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## Onomatopoeia in the English and German Nursery Rhymes

Elena Riabova<sup>a</sup>, Yury Kobenko<sup>b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Samara State Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities, 65/67 ul. M. Gorkogo, Samara, 443066, Russia

<sup>b</sup> National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, 30 Lenin Avenue, Tomsk, 634050, Russia

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### Abstract

This article is dedicated to the problem of onomatopoeia that is analyzed in English and German nursery rhymes. The material of the research includes thirty texts and has two stages: the first one shows the differences of sound-imitating words types while the second one deals with the syntactic-morphological and semantic characteristics of onomatopoeia in English and German nursery rhymes.

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### 1. Introduction

The article deals with a study of onomatopoeia in nursery rhymes – the type of text where this phenomenon plays a very important role – it not only forms the child's view of the world, but also influences their feelings and emotions, – this fact determines thematic justification of the research.

The originality of the research consists in analyzing sound-imitation in nursery rhymes – this material has never been used before.

The aim of the research is to provide complex phonetic, lexical-semantic and syntactic characteristics of onomatopoeia in English and German nursery rhymes. This aim leads to the following objectives:

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [serpentis@list.ru](mailto:serpentis@list.ru) (Y. Kobenko).

1. to analyze different types of onomatopoeia in English and German nursery rhymes;
2. to compare the mentioned above analysis by showing differences and similarities between these two languages in phonetics, syntactic-morphological and semantic characteristics of onomatopoeia.

The material of the research contains fifteen English and fifteen German nursery rhymes that have sound imitating words.

## 2. The definition of the onomatopoeia. The characteristic features and functions of nursery rhymes

Onomatopoeia is a phenomenon of a particular interest for many researchers; hence, there are various definitions of it.

Onomatopoeia (or sound imitation) – is a group of words that reproduce sounds of nature or animals (woof-woof, mew-mew, cookery-doo) and also creating verbs for imitating particular sounds (to bark, to roar) (Rosental, 1976).

The definition of S.V. Voronin is wider as the author includes in the notion of onomatopoeia not only imitation of animals' sounds but some other spheres as well (Voronin, 2004). That is why the author also includes the imitation of humans (laughter, whisper).

Other researchers, I.R. Galperin, for instance, analyze direct and indirect sound imitation. The direct one means creating a word, which is aimed at reproducing a particular sound. These words are necessary for rendering sounds in writing (for example, *ting-tang, ping-pong, tap*). Such sound-imitating words are also called “sound metaphors of the language” as they create an image that is not visual (*which is the purpose of a lexical metaphor*) but acoustic (Galperin, 1981).

Indirect sound imitation is a reproduction of a sound by a combination of particular phonemes. This type of onomatopoeia is a form of alliteration: phonemes in words create a certain effect of imitation and make up an individual author's style.

It should be mentioned, that there are various types of onomatopoeia classification. The most detailed one is thought to be the classification by Z.A. Petkova who singles out four main groups of sound imitating words:

1. imitating the sounds of animals, birds, insects (*oink-oink, woof-woof*);
2. imitating the sounds of nature (*pit-pat, glug-glug*);
3. imitating the sounds of inanimate objects (*ding-dong, ping-pong*);
4. imitating the sounds of humans (*ha-ha, ahchoo*) (Petkova, 2011).

Coming to the material analyzed in this research – nursery rhymes – it's worth mentioning that they are aimed at teaching children to see what is wrong and what is right and helping them to learn new facts about the world around them. Thus, nursery rhymes have several functions:

1. educational (nursery rhymes teach children to love nature and animals);
2. axiological (nursery rhymes form the notions of “good” and “bad”, “beautiful” and “ugly”, etc.
3. stylistic (nursery rhymes include expressive, emotive, evaluative and artistic information)

## 3. Comparative analysis of onomatopoeia in English and German nursery rhymes

The first part of the research was dedicated to the analysis of sound imitating words in fifteen English and fifteen German nursery rhymes. The main criterion of the sampling was the popularity of nursery rhymes, their presence in the majority of kids' books.

The research has shown that in English nursery rhymes the majority of onomatopoeia is imitating the sounds of animals and birds (42% of all the songs): *baa, quack, moo, woof, oink, gulp, gobble, waddle*.

Imitating sounds of inanimate objects is also quite numerous (32%): *shout, beep, swish, whaa, ding, jingle bells, knock*.

Imitating sounds of people are fixed in 15% of all the analyzed nursery rhymes: *laugh, sh, burp*.

Less numerous (11%) is a group of sound-imitating words that represent the sounds of nature: *noise, crack, roar, pitter-patter*.

As for the German nursery rhymes, onomatopoeia in this language has certain differences in comparison with English. 41% of all the cases under analysis have sound-imitating words of animals and birds: *wau, miau, summ, schwirren, heult, Gurren, quack*.

The second place goes to the sounds of imitating human's sounds (22%): *haha, gelacht, lachten, jam, Gebrumm*. Imitating sounds of nature is close to the previous group (20%): *gluck, tuck, pfisch, schlägt*.

The least numerous is the group with the words imitating the sounds of inanimate objects (17%): *brumm, bum, quietscht*.

The use of a great number of onomatopoeia imitating the sounds of animals and birds both in English and German nursery rhymes is connected with the above mentioned educational function, as nursery rhymes are aimed at teaching children to differentiate between the ways the animals speak and thus, learn new facts about the world and nature.

It is also important to highlight that in the German language there are no sound-imitating words for a cat as there is in English (*mew-mew*). However, the German language has the verb *schurren*. The same can be said about the sounds of a horse: *wiehern* and *hennir*.

As for the indirect sound-imitation, English nursery rhymes have 32% of cases. For example:

*Jingle bells, jingle bells,  
jingle all the way!  
Oh, what fun it is to ride  
In a one-horse open sleigh* (Reilly, 2014).

In the song "Jingle Bells" the listeners can hear the sound of the bells due to the combination of a plosive [g] with nasal consonants.

In the German language, according to the research, indirect sound-imitation is less frequent (20%), but there is a numerous group of sound-imitating verbs that reproduce various rough sounds due to a vibrating sonorant [g]. Special features of this sound lead to creating dissonant sounds of the outer world:

*Unsere guten Wünsche haben ihren Grund,  
Bitte bleib noch lange glücklich und gesund.  
Dich so froh zu sehen,  
Ist was uns gefällt,  
Tränen gibt es schon genug  
auf dieser Welt* (Mafi, 2007).

In this case we can observe that the sound [g] reproduces all the drawbacks that a person can experience but everyone forgets about them when they have the happiest day in the year – birthday.

The second part of the research was to carry out morphological-syntactic analysis of onomatopoeia in English and German nursery rhymes.

The research has shown that most sound-imitating words are formed by semantic-syntactic or morphological way. Most of these words can transit from one part of speech to the other:

*If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.  
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.  
If you're happy and you know it,  
And you really want to show it,  
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.*

German nursery rhymes are characterized by a great number of sound-imitating words (60%) that are formed by semantic-syntactic way:

*Der ist freundlich und kann sprechen  
und ist überall bekannt,  
und liegt gerne in der Sonne,  
um ihn rum da schwirren Bienchen*

As for the syntactic analysis it is necessary to highlight that in both languages onomatopoeia in nursery rhymes has the role of a subject or predicate:

*Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw (subject)  
Why sing so loud?  
Everyone loves the king of the sea,  
Ever so kind and gentle is he,  
Tricks he will do when children appear,*

*And how they laugh when he's near (predicate)*

*Dienstag, Mittwoch, das ist ganz egal,  
Denn Geburtstag kommt im Jahr doch nur einmal,  
Darum lasst uns feiern, dass die Schwarte kracht,  
Heute wird getanzt gesungen und gelacht (predicate).*

However, there is a certain difference on morphological level: in the German language sound-imitating words have the root which is always accompanied by affixes, while English ones more often have no affixes at all.

#### 4. Conclusion

All in all, the research has shown that onomatopoeia in English and German languages have both differences and similarities which can be explained by a difficult nature of a sound itself, various phonetic systems and the fact that these languages belong to different language groups. Still, onomatopoeia plays a very important role in nursery rhymes because it adds expressive and emotive features to the text and help little listeners to have a better view of the world around them.

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