

Onomatopoeia vs. ideophones in Saisiyat

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Abstract

Onomatopoeia and ideophones are quite similar in form and function and are thus difficult to distinguish. While the first imitate a sound, the latter express a feeling or encode sensory sensations.

This talk will introduce and compare the phonological internal word structure and grammatical characteristics of onomatopoeic words and ideophones in Saisiyat, a Formosan language spoken in northwestern Taiwan. It will present a detail investigation of their word formation, sound symbolic associations and grammatical distribution. I will show that both onomatopoeias and ideophones do not belong to any lexical category in particular but play the same role in the “feeding” mechanism of the lexicon in Saisiyat, in that nouns and verbs are related to these two categories; ideophones might also be derived from verbs and nouns.