CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF ONOMATOPOEIA IN COMIC STRIPS

Onomatopoeia is sometimes considered to be a means of word-formation (Koziol 1937, Marchand 1969, McKnight 1969, Bauer et al. 2013, Miller 2014, Ringe 2021). Onomatopoeic words are instances of creative word coinage as they are created literally 'from scratch'[1]. Newly coined, they have strong iconic correlation between form and meaning not yet 'blurred' by sound and meaning changes (Flaksman 2017). This makes onomatopoeias expressive and appropriate for use in genres where language creativity is required, for instance, in comic strips.

For the present study I have chosen comic strips (single drawings with inscriptions) from social media (*Facebook*) which fulfil the following ***criteria***: (1) they have at least one inscription containing an onomatopoeic word, (2) these are English, Russian, or German onomatopoeias (the corpus is still being expanded, for the moment it contains 40+ images).

I have ***analysed*** (1) the *function* of onomatopoeia in comic strips (whether it contributed to the comic effect) and (2) the specific *traits* of onomatopoeic words which make them 'fit' to be used in comic strips.

The ***results*** of the study have shown that onomatopoeia is either (1) used as a background and doesn't add to the punchline or (2) accompanies an action (adds to the punchline). In some cases (3) the humorous effect is created by *wordplay based on onomatopoeia*. For instance, the German word *mähen* 'to mow' is confused (in its imperative form *mäh*!) with an onomatopoeia for bleating (the picture shows an irritated man mowing his lawn and a sheep; the man says *Ich mähe doch!* 'So I *am* mowing!').

Use of onomatopoeia in wordplay has a strong potential for creating a humorous effect for two reasons: (1) onomatopoeia is stylistically marked and perceived as 'childish', which often creates a stark contrast with the context presented by visual means; (2) also, phonemes in onomatopoeic words have a dual function: the word-building function as well as the function of reference to natural sounds. This very ambiguity of phonemes in onomatopoeic words makes the latter potentially suitable for creating a comic effect through wordplay.

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[1] For dictionaries of (occasional) onomatopoeia in English consult, for example Taylor 2007; for occasional onomatopoeia in German, consult Havlik 1981, for Russian – Schliakhova, 2004.