Ideophones, gazes, and facial expressions: A preliminary report from Japanese

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Ideophones (aka mimetics) work multimodally. Their tight synchronization with iconic gestures has been reported in particularly many languages (Kunene 1965; Samarin 1971; Kita 1997; Son 2010) and discussed as a manual manifestation of their depictive, performative nature (Dingemanse 2013). This paper investigates the speaker's gaze behavior and facial expression as two more paralinguistic correlates of ideophonic utterances in Japanese.

Speaker gaze has been debated as having an interactional function of terminating a turn (Kendon 1967), showing aggression or intimacy (Argyle & Dean 1965), or mobilizing recipient response (Stivers & Rossano 2010). Facial expression is putatively an index of the speaker's emotion (Ekman 1977), a demonstration of emotional acts (Bavelas & Chovil 1997), or a signal for mutual affiliation (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2006). These behavioral functions make the two facial features crucially different from iconic gesture (a depictive sign) and may reveal a new aspect of the pragmatics of ideophones (cf. Nuckolls 1996; Baba 2003; Dingemanse 2011: Ch. 11).

500 ideophones and 179 quasi-ideophonic adverbials (deideophonized adverbials that morphologically look like ideophones but are distinctly frequent because of their event-general semantics; e.g., *dondon* 'one after another', *sukkari* 'completely') as well as 70 non-ideophonic verbs taken from the NHK East Japan Great Earthquake Archives (see Dingemanse & Akita 2016 for some details of this multimodal corpus) were coded for their cooccurrence with the speaker's eye contact with the hearer and obvious facial change.

It was found that, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, both eye contact and facial change occurred slightly more frequently with ideophones than with quasi-ideophonic adverbials or non-ideophonic verbs.

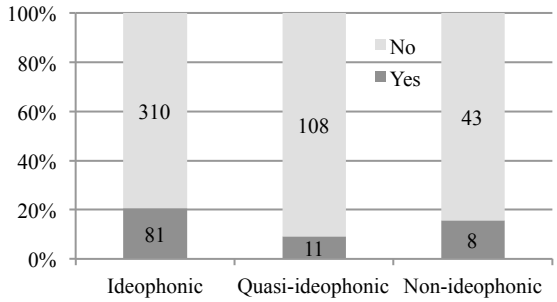

Fig. 1. Eye contact

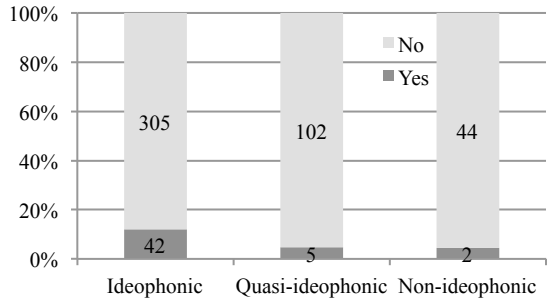

Fig. 2. Facial change

An example of an ideophone accompanied by the two types of facial behavior is given in (1). When the doctor utters the ideophone *bikkuri* 'surprised', he lifts his head to the interviewer with a smile.

(1) *Ziipu-mati-de, kanzya-san-to syokuin-to soto-de. Desukara soto-ni daitai zyuuni-zyuusan-mei-gurai-to kanzya-san-ga huton-goto-to-iu-koto-de san-mei, yon-mei-gurai-tte-iu-huu-na katati-de soto-ni i-masi-ta-ne. De …* ***bikkuri****-des-u-ne, honto.* '[We] were waiting for the rescue jeeps with our patients and colleagues outside [the hospital]. So, there were about 12 or 13 people and 3 or 4 patients with their bedding. And … *surprising*, it really was.'
(http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/map/#/evidence/detail/D0007010039_00000)

Moreover, we obtained a weak tendency that interviewees look away from interviewers when uttering adverbial ideophones (e.g., *zabaan-to* 'with a big splash') compared with predicative ideophones (e.g., *motamota-su-* 'dawdle'). Given that eye release often signals a shift to the performative mode of speech (Sidnell 2006), its preference for adverbial (i.e., less morpho-syntactically integrated) ideophones may confirm the inverse relation between the depictivity and grammatical integration of ideophones (Dingemanse & Akita 2016).

This last point reinforces the depictive semiotics of ideophones. More crucially, however, our primary findings about eye contact and facial change suggest that ideophones are more than mere depictive signs; they *utilize* depiction for interactional purposes. A qualitative analysis of the present and other data is essential for elucidating the specific interactional role ideophones play (for relevant explorations, see Dingemanse 2011: Ch. 11).

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