ESTONIAN ONOMATOPOEIA: A TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT
The paper presents a classification of Estonian onomatopoeic words worked out by the author. The inventory of Estonian onomatopoeia (735 onomatopes) is examined within the framework of the universal classification of onomatopes worked out by S. Voronin.

INTRODUCTION
The past decade has seen growing interest in the study of various iconic aspects of language. Of particular interest is the emergence of typological studies in the field of phonosemantics. The groundwork for typological studies in the field of onomatopoeia was laid down by S. Voronin in his universal classification of onomatopes /1/.

Onomatopoeia as a phonosemantic subsystem can be viewed as modelling extralinguistic acoustic phenomena by means of the phonological structure of words in a given language. Accordingly, onomatopoeia is approached from the extralinguistic point of view, the classification of onomatopes being based on the typology of extralinguistic sounds. It should be emphasized that an onomatope as a model is a double approximation of an extralinguistic sound /2/. At first the extralinguistic sound is channelled by the human ear and then the model is built up by means of the phonological structure of a language. The linguistic sign being a linear entity, the individual properties of a complex sound can only be conveyed successively. The extralinguistic and typological approach in the study of onomatopoeia brings to the fore the deep-set universal isomorphic features that otherwise would not be self-evident.

The present paper is an attempt to apply the principles of the universal classification of onomatopes to the study of Estonian onomatopoeia. The subject is of considerable interest since Estonian, as well as other Balto-Finnic languages, is noted for its rich repertoire of onomatopoeic and descriptive resources /3/.

A CLASSIFICATION OF ESTONIAN ONOMATOPES

CLASS A. INSTANTS

Type I. Instants
Pattern 1

\((\text{PLOS})(\text{SONLAT/NAS DENT})\)

\(\text{FricSIB}^{\dagger} + \text{VOC} + \text{PLOS}(s)\)
\(\text{FRIC} + \text{APPR}\)

Pattern 2

\(\text{CONS} + \text{VOC} + \text{CONS}(s)\)

Examples: TIKK-TAKK - tick-tack (of a clock); KLIPS - a light clicking sound; KLISUMA - to make a sound like water flowing unevenly out of an opening, esp. in the throat; NAPS - snap, the sound of closing the jaws quickly; SITIJSTAMA - (of a bird) to make a succession of short rapid sounds, twitter; VIISTAMA - (idem).

CLASS B. CONTINUANTS

Type II. Tonal Continuants

Pattern 3

\((\text{CONS} + \text{VOC} + \text{CONS})(\text{LAT/NAS DENT})\)

Examples: UNDAMA - to hoot (of sirens, communication lines); LLLLLLLL - (occas.) the monotonous sound of communication lines.

Type III. Pure Noise Continuants

Pattern 4

\((\text{Fric} + \text{CONS})\)\(^{\dagger}\) \(\text{VOC} + \text{SONLAT/NAS DENT}\)

Examples: SISUJEMA - to give a high-pitched prolonged sibilant sound, hiss; SOSUJEMA -
The text contains a detailed list of words with their meanings, primarily focusing on sounds and their descriptions. It appears to be a catalog of sounds with various contexts and their specific meanings. The text is structured in paragraphs, each detailing a different sound category, such as 'Pure Frequentatives', 'Imitative Loud Noise', and 'Pure Noise'. Each entry includes the sound description and an example to illustrate its usage.
DISCUSSION

The distribution of onomatopes within different types of onomatopoeia varies considerably. The most numerous types in Estonian are I and X (161 and 126 onomatopes respectively), which make up 39 per cent of the whole inventory. They are followed by types V (88), II (76), III (69) and VI (67) totalling 40.8 per cent. The remaining types cover about one fifth of the material. Estonian is poorly represented in Types XIV and XV. No Estonian examples for Sub-type A, Type XV, could be found in our material.

In modelling extralinguistic sounds the principle of homogeneity between the acoustic parameters of the extralinguistic sound and the corresponding phonemotypes is observed. This is one of the reasons why in onomatopoeia typologically isomorphic features dominate. As regards allomorphic features, they could be brought about by a variety of reasons. A possible source of allomorphism lies in the phonological redundancy of several types of onomatopes. For example, to render pure noise, in principle, only one voiceless fricative is needed; but since the majority of roots contain more than one consonant, the other can be considered to be redundant. Phonological redundancy may be manifested differently in various languages. Firstly, an extra (redundant) voiceless fricative may be supplied, e.g. SUSisema. Secondly, consonants can be found which do not fulfil any echoic function, e.g. the /k/ in KAHisema; cf. the Japanese designations of swishing, rustling movement kasa-kasa, goso-goso. Thirdly, the extra consonant may signal sound-symbolic values, e.g. the labial /p/: the protrusion of the lips in PUHuma - to blow.

Another possible source of allomorphism lies in the non-stable nature of affricates. In a group of Estonian onomatopes the initial affricate has undergone assimilation, and consequently the initial fricative sibilant in these onomatopes (Types I, V, and X) can no longer echo the plosive character of the sound.

A characteristic feature of Estonian Tonal Continuants and Tonal Frequentatives is the occurrence of doublets with long vowels and diphthongs. The onomatopes with diphthongs denote somewhat shorter sounds, e.g. KIUKSuma KIUUKSuma; KRIUKSuma KRIUKSuma. The phoneme /x/ which occurs finally in the combinations -ka, -pa and -ka, e.g. KIUKSuma, NAPS, PRANTSi is of expressive character, and serves the purpose of intensifying the meaning of the word. In a few onomatopes the "natural" order of qualitative elements is reversed, e.g. MURTSuma, MURISema. A parallel to this phenomenon can be found in the Nenets onomatopoea mirdenas and mirmes which have similar meanings (in Nenets /r/ does not occur in the initial position).

Finally, it should be pointed out that although in onomatopoeia auditory motivation prevails, the majority of onomatopes manifest the phenomena of sound-symbolic interference as well. As a rule, labial and guttural sounds in the designations of the sounds made by birds and animals denote the place of articulation. Sound-symbolic interference is especially strong in the designations of bubbling, e.g. PULisema, VULKSuma, MUULXSuma. In such onomatopes the presence of an initial labial appears to be more important than that of an initial plosive. Thus, strong sound-symbolic interference is a force that makes the patterns of onomatopes more complex. A characteristic feature of Estonian is the fact that the phoneme /v/ occurs initially in a number of onomatopes. In addition to its auditory value the initial /v/ in Estonian onomatopes is usually also sound-symbolically motivated.

By way of conclusion it should be said that the typological study of onomatopoea is an emerging area of research and it remains to be hoped that new studies will bring to light interesting facts in various languages of the world.

References


Symbols

CONS - consonant
PLOS - plosive
AFFR - affricate
FRIC - fricative
SIB - sibilant
R - the phoneme /r/
SON - sonorant
NAS - nasal
DENZ - dental
LAB - labial
LAT - lateral: /l/
^ - voiceless (e.g. FRIC - voiceless fricative)
~ - voiced (e.g. FRIC - voiced fricative)
VOC - short vowel
VOC - diphthong or long vowel
" - "either...or"
( ) - brackets for optional components