



LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ONOMATOPOEIA IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article converses about the linguistic characteristics of the onomatopoeia in Japanese language.

Imitative or onomatopoeic words are expressions that form a separate group according to their semantic and formal characteristics, imitating the sounds and images of people, animals and other living and non-living behaviors. In both Japanese and Uzbek, we meet reflection words in our daily routine. Thus, it is significant for language learners to analyze these words, in view of the fact that such words make the text more appealing.

Keywords: linguistic features, Japanese language, Uzbek language, onomatopoeia, imitation, ideophone, sound reflector, humans, animals, facial expressions, emotional state.

Introduction

Sound imitations or onomatopoeia are words that serves to imitate the sounds of the surrounding reality by means of current language. For example, in Uzbek language there is a wide group of imitation words denoting sounds that are produced by animals: "meow", "woof-woof", "qua-qua", "chik-chirik" and etc. Onomatopoeic words or in other words, ideophones often indicate types of movement, light phenomena, attributes of objects (shape, size, distance, properties of their surface), as well as gait, facial expressions, physiological and emotional states of humans and animals.

According to the statistics, there are more onomatopoeia words in Japanese than in any other language. Japanese people use onomatopoeia at least once a day. They use it to express even the most minute nuances. Therefore, if you want to have deeper conversations in Japanese, it is necessary to learn onomatopoeia words.

Additionally, if you are keen on Japanese modern literature and art, such as manga and anime, you have undoubtedly seen sound effects on the page. Those sound effects are onomatopoeia, too. Since Japanese manga and anime use many sound effects,





language learners must acquire a knowledge of onomatopoeia to understand what authors really want to say.

Before we look at the list of ideophones, let me explicate some information about what onomatopoeia means in the Japanese language. Onomatopoeia is オノマトペ (onomatope) in Japanese, and is from the French. It indicates fundamentally the same meaning as the English word “onomatopoeia.”

The Main Findings and Results

The majority of Japanese onomatopoeia words are repetitive. That is, the syllable, or pair of syllables, is repeated. Take for example the word キラキラ (kirakira). This word, meaning “glitter” or “twinkle,” repeats the syllables キラ (kira). Since most onomatopoeia words are Japanese in origin, most of them are not written in 漢字 (kanji). However, they are often written in カタカナ (katakana), but occasionally written in ひらがな (hiragana).

Most of them are used as adverbs, adjective-like words, or adjectival phrases. There are also some words which can be used as verbs when combined with する (suru) or やる (yaru). For example, ウキウキ (ukiuki), which means “be excited,” can be used as a verb with suru. Suru and yaru means “to do.”

There are several types of Japanese onomatopoeia. Some Japanese imitative words are not actually mimic sounds, but they describe feelings or actions. However, those words also follow the same form and are similar to those which do mimic sounds. Therefore, we call them “onomatopoeia” all together.

In this article, we introduce two functional forms of onomatopoeia. Those are 擬音語 (ぎおんご・giongo) and 擬態語 (擬態語・gitaigo). The kanji character 擬 (gi), at the beginning of each word, means “mimic.”

擬音語 (Giongo). Firstly, we need to analyze the meaning of “giongo”.

Giongo is the umbrella term for true onomatopoeia words, just like English onomatopoeia. The kanji character 音 means “sound” and “noise.” When you express sound effects in words, you use giongo.

擬態語 (Gitaigo) This sort of onomatopoeia is called Gitaigo, in this case the words are also mimetic, but don't imitate actual sounds. These words attempt to use similar sound patterns as giongo. The kanji character 態 (tai) means “condition,” “appearance,” and “action.”

To confuse the matter even more, there are some words that have both giongo and gitaigo elements. For instance, there is ぐうぐう (gūgū). When we use gūgū as giongo,



it mimics the sound of snoring. On the other hand, as gitaigo, it means “to sleep well.” It expresses the concept of sound sleep and does not have to actually imitate the snoring sound.

However, researchers have recently started to investigate this assumption. Several languages around the world use sound symbolic words called ideophones, which are used to talk about sensory imagery. Interestingly, these words seem to be directly related to their meaning (i.e. the sounds of the words are symbolic of their meaning), and even more interestingly, there seems to be something universal about these words – Several experiments have shown that people who do not speak these languages can still understand (or accurately guess) the meanings of ideophones.

We can try that out now. Please, notice if you can predict the meanings of these Japanese ideophones:

- Nurunuru – dry or slimy?
- Pikapika – bright or dark?
- Wakuwaku – excited or bored?
- Iraira – happy or angry?
- Guzuguzu – moving quickly or moving slowly?
- Kurukuru – spinning around or moving up and down?
- Kosokoso – walking quietly or walking loudly?
- Gochagocha – tidy or messy?
- Garagara – crowded or empty?
- Tsurutsuru – smooth or rough?

Here the answers to the questions written above :

- Nurunuru – slimy
- Pikapika – bright
- Wakuwaku – excited
- Iraira – angry
- Guzuguzu – moving slowly
- Kurukuru – spinning around
- Kosokoso – walking quietly
- Gochagocha – messy
- Garagara – empty
- Tsurutsuru – smooth

Did you guess the meanings of these words better than you would expect? Unlike the word dog, it seems that the individual sounds in these words actually do contribute





to the meaning of the words, and this is called sound symbolism. Sound symbolism is the opposite of arbitrariness, but the two can coexist perfectly happily within language. The word of the Japanese language is defined as a two-sided independent central linguistic and basic nominative unit, which has a system of word forms that differ in particular grammatical meanings, but united by a common material meaning, functioning in combination with similar units, realizing syntagmatic and paradigmatic potentials in their unity. In terms of nomination, the word is the basic unit in a series of bilateral units. A.N. Gordey believes that since one concept can be conveyed not by one word, but by a group of words, then the central element of the language should be recognized not the word itself, but the nominative unit, and the word should be considered as a folded nominative unit, in which one of its components is defining (modifier) and the other is definable (actualizer).

Conclusion

Since Japanese people use some onomatopoeia words very often, you will easily memorize those words. Now, we have an opportunity to have fun communicating with our Japanese friends by using some of above-mentioned Japanese onomatopoeia. Speakers of languages with sound symbolic ideophones, such as Japanese, often talk about how the ideophones create a very vivid image or feeling in their minds, whereas normal words do not create it. When a Japanese person hears the word "kirakira", meaning sparkly, it is like they can actually see the thing that is sparkly. How sound symbolism works, however, is not quite clear, and there have not yet been many neuroscience studies on it, but the research so far suggests that hearing sound symbolic words might involve other forms of sensory perception in a similar way to how people with synaesthesia associate colours to letters. My research at the current issue is to investigate why certain sounds appear to be related to certain meanings across languages and how the brain processes these sounds.

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