

Borrowing onomatopoeias

Foreign language students are always entertained to realise that animals make different sounds in other languages. Thus, words imitating sounds seem to be too constrained to be possible loanwords.

Onomatopoeias simply defined as “the formation of words imitative of sounds” (OED) are prominent in children’s literature. Indeed, the imitation of sounds in a book often read out loud helps reinforce the vivid sensory experience in the child’s mind.

Onomatopoeia is often used as a hypernym term encompassing various analyses of sound symbolism. Miller gives an extensive description of sound symbolism (2014:154-172) and identifies several kinds of relationships between sound and meaning. He establishes two “supercategories of iconicity”, namely *indexical iconicity* and *primary iconicity*. Within indexical iconicity, two subtypes can be established: *syn(a)esthesia* (or *relational iconicity*) and *phon(a)esthesia* (also called *sound symbolism*, or *complex iconicity*). Primary iconicity is also subdivided into *ideophones* (or *paraverbal mimologies*) and *onomatopoeias* (2014:155). However complex and detailed the analysis of *sound words* can be, researchers agree to their uniqueness as regards their source language. Newman (2001:251) explains that ideophones are “part of the structure of a specific language and have to be viewed in the context of that language”. For Körtevélyessy (2020: 512) “each language produces onomatopoeic words by imitation of non-articulated sounds by means of an articulated system of phonemes specific to any given language”. For Körtevélyessy, onomatopoeias are also conventionalised linguistic signs which thus can be further categorised in three types (2020: 541): “genuine onomatopoeia (e.g. *woof*) phonosthemic onomatopoeia (e.g. *swish*), and pseudo-onomatopoeia (e.g. *whip*). While genuine and phonosthemic onomatopoeias can be associated with words without etymologies, pseudo-onomatopoeia represents etymological words”. She explains that *whip* has its origin in Middle Dutch or Middle Low German and thus is not a direct imitation of sound but a case of borrowing.

This article analyses the translation of neological *sound words* encountered in a multilingual parallel corpus of children’s books (9 million words written in and translated into English, German, French and Italian). Translations sometimes follow the uniqueness of each language system, finding an equivalence which is coined (e.g. *Ughbwelch! Ieeeech!* EN > *Grroaatsch! Iigittigittigitt!* DE, *Aaapouuuuhhhh ! Spouuuuuâââââshhhhh !* FR, *Pfeeeeee! Achchch!* IT) or an equivalence which is already conventionally used (e.g. English *shhhh* < *chut* into French). However, in the context of children’s literature, cases of borrowing (e.g. *hrrmph*, *AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH*, *Rtt-ta-ta-ta*, *bang-bang-bang*, etc.) indicate that sound words, do not need to be a direct imitation of sound with the given phonotactics of a language but can be easily loaned from one language to another.

Selected references:

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CHILL: Parallel corpus of CHILdren's Literature:

- English:

- Barrie, J.M. (1911). *Peter Pan (Peter and Wendy)*. Translations DE Skunca, FR Laporte (2009), IT Dandolo.
- Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*. Translations DE Zimmermann (1869), FR Bué (1869), IT Pietrocola-Rossetti (1872).
- Dahl, R. (1982). *The BFG*. Translations DE Quidam (1984), FR Fabien (1990), IT Ziliotto (1987).
- Dickens, C. (1837). *Oliver Twist*. Translations DE Kolb & Ritthaler (1971), FR Gérardin & Lorain (1893), IT Amato (2014).
- Kipling, R. (1894). *The Jungle Book*. Translations DE unknown, FR Fabulet & d'Humières (1899), IT Dauli (2003).
- Lewis, C.S. (1950). *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Translations DE Tetzner (1981), FR Dalmais (2005), IT Dei (1979).
- Pullman, P. (1995). *Northern Lights*. Translations DE Ströle & Kann (2002), FR Esch (1998), IT unknown.
- Rowling, J.K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Translations DE Fritz (1998), FR Ménard (1998), IT Astrologo (1998).

- Stevenson, R. L. (1882). *Treasure Island*. Translations DE unknown, FR Serval (1920), IT unknown.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. (1937). *The Hobbit*. Translations DE Krege (1998), FR Ledoux (1980), IT Società Tolkieniana Italiana.
- Wilde, O. (1887). *The Canterville Ghost*. Translations DE unknown (1993), FR Robillot & Couvin (1994), IT unknown.

- French:

- Alain-Fournier (1913). *Le grand Meaulnes*. Translations DE Langrebe (2009), EN Russel (1999), IT Bianconi (1998).
- Aymé, M. (1934). *Les contes du chat perché*. Translations DE Meier-Haas & Lang (1964), EN Denny (1951), IT Galeotti & Lazzaro (2005).
- Daudet, A. (1869). *Lettres de mon moulin*. Translations DE Kühne (1900), EN Harmelin & Adams (2009), Dandolo (1945).
- Dumas, A. (1845). *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*. Translations DE Pannwitz, Rütten & Loening, EN unknown (1888), IT unknown.
- Giono, J. (1953). *L'homme qui plantait des arbres*. Translations DE Tappolet, EN Doyle (n.d.), IT Spagnol.
- Hugo, V. (1831). *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Translations DE unknown, EN Hapgood, IT unknown.
- Ponti, C. (1998). *Ma vallée*. Translations DE Klewer (1999), EN Waters (2017), IT Gandini (2001).
- Prévert, J. (1945). *Paroles*. Translations DE Kusenbergs (1962), EN Ferlinghetti (1958), IT Cortiana.
- Saint-Exupéry, A. (1943). *Le petit prince*. Translations DE Leitgeb (1956), EN Howard (2005), IT unknown.
- Sand, G. (1848). *La petite Fadette*. Translations DE Moellenhoff (2007), EN Mrc (2013), IT Calvanese (2014).
- Verne, J. (1869). *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*. Translations DE Jürgenmeister, EN Walter (2001), IT unknown.

- German:

- Eichendorff, J. (1826). *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*. Translations EN Glenny, FR Laval & Scrick (1990), IT unknown.
- Ende, M. (1973). *Momo*. Translations EN Brownjohn (1985), FR Gepner (2009), unknown.
- Grimm, J. & W. (1812). *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Translations EN Hunt (1884), FR unknown, IT Gramsci (1980).
- Hoffmann, E.T.A. (1816). *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*. Translations EN Neugroschel (2007), FR de la Bédollière (1838), IT Peltenburg-Brechneff (2011).
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- Nöstlinger, C. (1975). *Konrad oder das Kind aus der Konservenbüchse*. Translations EN Bell (1986), FR Royer (1982), Calamai (2007).
- Preussler, O. (1967). *Das kleine Gespenst*. Translations EN Bell (2001), Kahn (1979), IT Fischer (2007).
- Salten, F. (1923). *Bambi: eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*. Translations EN unknown, FR Waquet (2016), Pecchi (2015).
- Spyri, J. (1881). *Heidi*. Translations EN Pausinger (2007), FR unknown (1882), IT Lamberti (2016).

- Italian:

- Amicis, E. (1886). *Cuore*. Translations DE Freese (1986), EN Hapgood (n.d.), FR Piazza.
- Buzzati, D. (1945). *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*. Translations DE Ringe (2000), EN Lobb (2016), FR Pasquier (1968).
- Calvino, I. (1963). *Marcavaldo; ovvero, Le stagioni in città*. Translations DE Riedt & Erné (1988), EN Weaver (1983), FR Stragliati (1979).
- Collodi, C. (1883). *Le avventure di Pinocchio*. Translations DE Grumman, EN Carsey, FR Sartirano (1883).
- Piumini, R. (1993). *Mattia e il nonno*. Translations DE Bucholz (2011), EN Quigly (1993), FR Ménard (1994).
- Rodari, G. (1978). *C'era due volte il Barone Lamberto*. Translations DE Scholl (1983), EN Shugaar (2011), FR Salomon (2007).
- Salgari, E. (1900) [1883-1884]. *Le tigri di Mompracem*. Translations DE Wurm, EN Lorenzutti (2014), FR unknown (1900).