Onomatopoeia: A Comparative Study of Usage, Awareness, and Perception between Japanese and American University Students

Alexander H. Dacuyan

Advisors:
Dr. Yoshiko Saito-Abbott
Dr. Shigeko Sekine
Outline

• Significance of Study
• Research Questions
• Research Background
  • American and Japanese definition of onomatopoeia
  • Onomatopoeia examples and types
  • Onomatopoeia usage
• Research Method
• Research Findings
• Conclusion
• Bibliography
• Acknowledgements
Significance of the Study

• While studying Japanese at CSUMB, Japanese exchange students used many different onomatopoeia quite often. So I thought to myself, how often and within what situations is onomatopoeia used?

• I became interested in if American students used just as many onomatopoeia or and if they were aware of onomatopoeia usage at all. This also led me to investigate what perceptions both Japanese and American students hold as well.

• I hope to discover the answers to these questions through observation, research and surveys.
Research Questions

1. How is onomatopoeia usage and awareness different between Japanese and American university students?

2. How is the perception of using onomatopoeia different between Japanese and American university students?
Research Background

a. American and Japanese definition of onomatopoeia
b. Examples and types of onomatopoeia
c. Onomatopoeia usage
# American and Japanese Definition of Onomatopoeia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>American</strong></th>
<th><strong>Japanese</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Is a way of expressing a particular sound that does not have a vocabulary.  
  (Hugh Bredin, 1996) | • Words to describe sounds, often simple phonetic combinations of letters.  
  (urbandictionary, 2015) |
| • The formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g., cuckoo, sizzle,).  
  (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015) | • Is broken up into two specific groups, giongo and gitaigo. |
| | • Giongo includes sounds of animals, humans, and actions. |
| | • Gitaigo includes sounds of feelings or certain states of being.  
  (Tofugu, n.d.) |
# Onomatopoeia Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creak</td>
<td>Ki-ki-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boink</td>
<td>Bōn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choo-choo</td>
<td>Shyu shyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah-choo</td>
<td>Hakushyon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sizzle</td>
<td>Jyu-jyu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meow</td>
<td>Nya-nya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribbit</td>
<td>Gero gero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nom-nom</td>
<td>Mushya-mushya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whirl</td>
<td>Guru guru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phew</td>
<td>Fu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Denshi Jisho, 2015)
## Onomatopoeia Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- According to a dissertation written in 2010 by Takashi Sugahara, he was able to gather around <strong>278</strong> onomatopoeia from an Oxford English dictionary.</td>
<td>- Out of a Japanese dictionary of 500,000 words around <strong>5,000</strong> are onomatopoeia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Another source puts the estimate at 270 as well.</td>
<td>- That is one percent. One word out of 100 is an onomatopoeia. However, there are still many others that haven't been printed due to them being out of date or forgotten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Method

• Study Participants
  o 58 University Students
  o Ages 18 and up
    ❖ 29 American
      ▪ 14 Male, 15 Female
    ❖ 29 Japanese
      ▪ 8 Male, 21 Female

• Research Instrument
  o Online Survey
    ❖ English Survey
    ❖ Japanese Survey
Research Question 1: How is onomatopoeia usage and awareness different between Japanese and American university students?
American students most often use onomatopoeia with children, friends, and singing songs.
Japanese students most often use onomatopoeia with friends, children and family.
American students are most aware of onomatopoeia when used with children, the public, and friends.
Awareness of Onomatopoeia
(Japanese)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Strongly Aware</th>
<th>Quite Aware</th>
<th>Fairly Aware</th>
<th>Slightly Aware</th>
<th>Not Aware</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Japanese students are most aware of onomatopoeia when used with family, friends, and children.
Americans are most influenced by cartoons/anime, friends, comics/manga. Also, there are a small percentage that believe specific elements are “not applicable” and “strongly disagree” about influences.
Influences for Onomatopoeia (Japanese)

Japanese are most influenced by friends, family, and manga. Also, under “strongly disagree” and “n/a,” there were zero responses.
Research Question 1
Summary of Findings

• In general Japanese students have more **awareness and usage** compared to Americans.

• Both Japanese and Americans often use onomatopoeia with **children and friends**, however Japanese show high usage with **family** as well.

• American students show onomatopoeia is most influenced by **cartoons, friends, and comics** while Japanese are most influenced by **friends, family, and manga**. Also, Japanese see “**region**” as a large part of their influence as well.

• Americans did have a small percentage of students that found some of the influences to be “**strongly disagreed**” and “**not applicable**,” however, Japanese had **no responses at all lower than “disagree”**.
Survey Results

Research Question 2: How is the perception of using onomatopoeia different between Japanese and American university students?
Perceptions of Mature or Childish Onomatopoeia (American)

Question: From the following, which do you feel are more mature or childish?

- phew
- whirl
- nomnomnom
- ribbit
- meow
- sizzle
- ah-choo
- choochoo
- boink
- creak

Americans perceive that five out of the ten onomatopoeia shown are “slightly mature” to “mature.” Also, nom-nom-nom, choo-choo, and boink show the highest percentage of being childish.
Japanese perceive that “Phew” is the most mature out of the ten shown. However, the majority of onomatopoeia remaining are closely divided between being “neither” or “slightly childish” and “childish”. 
Both Japanese and American students show high percentages of importance for onomatopoeia. The black circle shows the higher combined importance from Japanese compared to Americans.
Americans find “describing feelings and emotions,” “emphasis,” and “describing sounds” to be the most popular reason to use onomatopoeia. Japanese find “describing feelings and emotions,” “shock and awe,” and “describing sounds” to be the most popular.
Research Question 2
Summary of Findings

- Perceptions of onomatopoeia being mature or childish are more varied in Americans while Japanese find that a majority are neither.
- Japanese and American students both find onomatopoeia to be important.
- Describing feelings and emotions, and describing sounds are similar reasons to use onomatopoeia for Japanese and Americans. However, Japanese also picked shock and awe while Americans picked emphasis as reasons as well.
- There are twice as many American students than Japanese students that find emphasis to be a reason for onomatopoeia usage.
Conclusion

• Onomatopoeia is found throughout the world. Not every country uses the same ones.
• Americans have a much smaller amount of onomatopoeia to choose from in comparison to Japanese.
• Americans have different usages, awareness and perceptions compared to the Japanese.
• The survey data shows that Japanese have more usage and awareness than Americans.
• Some of the perceptions of onomatopoeia are similar but there are many differences as well.

Bredin, H. (1996). Onomatopoeia as a Figure and a Linguistic Principle. 27(3). 555-569. The Johns Hopkins University Press.


Media Resources

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA302114844&v=2.1&u=csumb_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=07fd59490094ecf0321bde8dce5c84b4


I would like to acknowledge my advisors and the faculty that supported me throughout my education. Also, my classmates, friends, and family as well. It is difficult to put into words the appreciation and respect I have for everyone. One thing is for sure, my journey to my degree would not have been possible without everyone's help, animals included.

Thank you!