

Sound Symbolism in English and Japanese

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to analyze the types of sound symbolism in English and Japanese. The data used is derived from the research results of sound symbolism in English and Japanese. The method used is a qualitative method. Data collection and technique of data analysis are using data condensation techniques, data presentation and conclusion drawing. From the results of the analysis, it was found that there are four types of sound symbolism in English, namely physical, imitation, synthetic and conventional sound symbolism, while in Japanese sound symbolism belongs to the onomatopoeic category. There are five types of onomatopoeic, namely giongo, giseigo, gitaogo, giyougo, and gijougo. The phonemes involved in sound symbolism in English are dominated by the vowel /a,o/ while in Japanese it is dominated by the vowel /e,a/.

Keywords

sound symbolism; English;
Japanese



I. Introduction

Sound symbolism is words that represent the sound of an inanimate or living object and can also be an emotion from a person. Language is one of the most important things in the life of every human being (Purba, N. et al. (2020). (Hinton et al., 1994) states that sound symbolism is a direct relationship between sound and meaning. Human language has aspects in which sound and meaning are intertwined, such as the sound of crying out of pain or the sound of a hiccup. In addition (Mulyadi, 2008) states that the meaning of sound relations is arbitrary where most of the meanings are in fact created from arbitrary combinations and permutations of members of simple speech sounds. Research on sound symbolism has been carried out by many researchers.

(Mulyadi, 2008) has investigated the symbolism of sound in Indonesian. In his research, Mulyadi found that Indonesian sounds can be classified into corporeal sound symbolism, imitative sound symbolism, synthetic symbolism, and conventional sound symbolism and from the four types of sound it was revealed that sound symbolism that contains emotional meanings is corporal sound symbolism and conventional sound symbolism. In addition to Mulyadi's research, there is also research (Elsen, 2017) which discusses the two meanings of sound symbolism and the results of his research show that several aspects of sound symbolism such as the natural or iconic relationship between sound and referent interact but must be considered separately to obtain a more realistic view of the sound in sound symbolism. Another research on sound symbolism has also been conducted by (Dharmawati & Mulyadi, 2021) regarding comparative studies of sound symbolism in Indonesian and English. In their research, Dharmawati and Mulyadi found that the types of sound symbolism in the two languages are the same, namely the types of corporeal sound symbolism, imitative sound symbolism, synthetic symbolism, and conventional sound symbolism but the differences are in the form of visual writing for

instance between the words *uhuk uhuk* in Indonesian and *cof cof* in English that means *cough*.

In addition to English, there is also research on onomatopoeic sound symbolism in Japanese and Javanese which was conducted by (Supangat, 2015). In his research, it was found that the two languages have the same classification in common for onomatopoeia which explains the imitation of sound of objects, natural phenomena, movement of objects, and health which are the same but differ in the meanings evoked by the sound produced.

From the results of previous research, there is a gap in the research where the same research was carried out but in a different language. Therefore, this study focuses on research on sound symbolism in English and Japanese where the two languages have different sound systems. The source of data used in this study is data from the research results of sound symbolism in English and Japanese.

II. Review of Literature

The term sound symbolism is used to refer to sounds that have meanings that directly reflect the internal state of the body or mind. A scale can be set between these utterances and entirely conventional and arbitrary language, where sound and meaning are unlikely to have a direct relationship at all (Hinton et al., 1994). Hinton et al. divide sound symbolism into four categories, namely corporeal sound symbolism, imitative sound symbolism, synesthetic sound symbolism, and conventional sound symbolism.

Corporeal sound symbolism is the sound produced from a particular voice or intonation pattern to express the emotional or physical state of the speaker. This category includes sounds such as stone symptoms or hiccups, expressive intonation sounds, high voice expressions and interjections. In English, writing on comics has visual effects that appear such as font size, shape and color as in the symbolism of the sound *Aaugh!* and *Achoo!* indicating the sound of *coughing* and *sneezing*.

Imitative sound symbolism is the sound produced from sounds associated with onomatopoeic words or phrases that represent environmental sounds such as animal sounds, the sound of falling objects, or the sound of objects touching. Examples of imitation sound symbolism are the sound of a dog (*bow-bow*), a knock on a door (*knock*), a swish sound.

Synesthetic sound symbolism is sound symbolism which is defined as a symbol of acoustic and non-acoustic phenomena. Synesthetic sound symbolism is the process by which certain vowels, consonants, suprasegmentals are selected to consistently represent the visual, tactile proprioceptive properties of objects. In other words, synesthetic sound symbolism relates to sounds that are vowels or consonants that refer to whether the object is big or small. (Mulyadi, 2008) exemplifies that in Indonesian, the concept of 'big' which is formed in the semantic component of 'this thing/this person is big' is represented by the vowel /a/ while the concept of 'small' is represented by the vowel /i/ encodes the semantic component of 'this object' /this person is small'.

Conventional sound symbolism describes the common collocations of phonemes in forming words. This phoneme collocation is more linguistics than universal. Therefore, this type of sound symbolism is called arbitrary and conventional in explaining the relationship between sound and meaning (Mulyadi, 2008). This conventional sound symbolism is associated with several phonemes, consonant clusters, or syllables with certain meanings (Hunter & Smith, 2007).

Whereas in Japanese, sound symbolism is categorized into onomatopoeic sounds and is divided into five parts, namely *giongo* which describes imitation of sounds that come from nature or inanimate objects, *giseigo* describes imitation of sounds that come from living things, *gitaigo* describes the state of inanimate objects or certain situations, *giyougo* describes a state of living things, and *gijougo* describes the human mood Supangat (Supangat, 2015). The theory used in this study is the theory of sound symbolism presented by Hinton et al. The discussion on the types of sound symbolism in English and Japanese becomes the focus of this research.

III. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach using a grounded theory design. The data source used is the result of research on sound symbolism in English and Japanese. The data is in the form of words or phrases in the form of sound symbolism from the research results of several researchers in the field of sound symbolism. Data collection and techniques of data analysis were carried out in three stages, namely: (1) data condensation, (2) data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014)

IV. Results and Discussion

In this section, the discussion of sound symbolism in English and Japanese is described in detail using the theory of sound symbolism. The category of sound symbolism follows the theory described in the previous section, namely the theory of sound symbolism stated by Hinton et al (1994) in which there are four types of sound symbolism, namely corporeal sound symbolism, imitative sound symbolism, synesthetic sound symbolism, and conventional sound symbolism.

4.1 Corporeal Sound Symbolism

Corporeal sound symbolism relates to emotional states that are shown through expressions with low or high intonation such as sounds of admiration, surprise, stumbling or others. In addition to being related to emotional states, the symbolism of physical sounds is also related to the physical state of humans that are generated naturally, such as the sound of *coughing*, *sneezing*, or *snoring*. The category of corporeal sound symbolism in English exists in both English and Japanese. But in Japanese the category is included in the onomatopoeia with the term *giyougo* describing a condition of living things and *gijougo* describing the human mood. Some examples of physical sound symbolism in English and Japanese can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Sound Symbolism in English and Japanese

Sound	English	Japanese
Sneezing	Achoo	Hakushun
Coughing	cof cof	goho goho
Yawning	Huh	Fuwaa
Snoring	Zzzzz	goro goro
Surprising	Oh	Ee
Amazing	Wow	Maa
Pain	ouch	Are
Understanding	Aha	Aa

Thinking	Hmmm	Eeto
Heart Beat	Lup dup	Doki doki

From the table above, it can be seen that the sound symbolism in English and Japanese represents the shape of letters in human articulation where for example the sounds of *coughing* (*cof cof* and *goho goho*). In English and Japanese, the sounds are represented by velar consonants /k,g/ and vowels. /a,o/. The shape of the velar sound results from the meeting of the middle tongue touching the back of the palate and the state of the mouth being slightly open in the front. This articulation position is exactly like the human condition who is coughing.

4.2 Imitative Sound Symbolism

Imitative sound symbolism is the sound produced from sounds associated with onomatopoeic words or phrases that represent ambient sounds such as animal sounds, falling objects, or touching objects. In Japanese, sound symbolism is called *giongo* which describes imitation of sounds that come from nature or inanimate objects and *giseigo* describes imitation of sounds that come from living things. Some examples of sound symbolism in English and Japanese are as follows:

Table 2. Imitative Sound Symbolism in English and Japanese

Sound	English	Japanese
Cat	Meow	Nyaanyaa
Cow	Moo	Moomoo
Dog	Bow-bow	Wanwan
Goat	Baa	Meemee
Breezing wind	Wuizz	Zazaa
Boiling water bubbles	Bubbling	Gutsu gutsu
Bell ringing	Ringling	Gan gan
School bell	Ding	Kinkonkankon
Clapping	Clap	Pan pan pan

From the table data above, it can be seen that the symbolism of imitative sounds in English uses one word and only a few reduplicated words and words with double vowels such as the symbolism of the sound of a cat animal with a *meow* sound, a cow animal with a *moo* sound and a dog animal sound with a *bow-bow* sound. . The sound of animal imitation in English is dominated by bilabial sounds, which are sounds that result from the meeting of two lips at the place of articulation. In addition, there is an imitation of the sound of objects in contact in English which is dominated by velar /ŋ/ sounds such as ringing or bubbling sounds. In contrast to Japanese, the symbolism of imitative sounds is dominated by reduplication by using double vowels such as the symbolism of the cat's sound 'nyaanyaa' and the goat's sound 'meemee'.

4.3 Synesthetic Sound Symbolism

Synesthetic sound symbolism is sound symbolism related to vowel or consonant sounds which refers to whether the object is represented large or small. As in English, adjectives referring to small size or meaning are represented by vowel /i/ and adjectives referring to large size or meaning are represented by vowels /a/, /ɑ/, /o/ and /ɔ/ (Winter & Perlman, 2021). Examples of sound symbolism of nouns and adjectives in English are as follows:

Small adjectives

Baby, mini, tiny, little, bitty, teeny, wee, weeny, teensy, minute, miniscule.

Large adjectives

Giant, tremendous, huge, gigantic, mammoth, massive, vast, colossal, jumbo.

The application of synesthetic sound symbolism in English can be seen in the following example sentences:

- a. My little brother is crying.
- b. The giant has destroyed the forest.

In Japanese there are no words that refer to the size of large or small objects so that this type of symbolism does not apply in Japanese.

4.4 Conventional Sound Symbolism

Conventional sound symbolism is associated with several phonemes, consonant clusters, or syllables with certain meanings. In English the conventional sound is indicated by the sound of water spreading with consonant clusters /sp/ *spray, splay, splatter*, consonant clusters /gr/ in loudness; feelings of dissatisfaction such as the sound of *grunter, grown*, cluster /gl/ express glare such as the sound of *glowing, glitter*. The form of conventional sound symbolism clusters in English is formed from the CCV syllable.

In addition to the form of /sp/ and /gl/ consonant clusters, there are also combinations of /sw/ consonant clusters such as the words *sweep, swing, swoop, swish*, and *sway* which express long movements. Examples of these consonant clusters can be seen in the following sentences;

- a. The woman's skin is glowing.
- b. The man sprays the perfume to his body.
- c. The boy plays a swing in the kindergarten.

In sentence (1) the word *glowing* refers to a woman's skin that glows. In sentence (2), the word *spray* means to spray where the man sprays perfume on his body. And in sentence (3), the word *swing* means swing game. Then there is the '-ump' rhythm in English which expresses something round and plump as in the words *lump, bump, mumps, plump, rump*, and *stump*. The word *plump* refers to the meaning of 'montok' in Indonesian. Examples of sound symbolism can be seen in the following sentences:

1. Howard Hughes must have a lump in his throat.
2. He chopped off the wood on the stump tree.

In Japanese, conventional sound symbolism is not found, but another type of sound symbolism is found, namely sound symbolism called *gitaigo* in Japanese. *Gitaigo* is a sound symbolism that describes the state of an inanimate object or situation. As in the word *kirikira* which means *to shine*, then there is the word *koro koro kororin* which means *slipping*. This type of sound symbolism represents movement. Example sentences can be seen in the following sentences:

1. Sono josei no kao kagayaite wa *kira kira* mitai desu.
The woman's face is *glowing*.
2. Tokoro ga, ukkari te ga suberi omusubi wa *koro koro kororin* to korogatteikimashita.
But, *omusubi* in grandfather's hand *slips and falls*. (Purwarni et al., 2020)

IV. Conclusion

Sound symbolism in English has four criteria, namely corporeal sound symbolism, imitative sound symbolism, synthetic symbolism and conventional sound symbolism. While sound symbolism in Japanese has five criteria, namely *giongo* which describes imitation of sounds that come from nature or inanimate objects, *giseigo* describes imitation of sounds that come from living things, *gitaigo* describes the state of inanimate objects or certain situations, *giyougo* describes a condition of living things, and *gijougo* describes the human mood where the types of sound symbolism *giyougo* and *gijougo* fall into the category of corporeal sound symbolism, *giongo* and *giseigo* types fall into the category of imitation sound symbolism. For the type of *gitaigo* in Japanese, it is categorized into conventional sound symbolism. In the symbolism of physical sounds in English and Japanese, they are presented with velar consonants /k,g/ and vowels /a,o/ and use vowels /o,a/ in English. The symbolism of imitative sound in English is dominated by bilabial sound and velar sound /ŋ/ while in Japanese it is dominated by reduplication by using double vowels; they are vowels /e,a/.

Synesthetic sound symbolism in English is related to small meaning represented by vowel /i/ and adjectives referring to size or large meaning are represented by vowel /a/, /α/, /o/ and /ɔ/ while in Japanese there is no case as in English. Conventional sound symbolism in English is associated with several phonemes, consonant clusters, or syllables (CCV) with certain meanings associated with certain meanings such as the sound of water spreading with the consonant cluster sound /sp/, the meaning of violence with the consonant cluster sound /gr/ and cluster /gl/ indicates glare, besides that there is a combination of clusters of consonants /sw/ which indicates long movement. Meanwhile, in Japanese, the symbolism of sound that expresses movement is categorized as *gitaigo*.

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