

# A COMPARISON OF ONOMATOPOEIA IN FOREIGN, INDONESIAN, AND LOCAL LANGUAGES

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## **Abstrak**

Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing yang merupakan representasi kebudayaan memiliki sejumlah kesulitan. Salah satu kesulitan itu berasal dari pengenalan bunyi. Sebuah cara alternatif untuk mengakomodasi masalah tersebut adalah dengan pengenalan bentuk onomatope. Onomatope menyediakan bermacam bunyi tiruan yang berbeda sebagai ikon lintas bahasa dan budaya untuk mengartikulasikan hal yang sama. Onomatope dapat berasal dari berbagai sumber, seperti komik, karikatur, novel, koran dan lain sebagainya. Onomatope dapat memberikan berbagai sudut pandang mengenai identitas kebahasaan dan kebudayaannya, setidaknya dalam bahasa Inggris, Indonesia, dan daerah.

**Kata kunci:** onomatope, ikon, dan identitas

## ***Abstract***

*Teaching English as a foreign language that is a representation of culture has some difficulties. One of the them comes from sounds recognition. An alternative way to accomodate the problem is by acknowledging an onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia provides several different kinds of imitative sound as a cross cultures and language icon to articulate the same thing. Its sources can be taken from comics, caricatures, novels, newspapers, and others. Onomatopoeia could give various perspective of its cultural and language identity in English, Indonesia, and local language.*

***Keywords:*** *onomatopoeia, icon, and identity*

## 1. Introduction

Abundant uses of onomatopoeia in everyday communication cause some problems to foreigners trying to master a language that include teachers and students learning it such as English. Onomatopoeia is often used to express an impression in a personal, emotional manner, and therefore considered indispensable not only in conversation but also in reading a text.

In terms of language teaching this kind of onomatopoeic sounds can be used as a lesson material in a classroom. It is for introducing students about a phenomenon of language use. Furthermore, the mixing of various languages such as Indonesian, local language, and English found in advertisements may be an alternative of lesson material for cross-culture understanding in language learning. English is used because it is as a language for wider communication in some reasons; 1) It has a good internal quality and quantity; (2) It has a lot of native and foreign language users (1,3 billions); 3) It has a world wide geography spreading; 4) It is used widely in knowledge, technology, art-culture, and political communication, and the countries using it whether as native or second language dominate world economy, culture, and politics (Huda, 2011:59).

To recognize onomatopoeia, the students must listen to certain words, either by reading aloud or silently. On the other hand, to use onomatopoeia, they must think of words that contain sounds that they think the reader or listener should hear would be appropriate for the action or situation being described.

Onomatopoeia could stir the readers' or students' emotion when comprehending the sound description

referred to. The students, in this case, can respond to the onomatopoeia by using intellectual emotion to correlate between the meaning and onomatopoeia. They can build meaning carried out by the onomatopoeia using their imagination of the context of the onomatopoeia used.

Onomatopoeic words could improve teachers and students' ability by searching out the meaningful references. It is assumed that onomatopoeic words are potential to produce original responses both by their meaning and sounds. Associative bonds of referential and inferential meanings established through usage act as sets which only the imaginative strength of the respondent can break away from (Khatena, 1996).

Furthermore, Khatena (1996) adds that even more subtle is the sound element of words, which often takes him unaware and stirs the emotional base of the intellect, provoking a tendency towards irrational response. It is in the intellectual emotive field of interaction that the mechanisms of the creative process function most effectively. Onomatopoeia and Images containing both intellectual and emotional elements, appears to have promise as an instrument for the evocation of originality.

Onomatopoeia is the use of the consonant and vowel sounds of a pronounced or "heard" word to imitate, and thereby emphasize or bring to a listener's or reader's imagination, the sounds that might actually be heard in what is being described. In that way, it is a literary device used to make writing or speech more vibrant and effective. It depends on a listener's or reader's ability to hear the sounds of the words. Many words are onomatopoeic in and of themselves, such as "snap" and "scratch." However, the sounds used in speech don't need to be so obvious in order to still constitute onomatopoeia.

Furthermore, Khatena (1996) suggests some considerations about the correlation between onomatopoeia and

our natural speech sounds. Phoneticians have classified consonant and vowel sounds, and some basic facts seem to be true. The *explosive* consonant sounds (such as the sound of *b*, *d*, *k*, *p* and *t*) seem to bring to mind more violent actions or percussive situations. Consider the following sentence: "The horse trotted and clopped along on the cobblestones." In the sentence, you can hear the horse's hooves on the hard road, if you use your imagination. The *sibilant* consonant sounds (such as *s*, *sh* and *f*) have a gentler sound, and are often used in descriptions of water or flowing motions: "The shore was washed with every wave, revealing shells and sand with every pass." In the sentence, you can imagine the sound of ocean waves.

The *z* sound is often used for buzzing sounds, but you don't have to use the word "buzz" to get across the idea: "The bees, a blurry swarming fuzz of wings, are hungry for pollen, and they warn me off with the threat of stings." There are several *n*, *ng* and *z* sounds in that sentence, which help a reader or listener to imagine the buzz of a bee. *L* sounds are often associated with running water. In that sense, even the word liquid is onomatopoeic. Some research has also been done on how vowel sounds affect emotion or imagination. Vowel sounds range from low-pitched sounds, such as *ahhh*, to high-pitched, such as *eee* and *ayyy*. The lower pitched sounds generally contribute to a perception of somberness, slowness or sadness; while the higher pitched sounds generally convey a feeling of excitement or urgency.

In relation to interaction, Clack (1997:590) states that all linguistic signs are "mixed" in consisting, to varying degrees, of indexical, symbolic and iconic elements. It means that once a word is learned, it can sometimes be detached from its indexical anchoring in a context and treated as if it had meaning outside of any context. If this happens, it

may be thought of the word, originally a context-tied indexical, as a conventional, 'arbitrary' symbol. Words acquire meanings by virtue of being used together with their references. Like meanings associated with identities, words can be said to be enregistered in term of ideological structures.

Furthermore, in varying degree of symbolic and iconic elements when interactional happen, Silverstein (2003: 202) states that interactional happenings are social-actional 'event' of interpretable cultural meanings only to the degree they 'instantiate'—indexically invoke—macro sociological partitions as social place, in term of which cultural values can thus be said to be indexically 'articulated'. This connection of identity with iconic value manifest itself in the micro-contextual order to be sure, where perspectival and affectionate interests are played out; but it really constitutes a universe of cultural imagination.

The iconic value is reflected in the language use. The language icon is a general-purpose of language use with extensive features for strings (text) and the message that will be transferred. Then, Rahardi (2009:59) states that based on the instruments of language icon, it generally closes to onomatopoeia, the formation of word whose sounds suggested their meanings. With onomatopoeia, people are driven directly to sounds string from something being described, then produced meaning.

Some related researchs about onomatopoeia had been done by Ivanov (2002) who focused on animal instinct in the form of animal verbs and sound; which is adapted on the literature and fiction book. He found that there were three kinds of main onomatopoeia. Then, Plotnik (2003) who discussed about the concept onomatopoeia and its role in writing. Next, Oguss (2008) research about onomatopoeia in humour dialogue. Wallraff (2007) researched about onomatopoeia in relation to respon to

request for a specialized term used to ask woman to cease making a certain sound. a number of variation are found on the term of onomatopoeia. Next, Sayer (2010) researched about animal vocalization and human polyglot in Walter of Bibbesworth's thirteenth-century domestic treatise in Anglo-Norman French and Middle English. Many of the Anglo-Norman French names for animals and their sounds are glossed. Last, Takadar et al (2010) found on their research human represent sounds to others and receive information about sounds from other using onomatopoeia. Such representation is useful for obtaining and reporting the acoustic features and impressions of factual sounds without having to hear or emit them.

This article is to discuss about some language icons and their forms in term of onomatopoeia in some languages for cross-cultural understanding. To answer and describe the language icons, the data were taken from several caricatures, comics, novels, newspapers, drama scripts, dictionaries, and other resources. The data were analyzed, then divided into groups with each variants. There were several main groups found in the following discussion focusing on Indonesian, local languages, and English as. Choosing local languages, in this case, especially Minangkabau language as reference is to accommodate students' perception about onomatopoeia to their own mother tongue and culture. Students' participation in giving some alternative kinds of onomatopoeia based on their own languages and cultures is able to enrich the perspective of the onomatopoeia itself.

## 2. Discussion

There is no logical or necessary relationship between sounds of words and their meanings, if the language is arbitrary and segmentable speech (Crane, Edward, and Randal, 1996:15). For

example, the word *cat* may be divided into at least three segments or unit of sound: a *k*-like sound, a vowel, and a *t*-like sound. These three sounds have nothing to do with felinity. The sounds, moreover, recur regularly in English and may be recombined in different orders to form different words, such as *act* and *tack*. Thus, no sound carries meaning by itself; but when the sounds are put into sequences with other sounds, these sequences may carry meaning.

Some words, however, seem contradicted to the principle that the relationship between sound and meaning is arbitrary e.g. *buzz*. The word sound of *buzz* represents its meaning. This is called as onomatopoeia. It is considered that different language user will give different meaning to the word of onomatopoeia. Language users from different cultures produce different onomatopoeia words. In English the word *buzz* is considered the sound of *bee* but for Indonesian people it is *ngung*, *mmmm*, or *bummmm*. Whereas, for Minangkabau people it is *nguang*, *ngueng*, or *ngeeng*.

Onomatopoeia is considered as language icon from different cultures. This onomatopoeia is taken from some resources, such as comics, caricatures, drama script, and dictionaries i.e. English, Indonesian, and Minangese. The following language icons as onomatopoeia are limited to three groups of discussion. They are as follows:

### 2.1 Animal

There are some onomatopoeic words related to animal that can be produced from different languages. The words that represent sound as their meaning can be seen from animal sounds. The animals' sound-imitating words are different among different languages. The following are the examples of animals sounds-imitating words as an onomatopoeia of language icon from one culture to the others.

a. Kock or Roaster

In English the sound of *cock-a-doodle-doo* (as in *Fairy Night Comic*) is considered as the sound of kock or roaster, for Japanese the sound is *ko-ke-kok-ko-o*. For Indonesian, the sound of kock is *ku-ku-ru-yuk*, and for people from Sunda, the sound is *kong-ko-ro-ngok* (: as in *Kabayan Film*). Whereas, the sound of hen in her nest will be *kock do* for English, and for Indonesian is *kock teck kock, kock teck kock*. The sound of hen will be *teck do teck* for Indonesian *teck kock teck*. The sound of chicken in English is *cluck-cluck* and chick's sound is *cheep-cheep*. In Indonesia the sounds become *kot-kot-kot, tok-tok, cotcotcodet* and for chick's sounds are *ciap-ciap-ciap*, or *cit-cit-cit*.

b. Cat

Cat's sounds is different from one language to the others. The sound of a cat in English is *meow* or *furr* (as in the comic of *Batman in a Darknight Mare*). For Indonesian language user, it is *meong-meong*. In French the sound of cat is *ronron*.

c. Bird

All over the world sounds of bird are generally similar but their onomatopoeia are different in various countries. For Indonesian people the sounds of bird depends on the type or class of bird. In general the sounds of bird are *cit-cit-cit, cret-cret-cret, twit-twit-twit*, or *kwik-kwik-kwik* as an eagles' sound. In English the sounds of bird are *cheep/chirp, chirrup/chirp, tweet, squawk, warble, or twitter* (as in *The Adventure of Dora Film*). In Minangese the sounds of bird could be like *cengret-cengret, cingret-cingret, ter-ku-tut-tut, ued-ued-ued, bued-bued-bued* and many others.

d. Cow

The sound of *cow* is nearly the same in some countries. In English, the sound is *moo* or *moa* (as in *Shaun the Sheep Cartoon*). In Japanese the sound could be *mau-mau*, and in Italian the sound is *muu, muu*. In Indonesian the sound of cow is *mboo, mm-boo, mm-baa*. In Minangese, the sound of cow is *mboa, mbaah, mooah*.

e. Dog

Dog is a very popular animal in certain parts of the world. It is treated as a pet animal there. The sounds of dog are interpreted differently in the world. In English the sounds of dog are *yap-yap, arf-arf, woof-woof, ruff-ruff, boow-boow*, and many others (as in *Batman in Double Troubles Comics*). For Indonesian, the sounds of dog can be *gug-gug, gong-gong, kung-kung, kong-kong, king-king, keng-keng, wouow-wouow*, and many others. In French the sound of dog is *ouah-ouah*, for Japanese, the sound is *kian-kian*, in Italian the sound is *bau-bau*, and in Germany the sound is like *wau-wau*.

f. Frog

The frogs produce their sound in early morning or when the rain will come. In some countries which have similar language the imitating sounds are not exactly different. For other countries, on the other hand, the sound of frog is much more different. In English, the sounds of frog could be *croak, ribbit* (as in *Peter Pan Film*), in Indonesian, the sound is varied. It can be *tong-tong, groundong-groundong, owek-owek, trouk-trouk, tak-clung-tak-clung, to-kok-to-kok*, and many others. Meanwhile, the Italian describes the frog's sound as *cra-cra*, and for Japanese, it is *kero-kero*.

g. Goat

Indonesian people describe sounds of goat as *mengembek* or *mengembik*. The real sounds of goat could be *mbeek*, *mbiik*, *meek*, *miik*. For English, the sounds are *na-na*, *na-na* (as in *Sound the Sheep* cartoon). For the Japanese, the sounds of goat are *me-e me-e*, *me-e me-e* (as in *Sinchan* cartoon), in Italian the sound is *bee*, *bee*, and for Dutch the sound is *me'me'*, *me'me'*.

h. Lion or Tiger

The sounds of lion or tiger in some countries could be similar. For English, the sounds of lion or tiger are *raa*, *grr*, *roar* (as in: *George Prince of Jungle* Comic). Indonesian describes the sound of lion or tiger as *mengaum*. the real sounds of lion or tiger are *aumm*, *grrr*, *haorrrr*, and many others. For Italian, the sounds of lion or tiger are *gr*, *roar*, and for Japanese, the sound is *gaooo*, *gaooo*.

## 2.2 Natural Phenomena

Sounds from natural phenomena could result in similar or different onomatopoeia in different countries all over the world. The phenomena are interesting for those who never knew and so are students. The differences of words produced for similar thing or event could exactly impress them. If they are asked to produce sound of a certain thing or event, the sound could be different. The following are the words produced by imitating natural phenomena or onomatopoeia in some countries of course with different languages.

a. Wind

Wind is absolutely known and familiar all over the world. When it blows, the sound could be heard differently by different people. In general, it is found that for English, the sounds of wind when it blows are *ooaauiiww-ooaauiiww-ooaauiiww*, *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh*, *swish*,

*swoosh*, *whizz*, *whisper* (as in *Miracle Ball* Comic). For Indonesian, the sounds are *wuush-wuush-wuush*, *wish-wish-wish*, *deeru*, *siiuuuh*. These sound can be found and heard in some advertisements. For example, in a medicine advertisement the imitating sounds are *wuush-wuush-wuush*, *we-se-we-es bablas angine*, or motorbike such *wuush-wuush secepat kilat larinya*. In Minangese, the sound is *mandasui*. If someone drinks hot coffee or tea and enhailes the sound produced is *mandasuik*.

b. Breaking Glass

The sound of glass breaking that is actually alike but its related words are different. For English, this kind of sounds are *breek*, *breetick-tick*, *criing*, *creeng-tick-tick*, *clink*, *click* (as in *litle Paury Couldn't Fly* Comic). In Indonesia, the sounds are *friiik*, *bumbriiik*, *bam-briiik*, *bam-friiik*. The sound in Indonesia depends on the causes of the glass-breaking. If it is fallen purposely the sound is *friiik*, but it is fallen unpurposely it could be *bumbriiik*, *bambriiik*, *bamfriiik*. In Minangese the sound is *praang*.

c. Thunder

The sounds of thunder are also different among countries in the world. For English, the sounds of thunder are *blast* or *blarr*, *bliist*, *bleest* (as in *Miracle Ball* Comic). In Indonesia the sounds of thunder are *fles-baam*, *breek-duum*, *swiit-tar*, *degam*. For Minangese, the sounds of thunder are *badantuang*, *dagam*. while, for Javanese the sounds are *gler*, *hler* or even *duuuuoor*.

d. Water

The sounds of water whether flowing or falling are also different. For English the sounds of falling water are *splish-splash*, *plitack-plitick-plituck-splash* (as in *Harry Potter in Flying Broom* Comic). For

Indonesian, the sounds of a falling water into a pond is *berdebum*. It is 'berdebur' for sound of wave on the beach, *gemicik* is the sound of rain, and *tik-tik* is the sound of rain falling on roof. This sound is sung in a children song lyric i.e. 'tik-tik bunyi hujan di atas genteng' (tik-tik the sound of rain on the roof).

### 2.3 Human Activity

There are several sounds from human activities considered as onomatopoeia. The sounds are interesting for students who would like to broaden their knowledge about other culture. The onomatopoeia from human activities might impress them due to the experience they ever got before. Below there are some examples of human activities as onomatopoeia to enrich the appreciation of other cultural value.

#### a. Hiccup

Hiccup sound is heard from someone who has eaten or drunk something. It occurs when the air from the lung flows to the mouth cavity and the muscle is contracted in pharyngeal cavity. The sound of hiccup in English is sounded as *aarak, aarak*. In Indonesia, it is called *sendawa* that produces sounds such as *aek-hek, aek-hek*. For Minangese the hiccup is called *sandawo*. This sound is heard as *heek, haaek*.

#### b. Craker

The sound of craker is heard when someone eats *craker*. In Indonesia, the sound of craker or *kerupuk* is different from other different languages or cultures. In English this sound is heard as *krèker*. In Indonesia the sound of craker is heard as *kraak, krouk, raak-raak, rouk-rouk*. For Minangese who have a lot of kinds of *craker*, the sounds produced could be different. It is based on the kinds of *craker*. For *karak kaliang*, the sound produced could be as *krouk-krouk,*

*rouk-rouk*. Then, for *karupiak jangek*, the sound produced could be as *raag-raag, rēg-rēg, krēg-krēg, wraag-wraag*.

#### c. Paper torn

The *paper* sounds when it is torn vary in different languages. The different sounds produced also depend on the thickness of the paper. In general, for English the sound of paper torn is *screech, splash, sssttt, sit, set* (as in *Superman under War One Comic*). In Indonesia, the sound could be *sobek, reek, sreet, sriit, wreet, wriit*. For Javanese, it is *suweek, week*.

#### d. Gun shot

The sound of the gun shot generally is *doorr*. In some countries the sound can be different. In English its sounds are *dorr and beng* (as in *Batman and the Couples Comic*), and *bloorr, and dlorr* (as in *Superman in Troubles Comic*). In Indonesia, the sounds of gun shot are *dar, der door, doouuaar, tor, tooouaar*. The sounds can be also found in an old song, sung by Benyamin "dar der dor cedor, bunyi hujan felor bisa molor". The word *felor* (in Betawi language) is bullet. For Minangese, the gun shot is *badatar*. The real sound of the gun shot is *tor-tor, tar-tar*.

#### e. Falling Objects

There are some variations of falling object sounds. They depend on the objects. For example, in English the sounds of a falling *mango* are *dug, chug, chug, chug*. In Indonesian, the sounds are *debug, dug, bedebug, ndum, mbum*. In Minangese, the sounds are *badebuek, buek, duek, buak*, and *duak*. If the falling object is a tree, the sound is *badaram, braam, and praam*. Then, for the sounds of metal collision are

*badantang, badantiang, taang, ctaang, tiing, and tiang.*

f. Fart

There are some various kinds of fart sound. For some cultures the sound of fart is considered impolite action. In health term, fart is actually a result of digestion process in the form of gas with certain odors. For English people the sounds of fart are *fart, poot, toot* (as in *Mr. Bean in Trouble* Film). It was described that he was in a restaurant eating some seafood. Then, he got stomachache and released gas. For Indonesian, the sounds of fart are *pret, prett, tuut* (as in *Benyamin Biang Kerok* Film). There are different sound descriptions of fart as onomatopoeia between the two languages. The differences can be used as comparative sounds for students' pronunciation practise and cross cultural understanding.

g. Heartbeats

Heartbeats are usually heard in every second of living. However, their descriptions among various languages or cultures are different. For English, the sound of heartbeats are *yum yum, om nom nom* (as in *Superman in double troubles* Comic). For Indonesian, the sound description of heartbeats are *dag-dig-dug, deg-degan* (as in some songs and novels).

h. Kiss

Kiss sounds can be described into two ways i.e. in terms of action and sound of the action. The description of kiss sounds among various languages are different. For English, the sounds are *mwah, smooch* (as in *Little Pairy* Comic). In Indonesian, the sounds are *muahhh* or *cupp* (as in *Si Unyil* film).

From the examples above, the sounds considered as onomatopoeia are different in different languages and

cultures of the world. Their differences are considered to be language icons that represent the culture where the language belong to. onomatopoeia functions as a language icon in which the word represents its meaning. It provides an alternative way to see the simple relationship between language: sound and its meaning and the way the language users to interpret it. The bearing meaning of the onomatopoeia is characterized by the beyond culture of the language. The sound that produced by the same thing or event, however, interpreted as different bearing sound.

Various onomatopoeias can be an alternative teaching material used for language learning of foreign language. For instance, it can be used for learning reading to build students reading comprehension.

### 3. Conclusion

For the beginner students learning linguistics, it is easier for them to start with sound recognition. Since they could be actively getting involved in comparing alternative sounds on their own. Then, by introducing an onomatopoeia, the teachers may enhance the students learning. They can learn various sounds in terms of pronunciation or phonetic. The onomatopoeia of other languages and cultures can be also an alternative teaching material to improve students reading comprehension.. Last, The same thing or event that is able to produce a sound as an onomatopoeia might be differently interpreted by different language users.



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