

MWAGHAVUL EXPRESSIVES

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to ideophones in Africa

One of the most distinctive features of African languages are the abundance of ideophones, words that describe sensory experiences. The first clear reference to a class of ideophones in African languages was in the mid-nineteenth century, where they are touched on in Vidal's preface to the Yoruba Dictionary of Crowther (1852). Vidal describes ideophones as a "peculiar and appropriate adverb which denotes the degree or quality attaching to it" and mistakenly claims they are unique to Yoruba. Koelle (1854) noted the presence of these "peculiar adverbs" in Kanuri, perhaps the first documentation for a non-Niger-Congo language. McLaren (1886) called ideophones "indeclinable verbal particles". Banfield & Macintyre (1915) whose documentation for Nupe is particularly rich, use the term "intensitive adverbs". Doke (1935) defined them as "a vivid representation of an idea in sound" perhaps the first author to get away from the notion that ideophones must be adverbial. Childs (1994) lists some of the other terms occurring in the literature, such as "echo-words" (in relation to Semitic), "emphatics" (used by Lutheran Bible translators) and *impressifs* in Francophone publications. Blench (2010) reviews the literature on African ideophones in greater detail. Although ideophones (or 'expressives' in Asian terminology) are now of some interest to the broader scholarly community (e.g. Hinton et al. 1994; Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz 2001) they have hardly excited the attention they merit in terms of their overall importance in the lexicon of many languages (see review in Dingemans 2011).

Dingemans (2011:3) defines ideophones as 'marked words that depict sensory imagery'. In many languages, ideophones have distinctive phonotactics, but they always have highly specific applications to the sensory world and describe visual, aural and emotional experiences in ways hardly paralleled elsewhere in the lexicon. They tend to fill an adverb-like slot, and they usually have no clear etymologies. Historically, they are hard to treat, as they do not seem to be lexically cognate across languages. However, typical sensory experiences can be identified *semantically* across languages and even phyla. African languages commonly have ideophones describing analogous experiences, for example, the noises made by objects falling onto different surfaces or specific aspects of body shape. Ideophones are thus crucial to a broader understanding of the perceptual world implicit in African languages.

Most publications on African ideophones have focused on Niger-Congo languages; a great deal less is known about Nilo-Saharan and Afroasiatic, although Chadic languages are clearly as rich as their Niger-Congo neighbours. Only Hausa could be said to be well-studied in this respect (e.g. Newman 1968). Although it is not entirely clear, dictionaries suggest that Afroasiatic and Khoisan are less replete

with ideophones and that it is interaction with Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo that increases their repertoire.

Because of their failure to play a major role in syntax, all types of expressive vocabulary remain poorly studied in many African languages. Even lumping together a mosaic of sensory words under a single category of ideophones is clearly problematic. This paper¹ focuses on the broader class of such expressive terms in Mwaghavul, a West Chadic language of Central Nigeria. As part of a large-scale dictionary project (Dapiya et al. forthcoming), numerous expressives have been collected, together with examples of use, and this paper analyses both the morphology of ideophones and their syntactic context. It is preceded by a general discussion of the semantics of expressives and their classification, as well as their word classes and morphology.

1.2 Conceptual classes of ideophones

Our discussion of these orphan words remains unsophisticated; given the role they play in actual speech, their treatment in conventional grammars is inadequate, to say the least. Ideophones not only fall into different word classes, but also into a range of conceptual classes. They may demonstrate a characteristic phonology, morphology or canonical form, but this is absent in some languages, even where the ideas they express are conserved. To characterise this richness, it is helpful to switch to a larger class of ‘expressives’ (a characteristic Asian terminology) to encompass these ideas; ideophones would just be a subset. Table 1 shows the important conceptual classes characteristic of languages in the Nigeria/Cameroun area;

Table 1. Conceptual classes of expressive in Nigeria/Cameroun area

Class	Characteristics
Onomatopoeia	direct imitation of sound
Ontophones	terms that indicate states of mind or sensory experiences
Body epithets	descriptive terms applied to body parts, with a generally mildly insulting character
Ophresiophones	descriptive terms applied to odours
Colour intensifiers	terms added to basic vocabulary for red, black and white to denote different intensities

The terms ‘ontophone’ and ‘ophresiophone’ are not found in the literature and are proposed here, although neither are particularly elegant. Onomatopoeic words and ontophones usually form a convergent class in terms of morphology; the existence, morphology and syntax of the others seem to unpredictable in individual languages. It should be strongly emphasised that this is provisional; this is a fecund area for invention and it is positively likely further classes may be identified.

¹ I would like to thank Nathaniel Dapiya and Jacob Bess, with whom I work on the Mwaghavul dictionary project, for helping establish the words themselves and for the sentence examples of their use.

1.3 Word classes of expressives

Syntactically, it is not always easy to assign expressives to the conventional parts of speech². Newman (1968) discussing Hausa, argues that ideophones are identified by their morphology and phonology and the syntactic element is secondary. This argument has a danger of circularity; ideophones are identified by their shape, and then any word lacking this shape is excluded. Newman's point that expressives can show up across a wide range of syntactic categories is well taken, but identifying expressives by shape clearly does not work for many languages.

Broadly speaking, onomatopoeic terms, direct imitations of sound, function as a type of adverb. Thus, 'the bell sounded xx'. Other expressives can be placed at the end of a clause or sentence; thus 'the heavy man walked along the road xx'. This can be analysed as qualifying the verb 'walk' but without the information about the heavy man the sentence would not be well-formed or pragmatically possible. Blench (2010) argues that discussions of ideophones have tended to overemphasise their adverbial status.

The other important word-class is adjectival. In a typical construction in Mwaghavul and many other languages of Central Nigeria, expressives follow the copula, in this case *aasi* 'is'. There is no clear boundary between ideophonic adjectives and more standard qualifiers in terms of morphology, since in neither case do they agree with the noun. So classifying an adjectival form as ideophonic is largely based on semantics. Body epithets are clearly adjectival since they qualify nouns directly. Colour intensifiers qualify stative verbs, although in neighbouring languages they can also qualify other adjectives.

Ophresiophones are a particularly problematic class; in a languages such as Tarok and Kuteb, Benue-Congo languages in the same general area as Mwaghavul, they are a type of non-concordial adjective (Blench & Longtau 1995; Koops 2009). However, in Mwaghavul, their word-class and their role in the sentence appears to be highly variable. The moral, inasmuch as one may be drawn, is that description and exemplification should be primary, and analytic categories developed *post hoc*.

1.4 Morphology and phonology

Expressives are often characterised as having a particular shape, phonologically and morphologically. This is often true, but its incidence varies from language to language. The main distinctive features attested are;

² It is noteworthy that despite forty years' work on the Iẓon language, the most recent manuscript of the dictionary of the language (Williamson and Blench ined.) still contains numerous queries about the correct part of speech of some ideophonic-like terms.

Table 2. Distinctive features of expressives

Category	Feature
Phonology	Unusual phonemes
	Unusual distribution of phonemes
	Unusual or characteristic tonology
Morphology	Reduplication, triplication
	<i>Ad libitum</i> repetition
	Unusual canonical shape
Syntax	Lack of agreement as opposed to concordial adjectives
Etymology	Low number of expressives with transparent etymological source

Two related aspects of ideophones that are hard to capture in a table like this are templatic morphology and the embedding of phonaesthemes. In some languages, Ijoid for example, there is a strong correlation between ideas or concepts and templatic morphology reflected in a triliteral root (Blench & Williamson forthcoming). This can be compared to the templatic formulae that characterise Semitic languages, although their application is much less systematic and is not recognised overtly by speakers. Similarly, ideophones can exemplify phonaesthemes, combinations of segments that suggest feelings or sensations to speakers. Little has been written about this in the analysis of African ideophones, partly because it seems to be only sporadically present, and partly because it only emerges with a very large corpus. A small set of elicited ideophones is unlikely to provide adequate evidence for such underlying structures.

1.5 Why is Mwaghavul interesting?

Mwaghavul, a West Chadic language, appears to have some unusual features, inasmuch as there is comparative evidence. These are;

- Low emphasis on short ideophonic elements that can be repeated *ad libitum*
- Large number of trisyllabic expressives
- An apparently regular relationship between single fronted adjectival ideophones and clause-final reduplicated ideophones
- Relatively high number of expressives with transparent etymologies
- Expressives are almost always clause-final

2. Background to Mwaghavul

Mwaghavul is a relatively large West Chadic language spoken in Mangu Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The main towns of the Mwaghavul are Mangu and Panyam. There are generally estimated to be some 150,000 speakers of Mwaghavul, although such a figure is largely guesswork. Mupun, often considered a distinct language, is very close to Mwaghavul and the division may be more ethnic than linguistic. Although there is some geographic variation, Mwaghavul does not really group into distinct dialect areas. The closest relatives of Mwaghavul are Cakfem-Mushere and Miship and it falls within the same group as Ngas and Goemai. The Mwaghavul are known as ‘Sura’ in much of the older literature. Mwaghavul is bordered by Plateau (i.e. Benue-Congo) languages to the north and west, notably Berom and Izere. Mwaghavul (under the name Sura) was

first described in modern linguistic terms by Jungraithmayr (1963/4). Frajzyngier (1991, 1993) has published a dictionary and grammar of the Mupun language. Blench (2011) is an overview of the complex system of verbal plurality.

First attempts to write the Mwaghavul language date back to the 1920s, when scripture portions were first published. There is an active literacy programme associated with a Bible Translation Project and a collaborative project to produce a dictionary is also under way. However, no phonological analyses associated with the orthography have ever been published. There are six vowels in Mwaghavul, the cardinal vowels and an additional central vowel /ɨ/. Phonetically, the mid-vowels are /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ but they are not in contrast with /e/ and /o/ and are thus represented by ‘e’ and ‘o’ in orthographic practice.

Degree	Front	Central	Back
Close	i	ɨ	u
Half Open	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

Vowel length is contrastive, but there are no nasal vowels.

Mwaghavul consonants are as follows:

	Bila- bial	Labio- dental	Alve- olar	Post- alveolar	Pala- tal	Vel- ár	Labial- velar	Glott- al
Plosive	p b		t d			k g		ʔ
Implosive	ɓ		ɗ					
Nasal	m			n	ɲ	ŋ		
Fricative		f v		s z	ʃ ʒ	[χ]		h
Affricate						tʃ dʒ		
Approximant					y		w	
Trill			r					
Lateral			l					
Approximant								

There are three level tones; glide tones usually characterised double vowels and occur mainly with kin terms.

3. Mwaghavul data

3.1 Ideophonic adjectives

Mwaghavul adjectives typically precede the noun. Thus;

àà cuk naked (knife)
àà wus naked flame

However, Mwaghavul ideophonic adjectives are those which qualify nouns in equative sentences. The most common adjectives follow the copula *aasí*. Thus the

term *cèlpèt* describes someone who does things carelessly. A typical sentence context can be;

wurí aasí cèlpèt
He is thoughtless

Ideophonic adjectives can also be the complement of the perfective copula *si*;

wurí shang mee lèè dúghúríí sí m̀̀nd̀̀l̀̀ng
he dug out a certain large yam tuber that was *m̀̀nd̀̀l̀̀ng*

The adjective can also be fronted, behaving like a head noun. For example;

cèlpèt d́n m̀̀but
thoughtless without stomach
i.e. without manners

An ideophonic adjective can also follow the repeated copula *a*;

a làà funu a g̀̀r̀̀m̀̀g̀̀r̀̀m̀̀ ní d̀̀k
is child our **is** truly great it only
Only our candidate is truly great

More rarely, an ideophonic adjective can follow the noun directly;

m̀̀n h̀̀l̀̀k h̀̀l̀̀k artificial beauty

Table 3 shows the range of Mwaghavul ideophonic adjectives so far identified, with an impressionistic description of their semantic content and an example sentence with translation.

Table 3. Mwaghavul ideophonic adjectives

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
ḡwàghàl̀̀k, ḡwàg̀̀l̀̀- ḡwàg̀̀l̀̀	describes lukewarm water	àm shwaa ní aasí ḡwàghàl̀̀k <i>the drinking water is lukewarm</i>
bwághaasíáp	describes s.t. soft	láawúr ní táp bwágháp <i>sweet potato cooked in the right way is soft</i>
bwágháp	describes mouth with no teeth	dikaam wurí déé a pò bwágháp <i>the old man has become toothless</i>
cèlpèt	describes s.o. who does things carelessly	wurí aasí cèlpèt <i>He is thoughtless</i>
cèlpèt	describes s.o. thoughtless	cèlpèt d́n m̀̀but <i>lit. thoughtless without stomach i.e. without</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
dùkùlùm gìnìnòn	ignorant, not knowing s.t. describes s.o. who looks sickly [rare]	manners wurí déé aasí gìnìnòn <i>He looks very sick</i>
gùrùmgúrúm	tough, great (person)	a làà funu a gùrùmgúrúm ni òk <i>it is only our child [candidate] who is truly great</i>
hìlakhìlakh	describes artificial appearance	mèn hìlakhìlakh <i>to be artificially beautiful</i>
mmòghòdfish	describes s.t. very ugly	til máár ni mó bísh aasí mmòghòdfish <i>the ridges of the farm are misshapen, ugly</i>
mmòghòdfish	describes s.t. tasteless	mbìi sé ni bísh aasí mmòghòdfish <i>the food is bad, tasteless</i>
mùndùlùng	describes how a long fat worm or other legless animal or a plant like a yam tuber lies in one place inert but without projections	wurí shang mee lèè dúghúríí sí mùndùlùng <i>he dug out a large yam tuber, mùndùlùng</i>
zhàrmàn	describes the condition of the clothes of s.o. who falls into dirty water	wurí sham yaghal mbut àm bòòk ni zhàrmàn <i>he rises out of the muddy water zhàrmàn</i>
zídídyás	describes s.o. lean and emaciated	

An important subset of adjectives are those applied to supposedly mis-shapen body parts, ‘insultatives’. Similar insultatives have been reported from nearby Tarok and εBoze, Benue-Congo languages (Blench 2010). Such adjectives are invariant, and do not seem to be cognate across language boundaries. Nonetheless, there is a strong community of ideas; the notion that certain animals, such as the owl or the red patas monkey, have deepset eyes and that this is an insulting attribute when applied to humans is found in many regional languages. Table 4 shows a sample of typical Mwaghavul body idioms.

Table 4. Mwaghavul body idioms

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
báán	describes s.o. with a flat head	
dùghùl	describes s.o. who is flat footed	mwaan nii cìghìr màà shii dùghùl <i>s.o. who is flat-footed easily gets tired when walking</i>
gùjùrùk	describes a face with deep-set eyes or a deep hole	nyìyìi dìi dǎé sǐ ni kí yit gùjùrùk <i>That owl has deepset eyes</i> a táp kǐ yit dìi gùjùrùk sǐ <i>Be careful with your deepset eyes [insulting expression]</i>
jéghérékjégh érék	describes s.o. who is thin and fragile-looking	dì-káá wurí sìghit wéél ntóók jéghérékjéghérék <i>the man with the big head now has a thin neck</i> jéghérékjéghérék
kaamkaam	very wide (ears)	kom kaamkaam kaa kútùt sǐ <i>Ears as wide as a winnowing tray</i>
koryòng	crooked (limb)	koryòng kǐ baal; baal koryòng <i>crooked arm! abusive remark. But reversed it becomes a nickname</i>
koryòngkory òng	describes how people with crooked legs stand	mó dírang kǐ shii mó koryòngkoryòng <i>they stood there with crooked legs</i>
koryòngkory òng	describes how people with crooked legs stand	kàt cin ɓe wùrá mwaan gùrùm mó a yit koryòngkoryòng <i>She is not ashamed to move backwards and forwards in public despite her koryong-koryong legs</i>
mondòs	describes the snout of a pig or a dog	mondòs kǐ pòd kaa as sǐ <i>your mouth is mondòs like a dog</i>
mondòsmond òs	describes a projecting mouth [the sense is that someone is angry but won't come out and express it, so they purse their mouth]	wurí mwaan kǐ pòd mondòsmondòs <i>he walks with his mouth mondòsmondòs</i>
rongshòng	describes s.t. that is branching such as the horns of an antelope	a yaghal kǐ káá dǐ rongshòng sǐ, kaa góór sǐ <i>Get away from here with your horn-like head. e.g. someone with sticking out strands of hair</i>
vùkmùn	describes s.t. ill-looking and dusty	vùkmùn kǐ shwoop <i>messy hair</i>
vùrmùs	describes s.t with a rounded end such as an amputated hand, a leper without fingers or a blunt hoe	loghom kǐ se sar mó dǎé vùrmùs <i>leprosy has eaten his hands and only the stump remains</i>
vwàplàs	describes s.t. that is oversized, such as extra-wide feet or	wurí kǐ shii vwàplàs <i>his feet are very wide [like a duck]</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
	mouth	
vwàplàs	describes a very flat nose	pìgìzìṅ vwàplàs <i>flat-nose</i>
vyàngràghàs	describes a mis-shapen head	laa nii wurí kì káá vyàngràghàs <i>his child has a mis-shapen head</i>

As with other ideophonic adjectives, insultatives have a strong tendency to be sentence final. They can qualify a noun directly, but they can also be fronted, as in *mondòs kì pòdò káá as sí* ‘mis-shapen your mouth like a dog’s is’. An idiosyncrasy of these adjectives is the sentence-final copula *sí*, which is not usual in Mwaghavul grammar and is apparently a feature of these abusive utterances.

In addition to these adjectives, Mwaghavul can apply a prefix to body parts which emphasises their strange shape. The prefix is different for men and women, reflecting the almost vanished gender system. Thus *dì* is used for men (from *dàà*) and *nì* for women;

dìgín, nìgín	describes fat cheeks
dìjet, nìjet	describes a protruding back of the head
dìkom, nìkom	describes wide ears

These are more noun-like since they are used as the subject of the main verb accompanied by the appropriate pronoun;

Nìgín	wùrá	shwaa	wáár	dìmo	le	ñlaa	ni
fat-cheeked [woman]	she	drink	gruel	that	it	for child	the
the woman with fat cheeks drank the gruel they left for the child							

3.2 Onomatopoeiac ideophones

Mwaghavul also has a very impressive range of onomatopoeiac imitations of natural sounds. A sample of these is shown in Table 5;

Table 5. Mwaghavul onomatopoeiac ideophones

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence
bài	sound of hitting a fat person in the stomach	wurí shwoor shaar firi mbut bài <i>he hit his friend in the stomach, bài</i>
bíír	sound of a bird taking off	nyer ni sham yaghar bíír <i>the bird took off bíír</i>
bílásh	sound of a light person falling down	pee mílam be wùrá sham pal bílásh <i>the place was slippery and she fell down bílásh</i>
bìlàsh	sound of heavy person falling down in a slippery place	ngù nan ni táá can shii de wurí pal si bìlàsh <i>the old man stumbled and fell bìlàsh</i>
bùk	sound of a ripe fruit falling on the ground	làà koon diinung ni sham táá bùk <i>the ripe fig fell to the ground, bùk</i>
cóicói	sound of frying s.t. in oil	wùrá naka sughur lwaa mbut mwòòr cóicói <i>she is frying the meat in oil cóicói</i>
cùrèt	sound of s.o. sucking their teeth in annoyance	ni làà nwura mbut be wùrá dwas pòò cùrèt <i>she was angry and she sucked her teeth, cùrèt</i>
dài	sound of a big bundle of millet falling onto the ground	wurí táá vwèt bwàghàt kàs ni si dai <i>he dropped the bundle of millet onto the ground, dai</i>
dìghìshdìghìsh	sound of flapping clothes when s.o. is walking	ngù tár wurí jwa nighin léé mó nkaa shin dǎng wurí mwaan dìghìshdìghìsh <i>the madman wore many clothes and as he walked made the sound, dìghìshdìghìsh</i>
dùbúmdùbúm	sound of a building falling to the ground	lú ni shíp sham táá dùbúmdùbúm <i>the house collapsed and fell to the ground, dùbúmdùbúm</i>
dùbúmdùbúm	sound of s.o.'s feet as they learn to swim	wurí nkaa kam táá lung dùbúmdùbúm <i>he is learning to swim, dùbúmdùbúm</i>
fíyóótfíyóót	sound of a flute made a certain species of grass	dàá kaa long wurí ka tààn bél fíyóótfíyóót <i>an expert is blowing the flute bel, fíyóótfíyóót</i>
fwàà	sound of water pouring out	àm ni sham beer fwàà <i>the water poured out fwàà</i>
ghòghò	noise of frogs	nningkoro ni a zàrgong dini ki wál mbut àm ghòghò <i>frog sp. that cries inside the water ghòghò</i>

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence
gìrgìr	sound of a large and rather old truck creeping along	wu kiling wal ki mota ni ki kàà si Ndai gìrgìr <i>hear the sound of the lorry at Ndai coming along gìrgìr</i>
gùdyàkgùdyàk	the sound of gruel being swallowed quickly	wurí dílang wáár ni nkyennkyen gùdyàkgùdyàk <i>he swallowed the gruel quickly, gùdyàkgùdyàk</i>
gùk	sound of a stone falling to the ground	jwak ni sham laa gùk <i>the rock falls down gùk</i>
gùkgùkgùk	sound of running footsteps	wu kiling wát ni wurí su cìghir si mbwoon lú gùkgùkgùk <i>Hear the thief running behind the house!</i>
gùlúnggùlúng	sound of gruel sloshing around, either in a gourd or in the stomach of a child	wáár nii wál sídì mbut mbeen ni gùlúnggùlúng <i>the gruel is making noise in the gourd, gùlúnggùlúng</i>
gunggung	sound of a big drum	kung nii wál si njwak gunggung <i>the big drum is sounding gunggung in the rocks</i>
gùùl	sound of a fist hitting a person	gwàr ni shwoor wát ni shi dùghùl sár gùùl <i>the man hit the thief with his fist, gùùl</i>
gwíshgwísh	sound of a cow tail used by performing artistes	màt céer mó kàt dǎng níng ki mó gwíshgwísh dí pòò <i>The female dancers are waving the cow tails</i>
gwùy	sound of hitting s.o. on the back	wurí shwoor shaar firi nkìnòk gwùy <i>he hit his friend on the back, gwùy</i>
hàghàshhàgàsh	sound of a piece of meat falling on dry leaves	lwaa miir ni sham táá mbut kom pee díi fii kuni wal hàghàshhàgàsh <i>the meat of a python fell inside the dry leaves and made the noise hàghàshhàgàsh</i>
hàghàshhàgàsh	noise of sand in acca when it is poured or it is in your mouth	yíl nii wál si dí mbut ngwom fwoon ni hàghàshhàgàsh <i>sand makes the noise hàghàshhàgàsh when it is in the fonio cuscus</i>
híkhíík	sound of coughing	laa ni teer mmààp kkuni ki sighim dak híkhíík <i>the child cried all night and was coughing híkhíík</i>
hwat	sound of a dry stick breaking	yoghom díifi ni tep hwat <i>the</i>

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence
júm	sound of a light object falling in water	<i>dry stick snapped</i> hwat gìl kwaghar sham táá mbut àm júm <i>the pebble fell into the water</i> júm
jùm	sound of a heavy object falling in water	wurí met sham mbut àm kuur ni jùm <i>he jumped into the pool of water</i> jùm
kìcòr	sound of a dead frond of the borassus palm falling to ground	kwak ngàng sham táá kìcòr <i>the borassus frond fell down,</i> kìcòr
kípétkípét	sound of flip-flops when walking	gwaghazak kípét nii wal si kípétkípét <i>the flip-flops are making the sound,</i> kípétkípét
kìrètkìrèt	sound of s.o. grinding their teeth	wurí nkaa dýees àghàs kìrètkìrèt <i>He is grinding his teeth,</i> kìrètkìrèt
kúléngkúléng	sound of a bell ringing	kungguleng ni wál si kúléngkúléng <i>the bell rings</i> kúléngkúléng
kúráshkúrásh	sound of scraping burnt porridge from a pot [a sound well known to dogs]	laa reep wùrá nkaa aar tughul kúráshkúrásh <i>the girl is scraping the pot</i> kúráshkúrásh
kúráshkúrásh	sound of s.o. scratching their thigh	wùrá sám pyághál kúráshkúrásh <i>she scratched her thigh,</i> kúráshkúrásh [<i>implies lying</i>]
kwàà	sound used to drive birds away	sak máár dǎng nyer mó shwaa wèètwèèt. Kwàà kwàà nyer oo! <i>I made my farm and the birds came and 'drank' it all. Go away birds! [Children's song]</i>
kwááskwáás	noise of girls dragging their shoes on the ground	wa kiling shii kì laa reep ni wùráá jì si kwááskwáás <i>hear the sound of the foot of the girl coming along</i> kwááskwáás
kwàsh	sound of a bundle of firewood falling to the ground	òwàghàt yóghóm ni sham táá kwàsh <i>the bundle of firewood fell down</i> kwàsh
kwáshkwásh	sound of striking a flintstone to make fire	wurí cut shàghàl wus kuni wál kwáshkwásh <i>he struck the flintstones against each other,</i> kwáshkwásh
kwengkweng	sound of metal being hammered	pee nii wál kwengkweng dàá ndùng kilom cáán <i>the place sounds</i> kwengkweng <i>when father forges a hoe</i>
lipàtlipàt	sound of the ears flapping	tum ni nsùshíí be kom nii wal

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence
	when an animal such as a sheep is running. Also when the ancestors who weren't wearing clothes were running, those with fat thighs would make this noise.	lìpàtlìpàt <i>the sheep is running and its ears are making the noise</i> lìpàtlìpàt
mbyar	sound made by the hands of women slapping against the pestle while pounding grains in the mortar	jìrááp si mó nkághán fwo mbyar <i>the girls are competing to make the sound mbyar</i>
njung	describes a place that becomes suddenly quiet	pee ni dók títk njung <i>the place became extra quiet, njung</i>
pàshpàsh	sound of splashing water as you run along or play in it with your feet, or water coming out of a spring	jép mó cìn tan mbut àm dí a naar pee ni pàshpàsh <i>children play in the water on the ground, pàshpàsh</i>
rùghùsrùghùs	sound of crunching food	jép mó nkaa sum bángkúr ni rùghùsrùghùs <i>The children are eating the dry peanut cakes rùghùsrùghùs</i>
shùrètshùrèt	describes a woman crying and constantly sniffing	mó bàà wàt putughup dí mmat poo furu ni ku wùrá dǎé saa a làà piit dák shùrètshùrèt <i>they upset the new wife so she is sniffing continuously</i>
shwèrshwèr	sound of rain or other liquid dripping	mó teer nfwam kuni beer sham si shwèrshwèr <i>it rained all night and it is still dripping, shwèrshwèr</i>
shwètshwèt	describes s.o. who weeps continuously	màt káá ni wùrá kí baa bìlang dí mme la fra ni dǎé wùrá teer shoor a map dák shwètshwèt <i>the widow has lost another child and she has been crying all night shwetshwet</i>
tìràttìràt	sound of sipping hot gruel	nìgin nkaa mwak wáár diital ni tìràttìràt <i>the woman with fat cheeks is sipping hot gruel, tìràttìràt</i>
tùlulúúttùlulúút	sound of a fruitshell ocarina	jép mó nkaa làà ndùtúghút tùlulúúttùlulúút <i>the children were playing the ocarina, tùlulúúttùlulúút</i>
tùmbulúng	sound of a stone falling into deep water	ghìk ni sham táá mbut àm ni tùmbulúng <i>the stone fell into the water tùmbulúng</i>
zhùrùmzhùrùm	sound of small plants being	wurí shwat kom ni

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence
	uprooted	zhùrùmzhùrùm <i>he uprooted the groundnuts</i> zhùrùmzhùrùm

Mwaghavul onomatopoeiac ideophones are almost exclusively clause or sentence-final and generally can be said to reflect the entire content of the utterance rather than just the verb.

In a case of sound-symbolism, there is an association between tone and the weight of the object or person. Thus in the two cases shown in Table 6, high tone symbolises light and low tone heavy in weight.

Table 6. Tonal symbolism in Mwaghavul ideophones

Mwaghavul	Gloss
bílásh	sound of a light person falling down
bìlàsh	sound of heavy person falling down in a slippery place
júm	sound of a light object falling in water
jùm	sound of a heavy object falling in water

3.3 Adverbial ideophones

The most common form of ideophone in Mwaghavul is the adverbial which corresponds broadly with the ontophones characterised in Table 1. These are usually the classic reduplicated adverbial and describe motion, behaviour or experience. Table 7 shows the list of those so far recorded;

Table 7. Mwaghavul adverbials

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
abetabet	immediately	a sò abetabet kus a tàng làà ni wurí dí <i>you go at once and find the boy</i>
bìcìcìt, bùcìcìt	very wide (space, piece of cloth)	kom milom ni kaam bùcìcìt <i>The leaves of the cocoyam are very wide</i>
cukcur	describes being very excited	kòòk pughal ni doghon shang mighin màt funu no zam har ni kàá wùrá cukcur <i>yesterday our old woman danced the Pughal dance so much that she became very excited</i> cukcur
cwètcwèt	describes walking quickly	a mwaan òmun cwètcwèt lit. <i>walk quickly for us, i.e. Hurry up!</i>
dèmdèm	describes a compulsive desire for meat and other things	làà si dèmdèm zam <i>This child desires meat excessively</i>
dìbìlāk dībìlāk	describes s.o. who talks too fast and who replies without thinking	wurí kàt pòò dībìlāk dībìlāk <i>he speaks too fast without thinking</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
dìghìrikdìghìrik	describes how a lazy person walks	sèèr si wùrí mwaan kaa si dìghìrikdìghìrik <i>See that lazy man walking</i> dìghìrikdìghìrik
díisizòk	hidden	shàghàl fína ni a díisizòk <i>my money is hidden</i>
díkídíkí	repeatedly, again and again	a kàt pòd nkaa ni díkídíkí <i>you talk about it repeatedly</i>
gàrmàs	describes a very large person who stands in a challenging posture	mú kár wurí, 6e wurí jì dár si gàrmàs <i>we incited him and he stood there</i> gàrmàs
gashbáng	describes a light person falling to the ground	wùrá sham pal gashbáng <i>She [a light person] fell on her back</i>
gìdìbìsgìdìbìs	describes how a very large person or animal walks with a sluggish movement	mee lwaa ki sham si gìdìbìsgìdìbìs <i>A big animal is dragging itself along over there</i>
gìdìrikgìdìrik	describes how a lazy person walks	dialect version of dìghìrikdìghìrik
gìjìnànggìjìnàng	describes how a crab walks sideways and tentatively	kwàng kíbél ni ki mwaan sòr si gìjìnànggìjìnàng <i>that crab over there is walkng</i> gìjìnànggìjìnàng
gìnìnòn	describes s.o. with a mouth with few teeth	aghas ki gunan ni ki liyoon kyes kú pòd ni déé gìnìnòn <i>The old man has lost almost all his teeth and his mouth is now just empty,</i> gìnìnòn
gìnìnòn	describes s.o. with superficial wounds on the skin, e.g. after falling on gravel	dì gyók pal sham meen kípák gìnìnòn <i>The delinquent child fell and wounded the side of his face</i> gìnìnòn
gìshìshash	describes struggling with a load	mpè dēs ki léé ni déé mó gìshìshash ki ni dák <i>Due to the size of the load, they had to struggle</i> gìshìshash <i>to lift it</i>
gìshìshash	describes how people hold each other when fighting	mó yak shak gìshìshash gìshìshash <i>They held on to each other</i> gìshìshash gìshìshash
gìshìshash gìshìshash	describes difficult to control like a violent mad person.	mó aasí gìshìshash gìshìshash <i>They are very violent</i>
gìtìtát	describes scrambling out of a house, or struggling to climb a hill	jép mó swa put gìtìtát ndang wát mó <i>they scrambled out, gìtìtát, in pursuit of the thieves</i>
gìtìtát	describes s.o. who is strong and will not yield easily	wurí bál aasí gìtìtát <i>He is very strong and difficult to calm down</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
gòkshiròk	describes a person or animal that is very thin	as disi ni yém ndin biise kuni dǎé si gòkshiròk <i>The dog has not been fed for some time, and it is looking emaciated, gòkshiròk</i>
gòkshiròk	describes s.o. who is very old and worn out	nìghin màt díísí wùrà dǎé si gòkshiròk kaa gok tìp si <i>The old woman looked worn out like an old jute bag</i>
gùghùtùk	suddenly, unexpectedly	wàghà jì ìmmun a gùghùtùk <i>you have come to us unexpectedly</i>
gùsmètùsmèt	describes sluggish movement of a well-fed person or animal	dee wurí ki mwaan aase gùsmètùsmèt [<i>as a result of over-eating</i>] <i>He now walks sluggishly</i>
gùtùtùt	describes people or animals rushing out from somewhere	gùsmètùsmèt gùtùtùt randong mó dèl pwat nkuut long gùtùtùt <i>The cows came out of the pen</i>
gwíshbíríng	imitates a short person walking along and falling	aa kam a we kisi gwíshbíríng gwíshbíríng ye? <i>Who are you imitating, that walks gwíshbíríng gwíshbíríng?</i>
gwíshbíríng	describes how a short person falls	rep gwar si sham pal gwíshbíríng <i>the small person fell down</i>
gwíshgwísh	describes how a very short person walks	gwíshbíríng rẹp màt sí wùráá sò sí gwíshgwísh <i>there goes the short woman walking gwíshgwísh</i>
hàghàphàghàp	describes walking in dry leaves	kom pee díi fii ki túng pee hàghàphàghàp <i>Dry leaves are making hàghàphàghàp when moved by the wind</i>
hámhóghósh	describes s.o. with dry, cracked feet	shii ki nìghín màt fúú ni fès bàk aase hámhóghósh <i>Your old woman's feet have cracked so much they are hámhóghósh</i>
hàthàt	describes struggling to do s.t.	nyèm dǎk ni o cin a hàthàt dǎng mó kyes dǎk ni <i>the workers had to really struggle in order to finish the work</i>
hàthàt	describes struggling to do s.t.	nyèm dǎk ni o cìn a hàthàt dǎng mó kyes dǎk ni <i>the workers had to really struggle in order to finish the work</i>
hìlakhìlāk	describes s.t. shiny reflecting the sun	tájì yi pwos mwòòr cáán pee kás, ji yi mìlep hìlakhìlāk <i>Do not use bleaching cream otherwise you will shine artificially</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
jéghérékjéghérék	describes appearing or moving like a big bird with long neck as if it is about to break	doghon wán náá me yèr sham dél jéghérékjéghérék <i>I saw a bird with long neck moving around, tossing itself here and there</i> jéghérékjéghérék
jirakjirak	describes s.t. scattered around like maize grains	jép ni mó jirak máár ni a jirakjirak <i>when children move here and there in the farm they do it</i> jirakjirak
jìrèngjìrèng	describes the way a tall person moves	reep waazaa wuraa sham si jìrèngjìrèng <i>There comes the [tall] girl who plays the metal rattle for velang, walking</i> jìrèngjìrèng
jwèèt	intensifies verbs of tightening esp. applied things tied in a bundle	
kíndingding	describes being finished completely	mwòòr funu nii kyes kíndingding <i>our oil is completely finished</i> kíndingding
kírkír	describes s.t. going straight ahead	nyer nii sò si kírkír ki pòd fùng ni <i>the bird is flying straight towards the window</i>
kírkír	describes s.t. going straight at s.t.	wurí pùs pas ni sò kírkír ki nyer ni <i>he shot the arrow straight at the bird</i>
kíshkísh	describes bursting into laughter	wùrá ji dél sò 6e mó piin shwar kíshkísh <i>she walked by and they burst out laughing</i> kíshkísh. <i>N.B. you use a singular verb as they all burst out laughing at the same time</i>
kíj kíj	describes breaking apart and smashing, also describes s.t. that is completely scattered or spoilt	tughul ni sham táá 6e ni pyan kíshkísh <i>the pot fell and it broke</i> kíshkísh <i>[the verb is plural because it breaks into many pieces]</i>
kudùnùng	protruding like a cow hump	kudùnùng kí tughus kaa randong si <i>protruding like the hump of a cow</i>
kudùnùngkudùnùng	describes the way a heavy person or animal runs	ní ni sù sò ndìgìn shi yeep mó kudùnùngkudùnùng <i>the elephant ran into the trees,</i> kudùnùngkudùnùng
kùràsh	describes when s.o. gets up suddenly	kaa dí mó 6oo àm nkaa làà ni 6e wurí sham yághál 6ak kùràsh <i>when they poured water on the boy he got up suddenly</i>
kwààk	describes s.t that finishes very quickly or vanishes	mó cìghir sak máár ni kyes kwààk <i>they finished farming</i> kwààk

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
leelee	bit by bit, in small increments	
ndághámndághám	describes how s.o. grumbles or murmurs	wurí kàt pòò ndághámndághám nkaa shaar firi <i>He speaks grumblingly against his friend</i>
ndírendíre	properly, correctly, well	wùrá cèt gwóm mwòòr ni ndíre ndíre <i>she cooked the oily food correctly</i> yit kí ngunan ni moo náá pee ndíre ndíre <i>the eyes of the old man see very well</i>
nfúmvum	blindly, blindfolded	doghon, dyéél páá péé ni ku mó swa pwat nfúmvúm yesterday, <i>smoke covered the place, so they had to run out blinded</i>
ngaangaa	for a very long time, for ever and ever	ba mîsh kághám ni wùrín ntong dí a ngaangaa kás <i>the chief will not live for ever</i>
ntííntíít	describes things that are very similar or at the same time	mó ji wul a ntííntíít <i>they arrived at exactly the same time</i>
plotplot	describes how the flesh of a cocoyam pops out of the skin	mó téér dùm mílóm ku ni fes ret pun plotplot <i>they cooked the cocoyam overnight so that it was so good [soft] it popped out</i> plotplot
ròòjòròòjò	describes s.t. very tall	mee lwaa yil kí sò sí ròòjòròòjò <i>A really tall animal is moving over there</i>
rùskùl	describes a very fat person falling down sideways	wùrá doghon mét táá rùskùl <i>Yesterday, she fell down on her side</i> ruskul!
rùtùtùt	describes hasty movement of animals, rushing in somewhere	mó òl pwat rùtùtùt but kíir muut <i>They rushed out, rùtùtùt, as a result of fear</i>
rùtùtùt	describes hasty movement of animals, rushing in somewhere	long ni mó òl pwat òk rùtùtùt <i>The animals rushed out in a disorderly manner, rùtùtùt</i>
sàlmùtát	describes a very lazy person, sitting there almost helpless	wurí mét tong sí sàlmùtát <i>He sits there, sàlmùtát</i>
shìdààrshìdààr	daily, every day	ni rét kú wu se yil Naan shìdààrshìdààr <i>It is good for you to worship God every day</i>
shìlùshìlù	describes moving from house to house	nyèm òk yen mó nkaa cín yen ni a shìlùshìlù <i>The health workers are treating people in every house</i>
shìnishìni	different, variety of	a pèè òyik ni be mó ji kí mbii sé

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
shìpeeshìpee	describes moving from place to place	mó shìnishìni <i>At the wedding, they brought different varieties of food</i> nyèm sòr ndang Naan no ki mwaan sat pòò Naan ní ngùrùm mó a shìpeeshìpee <i>Christians go around preaching to people from place to place</i>
shìyílshìyíl	describes moving from one country to another or from one place to another	gùrùm mó shìyílshìyíl ki ár bilip nyèm sél furu mó <i>People in different countries have different ways of electing their leaders</i>
twéttwét	first, only one, singled out, unique	a wùrá shee ji nlú ki Naan ni gùrùm mó twéttwét <i>She was the first to come to church before all the others</i>
vwàmvwam	describes scrambling for things without being orderly	jép mó bwot vwàmvwam káá rèp sé dí mó cín mó <i>Children scrambled vwamvwam for the small amount of food they were given</i>
wàshwàsh	describes performing a task energetically	màt díi sì wuraa cìn mbìi wàshwàsh <i>this woman does her tasks energetically</i>
wéél wéélwéél	slim, slender, thin very thin	mó ki tàng a ngo dí wéélwéél mpe táá lúng <i>They look for a very slim person to swim</i> cf. kwàà
wèètwèè	describes s.t that finishes very quickly or vanishes	
wúrwúr	straight without turning	o ceen láá hìi fina ni òe ni sù sòr tùlú wúrwúr <i>They drove away my goat and it ran straight to the house</i>
wùrwùr	describes preparing oneself	nìghin màt ni wùrá wùrwùr a ár sòr kasuwa <i>The old woman prepared herself to get on road to the market</i>
yàlpàtyàlpàt	describes s.t. hanging loose or flapping like a curtain	mee ki sham òel mpèè si ki kom yàlpàtyàlpàt <i>A certain goat just passed down here with its ear hanging yàlpàtyàlpàt</i>
yángyáng	extremely well	dí yèm fina wurí gyar man tààn veláng ni yángyáng <i>My son knows how to blow velang extremely well</i>

Mwaghavul	English	Example sentence
yíngyíng	describes s.o. who is mad	Koghorong làa yíngyíng ³ mànng ghà put bwot mmo shwar <i>Koghorong [a hero] has given birth to an insane person, which makes him become a laughing-stock</i>
yìngyìng	describes s.o. who is mentally retarded, mental retardation	gyet mó kwár lop wurí mákáránta a mpe yìngyìng firi ni <i>Last year they refused to send him to school because of his mental retardation</i>
zángzáng	describes s.t. straight and tight	màt ni wùrá man òwàghàt yóghóm zángzáng <i>the woman knows how to tie firewood zángzáng</i>
zéénzèèn	truly	a sát án a zéénzèèn, a we cin wát niyee? <i>Tell me truly, who committed the theft?</i>
zhìrìkzhìrìk, jìrìkjìrìk	describes a person or animal who jumps from a height to the ground without fear	làa tum ni yághál mìrep shi rét nyit zhìrìkzhìrìk <i>the child jumped up and down with excitement</i>
zòkmònzòkmòn	describes s.o. who has done s.t. to be ashamed of but shows no shame in fact	wurí mwaan ndín nnaashwoop zòkmònzòkmòn <i>he walks around without shame</i>
zonzón	describes s.o. who follows another person thoughtlessly or without taking care	a zonzón a sò ku mó tù ghà dí òk <i>You are following them zonzon and they are going to kill you</i>
zònzòn	to walk aimlessly, foolishly	mó lop wùrá mpe séét kóm òe wùrá wét zònzòn dí kasuwa ni <i>They send her to buy groundnuts and she wandered about aimlessly in the market</i>
zònzòn	to go ahead without paying attention to what is happening	wán sát òwùrí nne món òtù wurí òe wurí sát a nso òk zònzòn <i>I told him they were going to kill him, but he kept on going zonzon</i>
zònzòn		naa wùrii sò si zònzòn <i>There he goes zonzon</i>

4. Other expressives

4.1 Tastes and smells

Some languages in this region have elaborate ophresiological vocabulary to describe smells, for example Tarok (Blench & Longtau 1995). Mwaghavul is quite

³ A proverbial expression

restricted in this respect, apparently having just three words, each of which functions in a slightly different syntactic slot. Mwaghavul has a general verb **đu** ‘to smell’, which can also function as a noun. It also has the noun **fwààp** ‘characteristic odour, smell’ which is usually the head noun in a sentence. Thus;

fwààp pèl dǎísì ni a mu ñlaahir the smell of the flower is that of Plateau berry

Table 8 shows the three terms;

Table 8. Odour terms in Mwaghavul

Mwaghavul	Gloss	Example sentence	Translation
càf	describes a pungent odour	gòghor nfùt ni ðu aasí càf	the grass sp. its smell is pungent
tàghàs	to have a bad taste, bad smell	léé dǎísì ni tàghàs nzutur	this cloth, it smells of bedbugs
vììr	very bad smell	tughun ni ðu vììr	the pit has a very bad smell

càf resembles an adjectival ideophone and indeed is also a colour intensifier for ‘red’ (Table 10). **tàghàs** is a verb followed by a nominal complement, and **vììr** fills an adverbial slot after the verb **đu**. Unlike Tarok where these terms fill a standard syntactic slot, Mwaghavul seems to have developed only a haphazardly constructed repertoire.

4.2 Colours and colour intensifiers

Mwaghavul has four stative verbs marking the three basic colour terms. Three of them have extended meanings representing luck or importance, as shown in Table 9;

Table 9. Stative verbs for colour in Mwaghavul and their extended meaning

Mwaghavul	Colour	Symbolism
nààt	to be red	to be serious (issue/matter)
pyáá	to be white, fair	to be lucky
rap	to be black, dirty, dark (complexion)	to be unlucky
tùp	to be black colour, dark, obscure	—

Each of the three basic colour terms has an intensifier, which follows the verb, like an adverb. However, no intensifier has been recorded for **rap**, although that is the verb that participates in colour symbolism as shown in Table 9. Table 10 shows these colour intensifiers;

Table 10. Colour intensifiers in Mwaghavul

Mwaghavul	Colour	Intensifies	Example, comment
càf	extremely red	nààt	also used to describe an intense odour
bítbít	very black	tùp	fwaat ni a tùp bítbít the cloth is very black
péngpéng	extremely white	pyáá	
pétpét	extremely white	pyáá	

Apart from the core colour terms, Mwaghavul adopts nouns or noun phrases to describe the colour of persons or animals, above all horses, which have a high cultural value (Table 11). The table shows the application of these terms and their probable etymology. All of these are used in equative sentences with the copula **aasí**.

Table 11. Non-standard colour terms in Mwaghavul

Mwaghavul	Colour	Etymology
àm mès	yellow colour	water of locust bean powder
bèèn mwòòr	light brown complexion of person	lit. 'gourd oil'
ndúmoghól	colour of a horse	grasshopper sp.
ngármoghól	colour of horse (reddish/brown)	? grasshopper sp.
njwèè	colour of reddish-brown horse	?
shiit mwòòr	dark brown colour of animals (especially goats)	lit. 'pounding oil'
vuun	foggy, cloudy, ash colour horse	fungus sp.

5. Conclusions

Mwaghavul has an elaborate array of expressive terms, both covering the standard field of ideophones and also including odour and colour terms, as well as body epithets. Capturing their syntactic function is often problematic as they seem to occur in a variety of pragmatic contexts. In part this is because the distinction between noun and verb is not well established in Mwaghavul, with many CV(C) lexemes apparently occupying multiple slots. Expressives go well beyond onomatopoeic ideophones into a wide range of experiential concepts. Clearly these have phonaesthetic component for speakers, which remains to be fully characterised. This paper suggests that this is a rich field in the study of African languages, which research has hardly begun to investigate.

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