brim with mealie-meal), and *amanzi abomvu klubhu* (The water is as red as blood). The verb *igcwele* has co-occurred with the ideophone *phama* and the relative *abovu* has co-occurred with the ideophone *klubhu* in the previous sentences. The two main functions of the ideophone are to embellish actions and intensify effects. IsiZulu ideophones also exhibit a unique morphology: they contain only roots which act as stems and complete lexical items. They are also formed by reduplicating the stem to denote emphasis. For instance, the ideophone *ngqongqongqo* (knocking) has been constructed by repeating the stem *nqgo* (knock). Phonologically, ideophones follow a peculiar vowel lengthening that occurs on the first or last syllable, unlike other parts of speech, where it occurs on the penultimate syllable. For instance, *bathula bathi du:* (they kept completely quiet). Semantically, ideophones have synonymous, homonymous and antonymous relations.

Mtumane and Dlamini<sup>[11]</sup> explored the semantic and syntactic use of ideophones in Sibiya's novels *Ngidedele Ngife*, *Ngiyolibala Ngifile*, and *Inkululeko Engakhululekile*. The ideophones were selected and analysed based on their semantic characteristics, such as actions, colours, sounds and liquids. A Stylo-lexicon approach was applied for analysis. The authors discovered that ideophones in the novels were used to imitate sounds and captivatingly describe specific actions. Ideophones that symbolise colour were used together with relatives for emphasis, for example, *mnyama bhuqe!* (it is completely dark). The ideophones in isiZulu denoted the colours white, black, red and green. They were also used to describe liquids, essentially tears. For example, *Zehle zithi mi- izinyembezi kuMaKhoza* (Her tears fell). Mtumane and Dlamini<sup>[11]</sup> claimed that the ideophone *mi-* is typically

associated with tears in isiZulu. Ideophones that are associated with movement and action were found to replace verbs in a sentence, for example, *isho ize igxume imakwabo lena enguMotaung nesisu sithi **bhaku bhaku*** (Motaung would even jump as he plays that, and his pot belly echoes him by flapping). The authors concluded that Sibiyi utilised ideophones in his novels to captivate readers and describe events in an interesting manner.

De Schryver<sup>[12]</sup> investigated how isiZulu ideophones are lexicographically treated in the isiZulu-English school dictionary. The author used a corpus-based approach to analyse the ideophone. It was noted that the ideophones in isiZulu do not have direct matches in English, and their meaning is elusively understood. The author recommended that using a corpus-driven approach to investigate ideophones would assist developers in compiling sound dictionaries in which articles for ideophones look like articles for lemmas.

Masubelele<sup>[13]</sup> investigated whether ideophones in the isiZulu short story *Uthingo Lwekosazana* (The Rainbow) were translatable into English. It was established that there is no exact equivalence between isiZulu as a source text and English as a target language. Nonetheless, numerous translation techniques were discovered to be efficient in communicating the message of the ideophones. These included employing exclamatory English terms to convey the meaning expressed by the ideophone. Interjections in the target language that convey similar meanings to ideophones in the source language were utilised. A phrase was also used to describe a single ideophone, such as *nya*, which was translated as 'you could have heard a pin drop'. The author found that the ideophones in isiZulu are particularly distinctive and complicated, therefore, they are difficult to translate.

Ziervogel<sup>[14]</sup> in the book titled "A Grammar of Swazi" claimed that Siswati ideophones are adverbs. These ideophones can be categorised based on their number of syllables, namely monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic ideophones. Examples of monosyllabic ideophones include *ba* (of lying on the stomach) and *dvu* (of silence); disyllabic ideophones *bamu* (of splashing) and *dliku* (of lifting); trisyllabic ideophones *shelele* (of slipping); and quadrisyllabic ideophones *halakasha* (of slipping away). The author noted that in trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic ideophones, stress normally falls on the first syllable. Ziervogel also posited that every speaker of Siswati could coin any ideophone based

on their needs. It was also established that ideophones in this language co-occur with the verb stem *-thi* [*-tsi*] that precedes them.

Taljaard, Khumalo and Bosch<sup>[15]</sup> examined the ideophones in Siswati and determined that they describe actions, colour and sound. These ideophones often follow a verb stem *-tsi* when used in a sentence such as *kwatsi dvu endlini* (It was dead quiet in the house). They further observed that remarkable features of ideophones were the reduplication of syllables/ stems and vowel assonance, for example, *tin-khabhi tihamba **chafuchafu** eludzakeni* (The oxen are sloshing through the mud). The authors also established that ideophones have no equivalent word category in English.

Simelane and Thwala<sup>[16]</sup> explored the ideophone in Siswati and observed that they reflected sound, colour and the way things happen. The authors attempted to classify the ideophones into syllables in the following manner: Ideophones with one syllable, such as *dvu*, *mbo* and *bhu*; ideophones with two syllables, such as *foco* and *tfuku*; ideophones with three syllables like *mvenene* and *shelele*; ideophones with four syllables such as *halakasha*; and *watsalala* as well as ideophones with five syllables like *gembelekece*, *ngumbulukudvu* and *gimbilikici*.

Dlamini<sup>[17]</sup> studied ideophones in Siswati from a phonological perspective and how they are used in a sentence. He found that ideophones can be monosyllabic such as *bhe*, *mfi*, *dvu* and *nkhe*. Some ideophones consist of two syllables, for example, *bhubu*, *phihli*, *vitsi*, *tfuku* and *bhidli*. Those that have three syllables include *catsatsa*, *khokhokho*, *bhubhubhu*, *galaja* and *yingili*. Some ideophones have four syllables such as *bobofiya*, *khenekhene*, *batalala* and *halakasha*. Ideophones that entail five syllables are *gombolokoko* and *gembelekece*. It was established that the ideophone can be used to emphasise by following a verb from which it has been derived, for example, *gcina **ngci** kusho njalo kimi* (stop completely saying that to me). They can also be used in a sentence to show the resemblance between things, for example, *ngamchasela kanye kwamkhanyela **bha** ngengelilanga liphuma* (I explained once, it was bright like a rising sun).

Vilakati and Sibanda<sup>[18]</sup> examined ideophones in Siswati and categorised them into three types, namely onomatopoeic, those that take after the verb and those that embellish conversations. The authors conceded that onomatopoeic ideophones and those that take after the verb enlighten how an

action happens, while those that embellish describe the state of something. For example, in the sentence, *Sivalo savaleka bhakla* (the door closed with a banging sound), the ideophone *bhakla* imitates the banging sound heard when the door closed, while in *Sambona atsi bhalakaca phansi* (We saw him falling swiftly), the ideophone *bhalakaca* describes how the action of falling happened. In the sentence *Sewumnyama khwishi lomswenko wami* (My clothes are now pitch black), the ideophone *khwishi* is used to embellish the colour black.

From the consulted scholarly work, it is evident that the ideophone in Siswati has received some attention but not to the same extent as isiZulu. The existing literature on Siswati also shows that it is mainly the morpho-phonological aspects of the ideophone that have been studied more, while the semantic and syntactic features of Siswati ideophones have not received enough investigation. Therefore, Siswati ideophones still need to be examined from various angles—a gap that this article attempts to fill.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Collection Techniques

This study is a qualitative description of ideophones in Siswati. In qualitative descriptive studies, researchers typically use realistic procedures in examining and describing phenomena in their natural circumstances<sup>[19]</sup>. Since this study is centred on qualitative data, linguistic intuition is employed to gather and analyse ideophones. This means that the ideophones are mainly supplied by two Siswati specialists who are native speakers (the authors of this article). Maynes and Gross<sup>[20]</sup> noted that linguistic intuitions are typically viewed as a form of assessments of certain linguistic or language entities and how they are used. This implies that the language specialists had to determine which word categories are ideophones in Siswati so that reliable data could be collected. Schindler, Drożdżowicz and Bröcke<sup>[21]</sup> supported that linguistic intuition serves evidentiary roles that result in scientific analysis because it is reliable and has a direct link with real language, which allows linguists to develop hypotheses and confirm assumptions.

The data (ideophones) were manually extracted alongside the sentences in which they are used from Siswati literary works, specifically novels that depict social life and reflect socio-cultural nuances in the language. They were also

sourced from a written collection of Siswati folktales. The researchers employed convenience sampling and collected only natural ideophones from these secondary sources—those not derived from other parts of speech, exhibiting phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic features. The derived ideophones were not considered as they did not address the research questions of this study. Some ideophones were provided by Siswati specialists through linguistic intuition. This additional data was gathered to minimise bias in the analysis and ensure that sufficient data were available to meet the study objectives. The collected ideophones were verified for accuracy by two native Siswati speakers who are also qualified Siswati teachers, serving as a triangulation method. Thurmond<sup>[22]</sup> defines triangulation as an amalgamation of several data sources, researchers, and methodological procedures. Therefore, the ideophones were validated by different native speakers to enhance the validity and reliability of the data.

#### 3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

Two theories—Prototype Theory and Systematic Functional Linguistics—were used to classify and analyse the collected data. The prototype theory was employed to categorise Siswati ideophones based on their unique phonological, morphological and semantic features. The analysis of ideophones on linguistic features has been done in other African languages such as Ewe, based on such an approach as noted by Ameka<sup>[23]</sup>. Fox<sup>[24]</sup> supported that a prototype theory is best suited for categorising concepts or items since specified attributes decide membership in a certain category but do not require all items to contain all features. This theory is useful in the classification of all types of Siswati ideophones since some are onomatopoeic while others are not.

Systematic functional linguistics was mainly used in the analysis of the ideophones. Systematic functional linguistics focuses on language and describes its patterns in terms of their functions as employed by speakers<sup>[25, 26]</sup>. Adopting this functional approach accompanied by the researchers' linguistic intuition, facilitated critical and objective evaluation of the Siswati ideophones, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of their nature. The results and analyses of the ideophones from various linguistic perspectives such as semantics and syntax were also validated by the native speakers of Siswati.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, we discuss the phonological, morphological and semantic properties of Siswati ideophones as well as their syntax. We focus only on natural ideophones, that is, ideophones not derived from other parts of speech.

### 4.1. Phonological Properties of Ideophones

Siswati ideophones follow unique phonological processes which are exceptions to other parts of speech in the language. Hence, the prototype theory was employed to categorise the ideophones based on their unique phonological features that distinguish them from other word categories. Onomatopoeic ideophones undergo vowel lengthening in the word's final position. This distinctive feature of ideophones has also been observed in other African languages by other scholars<sup>[23, 27, 28]</sup>. For example,

- 1(a) *Inhlali itse ntjuu edamini.* (The fish slid into the dam.)  
 1(b) *Butfongo batsi zwiii asashaye imoto.* (The sleep came while he was driving the car.)

In example 1(a) and 1(b), the final vowels /-u/ and /-i/ of the ideophones *ntjuu* and *zwiii* have been lengthened.

Vowels in Siswati cannot grammatically follow one another; if this occurs, phonological processes including vowel coalescence, gliding, and deletion take place<sup>[17]</sup>. However, ideophones are an exception to this grammatical rule as vowels can follow one another without resulting in a phonological process. Taljaard et al.<sup>[15]</sup> noted that vowel assonance is a remarkable phonological feature of Siswati ideophones. Let us consider the following examples:

- 2(a) *Gogo usute watsi dwii.* (The granny puffed out loudly.)  
 2(b) *Sitofu semalahle sishisa bhee.* (The coal stove is too hot.)

In example 2(a) and 2(b), the vowels /-i/ and /e-/ follow one another in the ideophones *dwii* and *bhee* respectively without resulting in a phonological process.

Furthermore, ideophones contain sounds typically not found elsewhere in the language. This phonological feature is only associated with onomatopoeic ideophones. Sibanda and Mthembu<sup>[4]</sup> explained that “[*tentakutsi*] *akudzingeki kutsi tize tilandzele imisindvo yenkhulumo levumelekile kololo lulwimi*”. This means that ideophones do not need to follow speech sounds permitted in that language. For example,

- 3(a) *Tinyoni tevele tatsi phrrr matibona umafana afuni kuttidubula ngeseki.* (The birds merely flew when they saw the boy about to shoot them with a sling.)  
 3(b) *Nakacedza, aphuma endlini yekugezela veva krr! krr! kukhala lucingo*<sup>[29]</sup>. (When she completed, getting out of the bathroom she heard the phone ringing.)

The onomatopoeic ideophones in example 3(a) *phrrr* and 3(b) *krr krr* have unique speech sounds exclusively found in this type of ideophone and are not associated with speech sounds of other word categories in Siswati.

Moreover, Siswati ideophones are also characterised by a high tone, which normally falls on the vowel of the first syllable. For example,

- 3(c) *Emanti abandza mpó.* (The water is cold.)  
 3(d) *Uwe watsu pháca.* (He fell on his stomach.)

In sentences 3(c) and 3(d), the ideophones *mpó* and *pháca* are pronounced with a high tone.

### 4.2. Morphological Features of Ideophones

Siswati ideophones can be classified morphologically based on their number of syllables<sup>[4, 17]</sup>. These ideophones consist of free morphemes or stems. They may have one, two, three, four or five syllables as presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Syllables of Siswati ideophones.

One Syllable	Two Syllables	Three Syllables	Four Syllables	Five Syllables
nke	ngceve	gogogo	hlabahlosi	gembeklekece
bhu	ngcumu	gigigi	khalakatsa	gombolokoko
nse	phihli	catsatsa	phampalati	gubulukundvu
mpo	gamu	galaja	calacala	bhabhadlalala
dvu	faca	gegedla	vevenene	
nkwe	manya	gegege	bakubaku	
tfwi	minye		gilikidzi	

From **Table 1**, we see the syllabic structure of ideophones, and it can be noted that all the ideophones are free morphemes.

Ideophones in Siswati can be formed through reduplication but not passivation, and topicalization. Dingemane<sup>[30]</sup> pointed out that in many languages, ideophones are distinguished by expressive morphology such as reduplication. Let us consider the following examples:

- 4(a) *Washo ahlala esihlalweni sangemuva lebesihleti umntfwanenkhozi, watsi nakangena imoto yate yatsi nyiki! nyiki! nyiki yetama kwemukela lomtfwalo leyayetfweswa wona*<sup>[31]</sup>. (She sat on the back seat where the prince was sitting, when she entered suddenly the car began to wobble several times, welcoming the weight it was given.)
- 4(b) *Emaphoyisa afike atsi gogogo emnyango wemsolwa*. (The police arrived and knocked hard at the suspect's door.)

The ideophone *nyiki nyiki nyiki* (wobble several times) in 4(a) has been formed by repeating the stem *nyiki* (wobble) and the ideophone *gogogo* in 4(b) has been formed by reduplicating the onomatopoeic stem *go* (knocking sound) to depict how the police knocked at the door.

### 4.3. Semantic Features of Ideophones

Ideophones, as free morphemes, express meaning<sup>[32, 33]</sup>. In this section, ideophones are classified by their themes. This classification is informed by systematic functional linguistics; that is, existing properties of the ideophones, as well as their functions, influence their categorisation. By employing the functional approach, one can deduce how the ideophones presented in this section have been utilised to denote semantic attributes. This is explored by examining the semantic meaning of the ideophones as revealed by their usage.

#### 4.3.1. Ideophones of Colour

Ideophones in Siswati are associated with or denote the colours—*luhlata* (green), *mnyama* (black), *mhlophe* (white) and *bovu* (red)—as seen in **Table 2** and in the sentences that provide their contextual use. This is a phenomenon which has also been observed by Ameka<sup>[23]</sup> in Ewe that ideophones can be used in the domain of colour in which they play a

descriptive role.

**Table 2.** Ideophones associated with colours.

Colour	Ideophones
Luhlata (green)	hlaba cwe
Mnyama (black)	khwishi bhuce tsu
Mhlophe (white)	nke cwa bha
Bovu (red)	tju klebbhu hhwe

Ideophones that denote green are *klaba* and *cwe*, for example:

- 5(a) *Befika boSebe bema etjanini lobutse cwe babukana ne-chapel*<sup>[34]</sup>. (Sebe and [him] arrived and stood on the green grass facing the chapel.)
- 5(b) *Kwatsi angasati wabhobokela kulesinye sitiba. Naso lesa besisikhulu futsi siluhlata klaba*<sup>[35]</sup>. (At the moment of cluelessness, he came to another dam. Even this one dam was big and green.)

In sentences 5(a) and 5(b), the ideophones *cwe* and *klaba* denote the colour green. Therefore, these ideophones can be used synonymously in different contexts to refer to the same colour.

Ideophones that denote the colour black are *khwishi*, *bhuce* and *tsu*. For example,

- 6(a) *Kwatsi khwishi emhlweni uma bamshaya ngemphama*. (It became black/dark in his eyes when they hit him.)
- 6(b) *Lihlatsi laba mnyama tsu ngemuva kwemlio*. (The forest became black after the fire.)
- 6(c) *Tinkhomo takhe letinyenti timnyama bhuce*. (Many of his cows are pitch black.)

The ideophones *kwishi*, *tsu* and *bhuce* in sentences 6(a)–6(c) express the colour black.

Ideophones that denote the colour white are *nke*, *cwa* and *bha*. Consider the following examples:

- 7(a) *Imvu lemhlophe nke ifile*. (A white sheep died.)

- 7(b) *Ematinyo lagezwako ahlale amhlophe cwa*<sup>[36]</sup>. (Teeth which are brushed remain pearly white.)  
 7(c) *Loshukela umhlophe bha*. (The sugar is white.)

In sentences 7(a)–7(c), the ideophones *nke*, *cwa* and *bha*, respectively denote white.

Several ideophones in Siswati denote the colour red such as *ntju*, *klebhu* and *hhwe*. Rycroft<sup>[37]</sup> and Whelton<sup>[36]</sup> in their dictionaries affirm that the ideophones *tju*, *klebhu* and *hhwe* describe redness. Consider the following examples:

- 8(a) *Umfula wajika, sababovu tju ludzaka*<sup>[38]</sup>. (The river turned; we were red with mud.)  
 8(b) *Imbita yakhe ibovu klebhu ingati*. (His claypot is red.)  
 8(c) *Utsenge umnyumbula wemoto lebovu hhwe*<sup>[38]</sup>. (He bought a brand-new car that is red.)

In sentences 8(a)–8(c), ideophones *tju*, *klebhu* and *hhwe* denote red.

#### 4.3.2. Ideophones of Quietness

Some Siswati ideophones express quietness as presented in **Table 3** and sentences 9(a)–9(c) providing contextual use.

**Table 3.** Ideophones expressing quietness.

Ideophone	Meaning
cwaka	quiet
dvu	quiet/silence
nya	silence

These ideophones are *cwaka*, *nya* and *dvu*. Sichazamagama seSiswati bilingual dictionary<sup>[39]</sup> explains that *cwaka* is an ideophone “of silence”. Meanwhile, Whelton<sup>[36]</sup> defines *nya* as an ideophone that means “be silent”. According to Hlophe et al.<sup>[38]</sup> the ideophone *dvu* in “*ligama lelikhomba kubindza dvu kwemsindvo*” is a word that indicates complete silence of sound, while *nya* in “*ligama likhomba kundzi nya, kung’abi namsindvo*”<sup>[38]</sup> is a word that indicates complete silence, without any noise. Therefore, these illustrate that the ideophones *cwaka*, *nya* and *dvu* express silence. For example,

- 9(a) *Kuse cwaka lapha ehhovisi*<sup>[40]</sup>. (It is quiet in the office.)  
 9(b) *Siphosemasiko yena uthule dvu*<sup>[40]</sup>. (Siphosemasiko is also quiet.)

- 9(c) *Kutsite kusuka lapho wabe asukuma Magangeni, wevakala amemeta, ”Ye Simangele!” kutsi nya*<sup>[41]</sup>. (After that Magangeni was heard yelling, Simangele! there was silence.)

Sentences 9(a)–9(c) show that the ideophones *cwaka*, *dvu* and *nya* express quietness.

#### 4.3.3. Ideophones of Noise

Some Siswati ideophones can be used to express noise such as *mpu*. Hlophe et al.<sup>[38]</sup> in their dictionary describes *mpu* as “*ligama lelikhomba umsindvo webantfu labanyenti labakhulumako*”. This means that *mpu* is a word that indicates noise made by many people talking. For example:

- 10(a) *Kutse mpu luhleko wabese Semasiko uyacela kubac hazela batawubuta ekugcineni kepha wabakhumbuta kutsi sikhatsi siyahamba utaze Ngci abatsetsise*<sup>[40]</sup>. (There was a noise of laughter and then Semasiko requested to explain, they would ask questions at the end but noted that time was moving before Ngci yelled at them.)

#### 4.3.4. Ideophones of Speed

In Siswati, some ideophones indicate speed, especially running. These ideophones are *mfe* and *nkwe*. Based on systemic linguistics, the ideophones contribute to textual metafunctions as they create a sense of immediacy and involvement. Whelton<sup>[36]</sup> stated that *mfe* is an ideophone that means run fast while Sichazamagama seSiswati bilingual dictionary<sup>[41]</sup> defines *nkwe* as an ideophone that means running fast. For example,

- 11(a) *Ematfombatana atsi mfe ayokutfota tinkhuni*. (The girls ran faster to collect the firewood.)  
 11(b) *Tsani nkwe uye esitolo*. (Run fast to the store.)

In sentences 11(a) and 11(b), both ideophones refer to running fast.

#### 4.3.5. Ideophones of Postures

Ideophones can describe different types of postures such as standing, sitting, and lying down. Ideophones for standing include *khwimilili* and *mpo* as presented in **Table 4**.

In the examples, 12a and 12 the ideophones *kwimilili* and *mpo* state standing postures.



- 12(a) *Bantfwana bema batsi kwimilili nababona imfene.*  
(The children stood still when they saw the baboon.)  
12(b) *Akukavumeleki kutsi ume mpo kugucasithandaze.* (It is not allowed to stand up straight in a hut.)

Table 4. Ideophones of postures.

Ideophone	Meaning
khwimilili	Stand still
mpo	Standing up straight
va	sitting casually
khenekhene	legs spread
kho	sit comfortably
vitsi	Sit heavily

In example, 13a to 13d, the ideophones that describe sitting positions include *va*, *khenekhene*, *kho* and *vitsi*.

- 13(a) *Sipho utse va esitulweni seyise.* (Sipho sat casually on his father's chair.)  
13(b) *Lentfombatana ihleli yatsi khenekhene esihlantsini.*  
(The girl sat with her legs spread on the grass mat.)  
13(c) *Bewung'eke vele umbone kutsi ukhona, ing'ani abet-site kho ekoneni lakhe yedvwa*<sup>[38]</sup>.  
(You could not realise he was present since he sat comfortably in his corner.)  
13(d) *Wanele kunikwa sihlalo wavele watsi vitsi phansi.* (After she received the chair, she sat down heavily on the chair.)

In sentences 13(a)–13(d), the ideophones *va*, *khenekhene*, *kho* and *vitsi* describe how the people sat. Therefore, this shows that these ideophones are associated with sitting positions.

#### 4.3.6. Ideophones of Ways of Looking at Someone/Something

Siswati has several ideophones that express how a person looks at something or someone. These ideophones include *klemu*, *laphalati*, *njo* and *klulu* as seen in Table 5, supported by the sentences.

Table 5. Ideophones of ways of looking.

Ideophone	Meaning
klemu	glance
laphalati	glance
njo	stare
klulu	glance disdainfully

For example,

- 14(a) *Lenjinga ivele ikutsi klemu uma uyicela imali.*  
(The rich man glances at you when you ask for money.)  
14(b) *Lendvodza beyisolo iyitsi laphalati lentfo lebeyimi es-iteshini.*  
(The man kept on throwing glances at the lady who was standing at the station.)  
14(c) *Wonkhe muntfu watsi njo kuye uma athandaza ngetil-wimi.*  
(Everyone stared at him when he prayed in tongues.)  
14(d) *Umphatsi wamtsi klulu lomake abecela umsebenti.*  
(The manager glanced disdainfully at the woman who was asking for a job.)

In sentences 14(a)–14(d), the ideophones *klemu*, *laphalati*, *njo* and *klulu* express kinds of glances.

#### 4.3.7. Ideophones Expressing Temperature

Some Siswati ideophones indicate cold and heat. These ideophones include *hleke*, *mpo*, *mpoo*, *bhe* and *nka* as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Ideophones of temperature.

Ideophone	Meaning
hleke	cold
mpo	cold
mpoo	cold
bhe	hot
nka	Hot (of weather)

For example,

- 15(a) *Ebusika kubandza hleke.* (In winter it is cold.)  
15(b) *Emanti laphuma kulesiyala abandza mpo.* (The water that comes from this oasis is cold.)  
15(c) *Lotjwala bubandza mpoo.* (This liquor is very cold.)  
16(a) *Sidle incwancwa ishisa bhe.* (We ate a very hot sour thin porridge.)  
16(b) *Langephandle libalele nka.* (It is too hot outside.)

In sentences 15(a)–15(c), the ideophones *hleke*, *mpo* and *mpoo* indicate cold temperatures, while in sentences 16(a) and 16(b), the ideophones *bhe* and *nka* express hot temperatures.

#### 4.3.8. Ideophones of Capacity

Siswati ideophones can express capacity such as fullness. These ideophones are *nswi*, *ma*, *mpa* and *phu* as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. ideophones expressing full capacity.

Ideophone	Meaning
nswi	full
ma	full
mpa	full
phu	full

For example,

- 17(a) *Bagcwalisa tigubhu emanti tatsi nswi*. (They filled containers with water to full capacity.)  
 17(b) *Bagcwalisa tigubhu emanti tatsi ma*. (They filled containers with water until they were full.)  
 17(c) *Sadla emasi tisu tatsi mpa*. (We ate sour milk until our stomachs were full.)  
 17(d) *Imphuphu igcwele itsite phu embiteni kodvwa akang'iphi nekung'ipha*<sup>[38]</sup>. (The maize meal is full in the claypot, but she does not give me.)

The ideophones in sentences 17(a)–17(d), all express full capacity.

#### 4.3.9. Ideophones of Light

Some ideophones express light in Siswati. These ideophones are *bha*, *kla* and *manya*. For example,

- 18(a) *Uma kunelilanga kutsi bha ngabaphahle*. (When there is a sun, there is light outside.)  
 18(b) *Lithoshi lama lelisha likhanya kla*. (My new torch shines clearly.)  
 18(c) *Litulu lidvume kanye kwatsi manya*. (The rain thundered once and there was a flashing light [lightning].)

In sentences 18(a) and 18(b), the ideophones *bha* and *kla* are typically used to denote light, while the ideophone *manya* in 18(c) is used to express specifically the flashing of light, such as lightning.

#### 4.3.10. Ideophones of Liquids

Ideophones can be used to express the dripping of liquids or wetness caused by water, blood, and tears, to name a few. For example,

- 19(a) *Bamgwaza waba manti nte ingati*. (They stabbed him, and he was wet with blood.)  
 19(b) *Weva kutsi nto litfonsi embhedzeni*. (She heard a drop dripping on the bed.)  
 19(c) *Tiyembenti tatsi ntfo uma atfola umbiko lobuhlungu*. (Tears dropped when he received the bad report.)

The ideophone *nte* in sentence 19(a) expresses wetness, while the ideophones *nto* and *ntfo* in sentences 19(b) and 19(c) express dripping of water and tears, respectively.

#### 4.3.11. Ideophones of Bad Smell

Ideophones can be used to express bad smells. These ideophones are *puhlu* and *pu*. For example,

- 20(a) *Inyama lebolile inuka puhlu*. (Rotten meat smells bad.)  
 20(b) *Emakhwapha akhe anuka pu*. (His armpits stink.)

In sentences 20(a) and 20(b) both ideophones *puhlu* and *pu* indicate bad odour.

#### 4.3.12. Ideophones of Sounds

Many ideophones in Siswati are onomatopoeic since they mimic a variety of sounds produced or heard when certain actions take place. Hence, scholars such as Doke<sup>[37]</sup> describe ideophones as onomatopoeic words. Ideophones of sound include *bhamu* (gunshot sound), *zhim* (sound of a moving motor), *krrrr* (ringing of a phone), *phaca* (sound of falling), *gigigi* (sound of steps made by a moving animal), *phihli* (sound of breaking glass), *gwinci* (sound of swallowing), *bhu* (sound of hitting or exploding), and *khehle* (sound of keys knocking against each other), to name a few.

### 4.4. The Syntax of the Ideophone

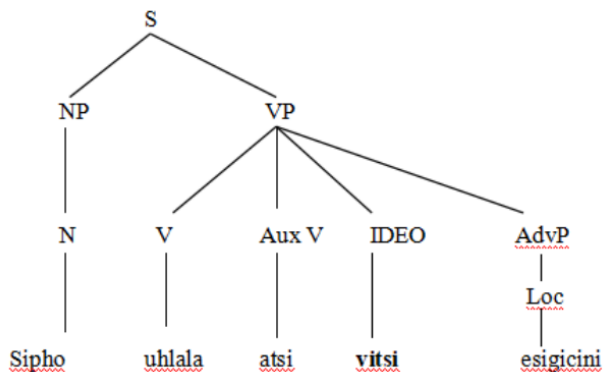
Ideophones in Siswati can exist in a variety of sentence constructions. They are a complete word category which occurs with others to form meaningful sentences.

A Siswati ideophone typically follows an auxiliary verb with the stem *-tsi* to describe how an action happens in a sentence<sup>[14, 15]</sup>. This stem exists in various forms due to tense but does not influence the ideophone (*ibid.*). For example,

- 21(a) *Sipho uhlela atsi vitsi esigicini*. (Sipho sits down heavily on the stool.)

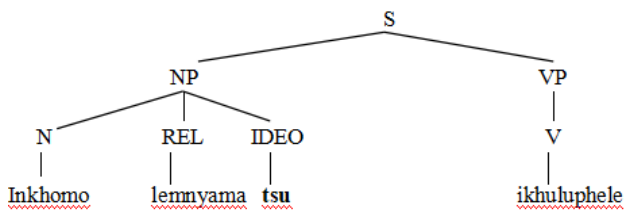
In sentence 21(a), the auxiliary verb *atsi* is in the present tense followed by the ideophone *vitsi*. These sentences show that indeed the tense of the auxiliary verb stem *-tsi* does not affect the ideophone following it.

Let's see **Figure 1** for illustration:



**Figure 1.** An ideophone following an auxiliary verb.

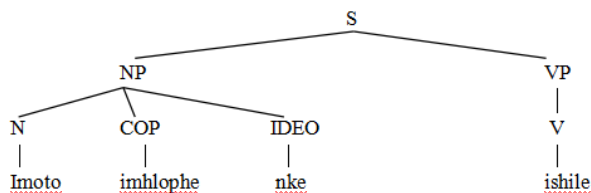
The ideophone can co-occur with a relative in a sentence. In this case, it follows the relative it describes. For example, in the sentence *Inkhomo lemnyama tsu ikhuluphele*. (The pitch-black cow is fat.) as shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** An ideophone co-existing with a relative.

In **Figure 2**, the ideophone *tsu* has followed the relative *lemnyama* and is juxtaposed with it.

The ideophone can also follow a copulative in a sentence. Let us consider **Figure 3** for illustration, with the sentence *Imoto imhlophe nke ishile*. (A car that is pure white burned.)

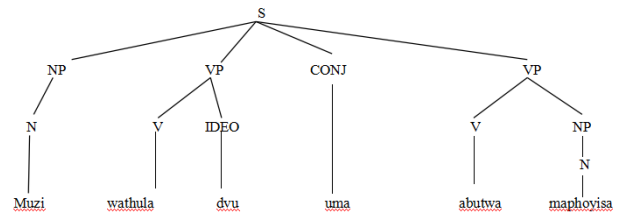


**Figure 3.** An ideophone following a copulative.

In **Figure 3**, the ideophone *nke* follows the copulative

*imhlophe* (it is white). In this instance, the ideophone gives a descriptive attribute to the copulative.

The ideophone can also follow a complete verb as shown in **Figure 4** in the sentence: *Muzi wathula dvu uma abutwa maphoyisa*. (Muzi was dead quiet when asked by the police.)



**Figure 4.** An ideophone following a verb.

In **Figure 4**, the ideophone *dvu* follows the verb *wathula*. Therefore, this shows that a verb and an ideophone can exist in a sentence and follow each other. In most cases, the ideophone is used to describe the action when it follows the verb. Therefore, ideophones are used in a variety of syntactic roles in Siswati.

## 5. Conclusions

This article has described the ideophone in Siswati based on phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties. It has been established that these ideophones have marked phonological and morphological features such as vowel lengthening, high tone articulation and syllable reduplication. The semantic use of ideophones has exhibited various nuances associated with them, such as colour, quietness, noise, speed, posture, and ways of looking at someone/something, temperature, capacity, light, liquids, smell and sound. Meanwhile, the syntax of the ideophone shows that this is a word category which occurs with other parts of speech to form meaningful sentences. They can follow an auxiliary verb, a verb or a copulative. The ideophone can also co-exist with a relative. This study brings more insight into the nature of the ideophone in Siswati and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the language. The findings show that the theoretical models for ideophones that have been developed and implemented in other Nguni languages apply to Siswati.

## Author Contributions

The conceptualization, M.M. and K.J.N.; methodology, M.M.; validation M.M. and K.J.N.; formal analysis, M.M.; investigation, M.M.; resources, M.M.; data curation, M.M. and K.J.N.; writing—original draft preparation M.M.; writing-review and editing, M.M. and K.J.N.; visualization, M.M.; supervision, M.M. and K.J.N.; project administration, M.M. and K.J.N.; funding acquisition, M.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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