

# ICONICITY IN BANGLA IDEOPHONES

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## Abstract

*The main function of any language is often considered is to convey the meaning, thus to imply as the basic mean of communication. Ideophones are in any language is a way of making the meaning more distinctive. Iconicity creates a bridge for the linguistic form which basically relates different real objects or events in that language. This paper deals with the concept of ideophones found in the Bangla and the iconic nature of the ideophones to set the primary ground in the discussion of the iconicity in Bangla ideophones.*

**Key-words:** Iconicity, Bangla Ideophones, Onomatopoeic Words, Iconic Nature of words

## Introduction

The primary function of any language is often considered to convey the meaning, thus to imply as the essential means of communication. Every language has different ways of expressing different things. The communicative function of any language tries to establish a relation between real objects and linguistic form. Language often makes a one to one correlation between form and meaning. A language may be mostly iconic as to form and to mean. To quote Fromkin & others, we may say that wherever human exists, language exists and the speakers of all languages are capable of producing and comprehending an infinite set of sentences (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2003, p. 27). As Bangladeshi people exist with their language, the Bengali language comes by the first mean of commutation. With over 70 million native speakers in India and over 100 million in Bangladesh, Bengali has perhaps the sixth-largest number of native speakers among the languages of the world, considerably more than such European languages as Russian, German and French. Ideophone is not a very widely discussed topic in Bengali languages, though there are plenty of ideophone examples in the Bengali language. Moreover, most of these ideophones in

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Bengali indicate specific and own iconic representations of real-life incidents. This paper contains five different parts, which will consecutively deal with the concept of iconicity of ideophones found in the Bengali language. The first part is the introductory part; the second part portrays the theoretical concepts of iconicity, ideophone, and Bengali language. The third part will look at the representations of Bengali Ideophones, while the fourth segment will analyze the iconic nature of Bengali ideophones. The fifth and also the final part will conclude this topic. Therefore, this paper would set the primary ground of the iconicity of Bengali ideophones.

### **Iconicity**

Iconicity is a term coined by C. W. Morris that designates the measure of similarity between the icon and the object to which it refers. In Semiotics, it is the concept of text interpretations developed within the semiotics framework based on a correspondence between the characteristics of a particular representation and the characteristics of that which it represents. Charles Sanders Peirce first introduced the concept of iconicity. Peirce explained how we connect a sign with its referent. He mentioned three dimensions in which a language can be coded. These are Icon, Index, and Symbol. A sign reflects a sort of similarity to its referent has called icon; sign indicates to its referent has called index; and a sign-referent association is an arbitrary one called symbol (Newmeyer, 1992).

Alderson mentioned in his article that Haiman stated that iconicity could be characterized as a set of signs whose meaning in some crucial way resembles their form (Alderson, 1999, p.109). There are two types of iconicity in a language, one is imagic iconicity, and diagrammatic iconicity. Imagic iconicity is non-arbitrary, whereas diagrammatic iconicity is arbitrary. In imagic iconicity, there is a more or less direct one-to-one relationship between the 'sign' and the 'signified.' The 'sign' is the physical, verbal form that may consist of sounds (in speech) or letters (in writing); the 'signified' is the concept or object that the sign corresponds to within the real world as experienced by us. In iconicity, the 'object' in the real world motivates signs; they are non-arbitrary (Fischer & Nänny, 2001).

### **Ideophone**

Ideophones are distinct kinds of words that can be found in many languages. Ideophones have specific linguistic structure and meaning,

which is related to the real experience. Ideophones are more iconic rather than arbitrary. It can be iconic as imagic iconicity. It has a recognizable idiosyncratic form. Dingemanse discussed the ideophones and stated that Doke proposed the term ideophone. He characterized the class in Bantu language as a vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word often could be onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative, or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state, or intensity (Dingemanse, 2008).

Ideophones tend to be onomatopoeic expressions. Many languages have ideophones, which is covering a wide range of sensory meanings. As a result of this, we can explain this in an English word. In English, 'pitter-patter' means the sound of raindrops. It is a ubiquitous example of Ideophone in the English language. This word creates the lexical visualization and word-based conceptualization of the word 'rain' in a more concrete way in the mind of the listener or reader. Although people are not watching the rain in real, after hearing the word 'pitter-patter' – they can relate to the actual situation of rainfall. They can imagine how the water drops are falling from the sky in the ground. All the ideophones written in this paper are in bold format, and if it is in the Bengali language, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has been used to show the actual utterance. Likewise, in the Bengali language, we can found a similar kind of word. Bengali has two kinds of interpretation according to the rhythm of rain. These are -

- a) /tiptip/ - it refers to the slow rhythm of rain.
- b) /ʃʰomʃʰom/ - it refers to the heavy rhythm of rain.

Ideophones refer to the relation between the real-world and sign and show expressions of what we feel. In English, the word 'wow' is used to express appreciation or surprise. When someone feels surprised to see something that cannot be narrated with the real object, the word, 'wow' comes hereby. It is an inner feeling, which is also depicting by ideophone. In Bengali, we have a similar kind of word /bah/, which expresses a way of appreciation in a single word. It conveys the concept as 'you have done it' by uttering a single word /bah/.

In many languages, onomatopoeic words are considered as prototypical ideophones. Onomatopoeic word makes a clear view about sound pattern and linguistic form. Dingemanse gives a cross-linguistic

hierarchy for ideophonic systems of language (Dingemanse, 2012, p. 663):

*Sound < Movement < Visual Patterns < Other Sensory Perceptions < Inner Feelings and Cognitive States*

It shows how ideophones express our cognitive states to language visually. Ideophones are semantically close to our sensory perceptions that make linguistic expressions. Therefore, ideophone is a kind of onomatopoeic representation of a concept, often consisting of reduplicated syllables and not adhering to the given language's phonotactic structure. Both sound concepts and visual concepts could be displayed in here. (a) sound concepts are more like these - /keteketekete/ 'a running elephant,' /foooooo/ 'the laughter of an elephant'; (b) on the contrary, visual concepts /gudugudu/ 'something large and round,' /mlāmlālā/ 'something large and fat'.

The formation of words through the imitation of sounds from nature, e.g., cock-a-doodle-doo, meow, splash. The same sound may be represented differently in other languages, e.g., /cocka-doodle-doo/ is /kikeriki/ in German and /cocorico/ in French. Such words' natural motivation is an exception to the basic arbitrariness of the linguistic symbol and should not be understood as evidence of the onomatopoeic origin of language.

### Bengali Ideophones

The Bengali language contains a considerable amount of ideophones. Most of these are onomatopoeic words. If languages can be said to have particular notations, then Bengali has a sense of play in its phonetic and semantic structure. In the Bengali language, there is numerous onomatopoeia, some of them are given below-

**Table A:** Some common onomatopoeia in the Bengali language

Bengali word	IPA transcription	English meaning
চকচক	/cokcok/	'glittering',
টিপটিপ	/tipip/	'dripping (water)'
ঘোঁত ঘোঁত	/g <sup>h</sup> ot g <sup>h</sup> ot/	'grunting'
খিলখিল	/k <sup>h</sup> il k <sup>h</sup> il/	'giggling'
ধুঁ ধুঁ	/d <sup>h</sup> u d <sup>h</sup> u/	'expression of desolation'

In sequences of similar or identical syllables to express mutual or extended actions of the task, such as –

**Table B:** similar or identical syllables as ideophones in the Bengali language

Bengali word	IPA transcription	English meaning
হাসাহাসি	/haʃa-haʃi/	‘laughing’
মারামারি	/maramari/	‘fighting’
ঠেলাঠেলি	/tʰela-tʰeli/	‘jostling’
বকাবকি	/bokaboki/	‘bickering’
লেখালেখি	/lekʰalekʰi/	‘writing’
কান্নাকাটি	/kannakati/	‘weeping (continuous)’

Reduplication of adjectives and adverbs has an intensifying effect with other word classes, for instance, we can say –

**Table C:** Ideophonic reduplication of adjectives and adverbs in the Bengali language

Bengali word	IPA transcription	English meaning
বড় বড়	/boro boro/	‘big big’
দূরে দূরে	/d̪ure d̪ure/	‘far far’
সকাল সকাল	/ʃokal ʃokal/	‘morning morning (very early)’

Many of these combinations have an element of improvisation, and they significantly add to the iconicity of ideophones in the Bengali language. In Bengali, ideophones are usually used in oral language. Ideophones in Bengali act as an adjective. Ideophones modify nouns and verbs. In this paper, the main focus will be on how Bengali ideophones become iconic. Bengali ideophones will be discussed herein by different semantic domains. We will try to see that all of these domains are iconic or not.

Bengali ideophones have particular phonological and morphological properties that set them apart from other words in the language. Altering one phoneme within a word will change the meaning of the entire word. This meaning not only demonstrates the different application of words but also measures temperament of words.

- a) /kɔɽmɔɽ/ - the sound of breaking something in the usual way.
- b) /kiɽmiɽ/ - mild sound of aggression by teeth.
- c) /kuɽmuɽ/ - low sound of eating crispy things.

Here, /kɔɽmɔɽ/, /kiɽmiɽ/, /kuɽmuɽ/ all these words have the change in middle phoneme /ɔ/, /i/, /u/ - that make a difference in their meaning. The situation with other languages of the Indian subcontinent is nearly the same – different similar instances are often found. However, there are two exceptions: Chevillard's two papers on Tamil ideophones (2004a; 2004b) and Rácová's paper on ideophones in Bengali (Rácová 2014).

The main goal of this paper is to figure out the presence of Bengali ideophones and to represent their iconic representation as per language use. The ideophones have been collected by own perception of the Bengali speakers and from some Bengali literature. Ideophone types are Bengali could be found in different perspectives of Bengali language like – reduplications, parts of speech classification (ideophonic verb, ideophonic adjective, ideophonic noun) and ideophonic suffix. In brief, these aspects would be eventually carried out with examples.

### **Pattern review in the Bengali Ideophones**

Kauffman defines reduplication as one morphological substance that occurs through the processes like doubling a word, element, root, or stem. Moreover, he mentioned that this process improves, emphasizes, amplifies, enlarges, decreases, adds or changes verb tense for producing substantial changes in meaning or meaning shades (Kauffman, 2015).

It is a significant part of ideophones in world languages. Onomatopoeic words specifically made with reduplication. There two types of reduplication. These are full reduplication and partial reduplication. Full reduplication implies a doubling of one word. Usually, Bengali ideophones have made with the same repetitive word, which shows sound symbolism. For example- the word /ɔɽ/ means 'fever'. However, if we say it two times /ɔɽ ɔɽ/, then the meaning will be changed. /ɔɽ ɔɽ/ means a feel like fever. It does not specify that fever has come already. It is a sensory perception that fever will come soon. This word sends a signal to our cognitive state that we should take precautions to stop the fever. Some words contain additional case marker when it is used in sentences.

**Sample sentence (a)**

ʃirʃir-e	bataʃ	caridik-e
rustle- affix	wind	around suffix

Rustling wind blows around.

In some ideophonic words, the second part of the word has changed. It changes a syllable in a word as /ʃikmik/ that means ‘glitter’. This instance is called partial reduplication. Many Bengali ideophones have made in this way.

Bengali ideophones work as mostly adjectives. It usually modifies nouns. In some words, it modifies verbs.

**Sample sentence (b)**

amar	kaṭṭha	ʃune	ʃe	ṭṭomṭo	bod	korlo
my	speech	hear-affix	he	embarrass- modifier	felt	verb

He felt embarrassed by hearing my speech.

In this sentence, /ṭṭomṭo/ brings the notion of embarrassment. It modifies the verb ‘feel’. In the Bengali language, /ṭṭomṭo/ also express a situation where someone feels confusion or hesitation.

**Sample sentence (c)**

baire	kṅkṅe	tṭanda	bataʃ	boiche.
outside	adj.	cold	bridge	blow-affix

A very cold bridge is blowing outside.

In this sentence, /kṅkṅe/ is used to express the feeling of cold wind. It modifies adjective ‘cold’ and works as an adverb.

**Sample sentence (d)**

tuntan	ʃobde	amar	gṭum	bṭeje	gelo.
Mumming	sound	my	sleep	blown	away.

My sleep is blown away by mumming sound.

In this sentence, the word /tuntan/ to expresses the rhythm of sound. /tuntan/ means a slow rhythmic sound. Here, it modifies the noun ‘sound’ and works as an adjective.

## Representation of the Bengali Ideophones

Here, Bengali ideophones are described in different semantic domains. Ideophones are commonly varied in meaning. Meaning makes an ideophonic sound relevant to its referent. It is the most significant part of considering such words as ideophones. The same semantic domains for Bengali ideophones are present here, which was used in Diatka's (2014) Hindi ideophones. Some random words are chosen, which demonstrate specific characteristics within the domain.

These domains are colour, onomatopoeic, interception, speed, tactile, intensity, visual, movement, olfactory, taste and animal sounds.

### *a. Color*

- a) /kuckuce/ – indicates deep black.
- b) /təktəke/ – indicates red as blood.
- c) /d<sup>h</sup>əbd<sup>h</sup>əbe/ – indicates pure white.
- d) /lal lal/ – seems like red or nearly red.
- e) /nil nil/ – reflects as blue.
- f) /pit pit/ – reflects as green.

### *b. Onomatopoeic*

- a) /ʃoʃo/ - the sound of the wind.
- b) /ha ha/ or /hi hi / or /k<sup>h</sup>ik k<sup>h</sup>ik/- the sound of laughing.
- c) /gəbgəb / or /ʃəpəʃəp/ - the sound of eating.
- d) /p<sup>h</sup>iʃp<sup>h</sup>iʃ/ - the sound of whispering.
- e) /gungun/ - the sound of singing.

### *c. Interception*

- a) /t<sup>h</sup>ər<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ər/ – feel of the scare.
- b) /d<sup>h</sup>ək<sup>h</sup>d<sup>h</sup>ək/ – feel of excitement.
- c) /him him/ – feel of cold.
- d) /təg bəg/ - the sound of boiling water.
- e) /d̥əp d̥əp/ – feel of headache.



*d. Tactile*

- a) /liklike/ – thinness.
- b) /t<sup>h</sup>ɔlt<sup>h</sup>ɔle/ – fatness.
- c) /tultula/ – softness.
- d) /k<sup>h</sup>ɔŋk<sup>h</sup>ɔŋe/ – harshness.

*e. Intensity*

- a) /t<sup>h</sup>aŋat<sup>h</sup>aŋi/ – crowded.
- b) /puropuri/ – completely.

*f. Visual*

- a) /cɔkcɔk/ – bright.
- b) /ʃ<sup>h</sup>ɔlmɔl/ – sparkle.
- c) /ʃɔlʃɔl/ – flame.

*g. Speed*

- a) /hɔnhɔn/ – walking fast.
- b) /hɔŋbɔŋ/ – talking fast.
- c) /cɔtpɔt/ – doing fast.

*h. Movement*

- a) /kilbil/ – wriggling.
- b) /t<sup>h</sup>ɔpt<sup>h</sup>ɔp/ – the sound of a bulky walk.
- c) /ākabāka/ – devious.
- d) /t<sup>h</sup>ɔkt<sup>h</sup>ɔke/ – glaireous.

*i. Olfactory*

- a) /mou mou/ – the smell of food.
- b) /b<sup>h</sup>urb<sup>h</sup>ur/ – the smell of a flower.

*j. Taste*

- a) /ʃ<sup>h</sup>alʃ<sup>h</sup>al/ – a taste of spice.
- b) /miʃti miʃti/ – taste like sweets.
- c) /tɔk tɔk/ – taste like sour.

### k. Animal Sounds

- a) /miao miao/ – cat
- b) /g<sup>h</sup>eu g<sup>h</sup>eu / or /b<sup>h</sup>eu b<sup>h</sup>eu / or /b<sup>h</sup>ou b<sup>h</sup>ou/ – dog
- c) /pæk pæk/ – duck
- d) /g<sup>h</sup>ægog g<sup>h</sup>əŋ/ – frog
- e) /kuk-ku-ruk-kuoo/ – cock or chicken

### Iconic Nature of Bengali Ideophones

Iconicity makes a relation between sign and its referent. In above, an overview in Bengali ideophones was described. Bengali ideophones show iconicity; this is the fundamental proposition in here. Bengali ideophones are more or less connected as a sign with a real object. It creates sensory imagery that makes it more iconic. Some aspects of common Bengali representations would be described here highlighting their iconic nature.

In Bengali ideophones, /kuckuce/ expresses the colour black. It signifies a deep dark black colour. kuckuce shows a visualization of something darker than dark. /d<sup>h</sup>ɔbd<sup>h</sup>ɔbe/ expresses the colour white, which is more than white. It is intense white. It signifies something immaculate. However, /tɔktɔke/ expresses the colour red which similar to blood. When people hear this word /tɔktɔke/, they can imagine blood colour. There has been another notion of the word /tɔktɔke/ is /tuktuke/. /tuktuke/ denotes a human uniqueness whereas /tɔktɔke/ denotes the concrete object.

#### Sample sentence (e)

<i>lal</i>	<i>tuktuke</i>	<i>bou</i>
<i>red</i>	<i>ideophonic adjective</i>	<i>bride.</i>

A bride is beautiful as a red colour. Here, red is a symbol of beauty, and /tuktuke/ signifies the beauty relating to red colour. In Bengali, there is a word /lal lal/ which is also related to red colour. It means something seems like red, which is not exactly red. It means almost red. It is a sign that refers everything close to red colour.

#### Sample sentence (f)

<i>lal lal</i>	<i>am</i>
<i>red red (reduplicated ideophonic modifier)</i>	<i>mango.</i>

Onomatopoeic words can be said as the most iconic ideophones. Onomatopoeic words are often conveying a direct relation between sign and referent. Whenever we have heard onomatopoeic words, it connects sign with the sounds. /*ʃoʃo*/ is a sound of the wind. This sign put together the event of wind. /*ha ha*/ or /*hi hi*/ or /*kʰik kʰik*/ these three words denotes the same expression that someone is laughing. In some situation, /*ha ha*/ expresses a laugh like giant. It means a very loud sound of laugh. /*hi hi*/ and /*kʰik kʰik*/ represents low sound of laugh. Especially children laugh like this. Therefore, the same concept of laugh can be iconic as giant's laugh and child's laugh. /*gɔb gɔb*/ and /*ʃɔpa ʃɔp*/ means sound of eating. /*gɔb gɔb*/ also makes a expression that someone is eating in hurry and /*ʃɔpa ʃɔp*/ signifies the expression that someone is eating so fast. Here is also found the same conception but different iconic perception. /*pʰiʃ pʰiʃ*/ and /*gungun*/ indicates human sounds. /*pʰiʃ pʰiʃ*/ creates a perception that someone is talking in a low voice and the topic of talk is very secret and sensitive. Whereas /*gungun*/ is singing in a low voice by self while working or doing something in an informal situation.

Interception has sensed as an information channel within a body. /*tʰɔrtʰɔr*/ and /*dʰɔkdʰɔk*/ are very close in meaning. /*tʰɔrtʰɔr*/ connotes an event when a person perceives something very terrified, and his body is shivering with fear. /*dʰɔkdʰɔk*/ reflects anxiety which feels at heart. This anxiety can be intended for both good and wrong issue. /*ɖɔpɖɔp*/ means pain in the head. It is particularly used to express headache. This ideophone /*ɖɔpɖɔp*/ creates a direct relationship between the actual event and sign. /*himhim*/ and /*tɔgbɔg*/ expressed the opposite kind of feeling. /*himhim*/ is a feel of light cold. /*tɔgbɔg*/ generally takes as a sound of boiling water. However, it also expresses another notion of extreme anger. It makes a sense that blood is boiling as water boiling in extreme anger.

Tactile is a perceptible sense of touching things. Some of Bengali ideophones are expressed tactile perception. These ideophones are symbolized a real experience with an expressive sign. /*liklike*/ and /*tʰɔltʰɔle*/, both indicate the physical state of a person. /*liklike*/ means skinny person. This ideophone expresses one meaning. It connects directly to the real situation and makes visible imagery of a person's health condition. /*tʰɔltʰɔle*/ is opposite in meaning from /*liklike*/. /*tʰɔltʰɔle*/ means obese person. This word also expresses one particular meaning and connects the sign with reality.



of delicious foods. /b<sup>h</sup>urb<sup>h</sup>ur/ expresses the smell of the flower. /b<sup>h</sup>urb<sup>h</sup>ur/ gives a feeling of beautiful aromatic flowers, and it makes an attraction to see the flowers.

Bengali ideophone /ʃ<sup>h</sup>alʃ<sup>h</sup>al/ is the taste of spice. It creates a visual impression of seeing chilli. /miʃti miʃti/ is a taste like sweets. It symbolizes all kind of sweet foods. /tək tək/ has the same kind of symbolization as /miʃti miʃti/. /tək tək/ expresses sour tastes instead of sweet taste.

Animal sounds are very conventional part of ideophones. Bengali ideophones contain many expressions regarding animal sounds. /miao miao/ signifies the icon of a cat. /g<sup>h</sup>eug<sup>h</sup>eu/, /b<sup>h</sup>eub<sup>h</sup>eu /, /b<sup>h</sup>oub<sup>h</sup>ou/ - these three words signifies the same real object, which is a dog. /pæk pæk/ for duck, /g<sup>h</sup>æg<sup>h</sup>or g<sup>h</sup>aŋ/ for frog and /kuk-ku-ruk-kuoo/ for cock or chicken signifies in the same way respectively.

These are a glimpse of Bengali ideophones which expresses cognitive states of sensory perception in an iconic way. It can be said that the above-discussed ideophones are an excellent example of iconicity. Bengali ideophonic words connote totally or firmly in meaning to its sign and referent within an iconic perception.

## Conclusion

The overall succinct debate on Bengali ideophonic iconicity has been displayed in a limited area, while work on this topic has a vast scope. Their origin and expressive usage could portray the categorical discussion of Bengali ideophones. These examples have been explained with their pragmatic value if the scopes were broader in representation. This research, however, primarily relates this alternative theoretical discussion within the Bengali language domain. In last words, this initial attempt is just the first doorway to explore the diverse and detailed analysis of iconicity found in the ideophones of Bengali language – and the afterward scopes would follow the previous trail to reveal this vibrant linguistic phenomena.

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