The principles behind the drafting of the *Onomatopoeic Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*

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Abstract

The Lithuanian language has preserved a vast layer of iconic lexis. This type of lexis is interesting from the perspective of onomasiologic definition, pragmatics, and the history of language. Of all the language parts, it functionally covers onomatopoeic words. Elements of iconism are also typical of some words from other parts of language, as defined by the level of pragmatism, such as emotives and expressives, some interjections (and invocations in particular), as the emotional – expressive element embedded in their semantic structure is also the basis of their existence in the language. Iconic nature can also be a definitive feature of words of child-speak and any other lexical periphery: riddle words, some of the euphemisms, refrains, etc. Word formation can be iconic as well. The phonetic structure of an iconic word has references of phonetic or phonosemantic motivation that can be described linguistically, actualised language sounds and sound complexes with articulative and acoustic properties. Such properties, when transformed from the psychophysiological audible stimulus to phonologically described acoustic and articulative properties of phonemes are one of the key principles of describing the iconic lexis in lexicographic resources.

In language, expressive words serve the function of conveying the impression or emotion of the speaker/writer so that the target can experience/feel it too. M. Grammont has indicated that the ability of language sounds to give connotation to the meaning of a word is often potential and that it emerges in the process of the act of speaking (with the exception of the "pure" onomatopoeias that have a phonetic motivation). For instance, the connotational qualities of sounds of language make the narrator choose a member of the phonosemantic opposition (or triad) of synonymous onomatopoeias – *kaukšt*: *taukšt*: *paukšt*; *bumpt* : *bliumpt*; *kapt* : *knapt*; *pliaukšt* : *paukšt*; *čiaukšt* : *taukšt*, etc. – to be able to disclose the specifics and details of the image, sound or sense/experience being described (imitated) better. However, the choice of pragmatic situations is unlimited and therefore, when presented on its basis, the lexical meaning might be very inaccurate. Thus, the drafting of a lexicographic inventory has to begin with identifying the type of descriptive imitatives, i.e. the impression (visual, acoustic, sensual/experiential) they carry. Describing the semantic system of specific imitative requires the identification of certain tools, i.e. the phonic (or formative) instruments that are used to create the correlation of meaning and expression.

Instead of employing the conventional classification of onomatopoeias, in the Onomatopoeic Dictionary such words are categorised by the method of imitation, forming a total of four groups: onomatopoeias (construed as only those onomatopoeic words that imitate real-life sounds using linguistic tools, turning them into words), imitatives, mimemes and verbal onomatopoeic words (which are not considered iconic words). The idea here is to demonstrate the versatility of their iconic features and the variety of pragmatics, and therefore a systematic approach to presentation under the behaviourist scheme has been adopted. For instance, onomatopoeic words of a punch are presented systematically, and their lexicological articles are broken down against other attributes, i.e. a punch to a soft/hard surface or a vertical/horizontal punch and so on. The unique phonetic structure of onomatopoeic words is considered, describing some of the features, like frequent replication and consonantal variations of onomatopoeic endings, like *plept*:*plep*:*ple*, etc. as universal in the inventory. The systematic relationships are presented in several languages, which makes the Onomatopoeic Dictionary more accessible for linguists and semiotic scientists from other countries. The type of the lexicographic work being presented is an ideographical dictionary.

1. Lithuanian onomatopoeic words and their presentation in dictionaries

Of all the Indo-European languages, the Lithuanian language is known as one of the languages that are possessed of the largest quantity of archaic characteristics. This is typical both of the structure of the language, and the system of its lexis (Levin, 1982). Even though onomatopoeias are dwindling rapidly in the standard language, they are still quite abundant in Lithuanian dialects. Contrary to the grammars of many other languages, the grammar of

Lithuania differentiates between two parts of speech: interjections, which are a class of invariable words which express emotions, reactions or commands without naming them, and onomatopoeic words, a class of invariable words which are mostly a deliberate imitation of sounds or acoustic and visual effects or impressions of human actions, animals, natural phenomena, artefacts (Ambrazas et al., 1997).

Onomatopoeic words represent a very exciting subject in terms of their lexical semantics, phonosemantics, their iconic nature, the history of language, pragmatics and in other respects.

2. The phonosemantic and semantic properties of onomatopoeias and their pragmatics

Onomatopoeic words are the part of the iconic lexis of the Indo-European languages that have interested researchers the most. Research in this field was started by Moric Grammont, a student to F. de Saussure, who elaborated reduplication of the German onomatopoeias of *pif-paf* and *pif-paf-puf*, which have been a focal point of phonological theoreticians Jakobson, Waught (1979) as well. Onomatopoeic words do not have a nominative value and, as it was already mentioned above, are classified as icons (iconic words) within the system of signs. Onomatopoeias imitate sounds, mimic an impression brought about by an action, use linguistic media to recreate internal sensations, experiences, the features of a person's mime, articulation. One exception is verbal onomatopoeias, which are related to verbs by the way in which they are formed and match their roots in their form.

2.1. *The phonetic structure of the iconic onomatopoeias*

Due to their iconic nature, onomatopoeic words can be motivated phonosemantically as the acoustic and articulation properties of sounds of language and combinations of such sounds carry a connotative meaning, which can affect the meanings of onomatopoeias. The connotative properties of sounds are grounded in the sinesthetic perception of the audible stimulus (the sound).

2.2. *The semantics of the iconic onomatopoeias*

The semantics of onomatopoeias has to do with the features of the phonetic structure that they imitate. Their phonetic system is correlated with the meaning. For instance, there are phonological pairs of onomatopoeias in the Lithuanian language that have the consonant /l/ in the root of their second element. Let's take, for instance, the onomatopoeic pair of *pumpt : plumpt*. The onomatopoeia *pumpt* stands to "imitate the sound of falling and reflect its impression", whilst the meaning of *plumpt* is to "imitate the sound of falling into water and reflect its impression". The consonant /l/ ads the semantic component of "water, wetness" to the meaning of the second element of opposition.

2.3. *The pragmatics of onomatopoeias*

The correlation of meaning and expression reveals a certain degree of choice when it comes to using speech. The speaker chooses which elements of an opposition (or a triad) of synonymous onomatopoeias (i.e. those that imitate the impression of the same action) would

be better for the purposes of reflecting the specifics and details of the impression of the action that the speech denotes (or imitates). For instance, the behaviouristic situation of action-motion-contact is imitated by the onomatopoeias *kaukšt : taukšt : paukšt* to "imitate the impression of impact", and the user is free to choose the onomatopoeic word that is best suited for the specific expression.

3. The practice of the lexicographic description of onomatopoeias

Dictionaries describe onomatopoeic words in many different ways. Words that function as clear-cut onomatopoeias in the Lithuanian language can be described lexicographically in dictionaries of other languages based on their syntactic function in the sentence, giving then a nominative onomasiologic meaning (1):

> (1) *mi-aow, meow* verb to make the crying sound that a cat makes; bump verb 1. to hit or knock against something: It was so dark/ I bumped into a tree (Longman: 2000). *miaou, miaow*, see *mew*, verb to cry as a cat – noun the ordinary plaintive cry of a cat; bump verb 1. to come into contact with; knock into. 2. to cause to knock or against. (…) to bump of SLANG to kill, especially with a gun (Webster: 1996).

Other dictionaries point to the imitative origins of these words (2):

> (2) *miaow* (also *meow*) > noun the characteristic crying sound of cat. > verb (no obj.) (of a cat) make such a sound. ORIGIN early 17th cent.: imitative; bump > noun 1. A light blow or a jolting collision: a nasty bump on the head. 2. The dull sound of such a blow or collision. (…). verb (no obj. with adverbial of direction) move or travel with much jolting and jarring: the car had to bump the pushchair down the steps. (…). ORIGIN mid. 16th cent. (as a verb). Imitative, perhaps of Scandinavian origin. (OED)
> *mi'au* (Schallw.) den Laud der Katze nachahmend; bum! (Schallw.) Ausruf zur Nachahmung von dronendem Aufschlagen (Wahrig Deutshes Worterbuch: 1997).

Certain words do not provide any grammatical characteristic at all (3):

> (3) bum wyraz (zwykle powtórzony) naśladujący odgłos spadania czegoś, wystrału, głos bębna, dzwonu (Nowy Słownik poprawnej polszyczyzny: 2000).

As a lexicographical tradition, dictionaries of the Lithuanian language consider the correlation between the root vowel of the onomatopoeic word and the meaning of the same word, as the length – shortness of vowels is a distinctive attribute of the Lithuanian language. Onomatopoeias with a short vowel in their root usually stand to denote a petty, weaker, less intensive, lighter action, while onomatopoeias that carry a long vowel signify an action that is stronger, sharper, more intensive and more powerful. A different length of a root vowel serves as a basis to consider the onomatopoeia a different kind of word, given the following minimal pairs: /i/ : /i·/, /u/ : /u·/, /a/ : /a·/, /e/ : /e·/, /o/ : /o·/.

Many traditional Lithuanian dictionaries take account of this phonosemantic iconic characteristic, all the while disregarding other specific qualities of onomatopoeias. As often as not, onomatopoeic words usually are described on the basis of the context of their usage, i.e. the situation present in the dictionary database, and can sometimes be elaborated using synonymic interpretation, denying the iconic nature of the onomatopoeia altogether. The

Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language, available from www.lki.lt (LKŽe), the *Dictionary of Modern Lithuanian* (DŽe http://dz.lki.lt/) and dialectal dictionaries present meanings in an arbitrary fashion, there is no clear–cut system in place. For example, the onomatopoeic words *tret/trep* as presented in the LKŽe:

> (4) *trept* interj. 1. stomp (denoting the stamping of a foot on the ground). 2. when used in repetition, may denote a stomping gait. 3. flop. 4. when used in repetition, may denote whacking, shaking; *trep* interj. see *trept* 1 (denoting the stamping of a foot on the ground).

Synonymic and situational interpretation does not disclose the content of the phonological pair of *trept : trep* – onomatopoeias with a varying formative of the ending – as polysemous onomatopoeic words *trept* and *trep* imitate the act of *stomping* and *stamping* (Lith. *treptelėjimas* and *trepsėjimas*), with the latter being imitated by reduplicating the onomatopoeic word. The meanings are broken down on the basis of the context of using (writing down) the given onomatopoeic words and the specific setting of usage. That does not conform to the nature of the onomatopoeic word as an iconic word. For instance, in its meaning No. 4, "when used in repetition, may denote whacking, shaking", the onomatopoeic word *trept* most likely does not imitate the act of whacking, but rather stands to show that this act resembles the act of stomping.

4. The new principles of the new dictionary

The Onomatopoeic Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language (ODL) is currently under development. The ODL is aimed at disclosing the variety of Lithuanian onomatopoeic words as well as their semantic ties and iconic nature. Here, the traditional lexicographical method cannot be applied and hence new lexicographical principles were invented that, in essence, can be used with other dictionaries of the iconic lexis as well.

4.1. *Principle 1: disclosing the phonosemantic motivation of onomatopoeic words*

The phonetic structure of an iconic word has references of phonetic or phonosemantic motivation that can be described linguistically, actualised language sounds and sound complexes with articulative and acoustic properties. Such properties, when transformed from the psychophysiological audible stimulus to phonologically described acoustic and articulative properties of phonemes are one of the key principles of describing the iconic lexis in lexicographic resources. Lexicographic descriptions of onomatopoeias consider the differences in their phonetic structure that can be discerned by making minimal phonologic pairs, such as /la/ : /la·/. The meaning of the first onomatopoeia is described taking account of the low intensity of the short vowel in the formational syllable: taking account of the low intensity of the short formational vowel in the syllable: "when used in repetition, denotes speaking", and the meaning of the second onomatopoeic word of the pair is described considering that the formational vowel in the syllable is long and possessed of a higher degree of intensity: "when used in repetition, denotes intensive speaking".

4.2. *Principle 2: disclosing the specifics of the lexicographic inventory of onomatopoeic words*

However, the choice of pragmatic situations is unlimited and therefore, when presented on its basis, the lexical meaning might be very inaccurate. Thus, the drafting of a lexicographic inventory has to begin with identifying the type of descriptive imitatives, i.e. the impression (visual, acoustic, sensual/experiential) they carry. Instead of employing the conventional classification of onomatopoeias, in ODL such words are categorised by the method of imitation, forming a total of three groups:

- Onomatopoeias – only the onomatopoeic words that imitate real–life sounds using linguistic tools, turning them into words. For instance, *kukū* – "an *imitation* of the cuckoo's song";
- Imitatives – onomatopoeic words that denote an external impression rather than a sound, with the help of sound connotations. For instance, *kabaldai* – "a *depiction* of the impression of a swaying stride*"*;
- Mimemes – onomatopoeic words that imitate non-verbal interior experiences and sensations, the qualities of mime. For instance, *gurkt* – "an *expression* of the sense of swallowing liquid".

4.3. *Principle 3: systemic lexicographical definitions of onomatopoeias, imitatives and mimemes*

The lexicographical definitions are provided through organisation of onomatopoeias by the nature of imitation and the qualities of their phonetic structure (where possible, based on the minimal phonological pairs). That way, the dictionary becomes systematic in its own right. Got instance, onomatopoeias that imitate the impression of a blow are presented together, systematically, and their lexicological articles are broken down against other attributes, i.e. a blow on a soft/hard surface or a vertical/horizontal blow and so on. Furthermore, other unique features of the phonetic structure, such as frequent replication and consonantal variations of onomatopoeic endings, like *plept : plep : ple* are considered as well. The first onomatopoeia carries the meaning of "an expression of the sensation of an inconsiderate saying"*,* the second *plep* serves as "an expression of inconsiderate speaking" and the third *ple* is "an expression of the continuous sensation of inconsiderate speaking".

There are plans to present the systematic relationships in several languages, which will make the OLD more accessible for linguists and semiotic scientists from other countries.

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