

THE PHONEMOTYPE: A NEW LINGUISTIC NOTION
(IMPLICATIONS FOR TYPOLOGICAL PHONOSEMANTICS)

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ABSTRACT

The problem of descriptive units is of paramount importance for any typology. Isomorphism (similarity), which prevails over allomorphy (dissimilarity) in the iconic (onomatopoeic and sound-symbolic) words of any two (unrelated) languages, cannot, as a rule, be revealed on the level of individual phonemes. The paper is a first report on the implications for typological phonosemantics of a notion introduced earlier by the author - the notion of the phonemotype (i.e., a "semantically loaded" acoustic or articulatory type of phonemes). The phonemotype as a unit is shown to possess a number of unique features.

The emergence of the new linguistic science, phonosemantics (dealing with the iconic, i.e., onomatopoeic and sound-symbolic, system of language), necessitates the elaboration of typological phonosemantics, or a phonosemantic typology of the world's languages /1/.

Linguistic iconicism is an absolute language universal, and the scope of the iconic system in language is, contrary to popular sentiment, extremely great /2/. This system does not include exclusively words that are felt to possess a phonetically motivated connection between sound and sense - it also embraces all those countless words where in the course of historical development, this connection has become obscured but where it can be uncovered with the aid of "deep down" etymological analysis buttressed by "external" typological data.

Invading the realm of iconicity, the researcher, like Alice in Wonderland, probes a world where many things are "so different" and "so unlike"; prepared to relinquish some of the hallowed age-long linguistic shibboleths and willing to work out a new set of values, the explorer presses on in his quest. Phonetic (phonological) typology and semantic typology are venues for the stu-

dy of sound and, disconnectedly, sense. The blazing gap is there - to be bridged by phonosemantic typology exploring the sound/sense connection in the lexis of different - primarily unrelated - languages.

The problem of descriptive units is of paramount importance for any typology. Isomorphism (similarity), which prevails over allomorphy (dissimilarity) in the iconic words of any two (unrelated) languages, cannot, as a rule, be revealed on the level of individual phonemes (instances like the English ting and Indonesian ting, both signifying the sound of a small bell, are very infrequent). This paper is a first report on the implications for typological phonosemantics of a notion introduced earlier by the author - the notion of the phonemotype (i.e., a "semantically loaded" acoustic or articulatory type of phonemes) /3/.

Taking by way of illustration a number of onomatopoeic groupings, I shall attempt to retrace the steps in arriving at the notion of the phonemotype in phonosemantic typology.

Illustration 1: Instants /4/. These onomatopes designate pulses (the pulse is an instant sound like a tap, tick, click or knock). Cf. examples from four languages (of diverse language families), viz. English (Eng.), Estonian (Est.), Bashkir (B.), Indonesian (Indon.) /5/. Eng. tap, tick, pat, pop, click, clop-clop, chop; Est. tikk-takk - tick-tack (of a clock), k p-kop - imitative of tapping on the door, klobisema --to go clop-clop (of wooden shoes), pl gisema - to click; chatter (of teeth); B. tap - instantaneous sound of hard object falling to the ground, d k - dull knock or tap (on the door), qup - sound of object striking wood, kelt-kelt - to tick; Indon. tuk - imitation of knocking, tak - sound of a stone striking wood, bap - imitative of an object falling on a soft surface, bak - a pat; sound of fruit falling on the ground, lepik - sound of matchbox falling on the floor. Listing the initial consonants in the roots of the onomatopes cited, we find them to be: /t,p,k,k,d,b,

tʃ/; the root-final consonants are: /p,k,t,g,b/. Here we see a great diversity of phonetic types: dentals, labials, velars; voiced and voiceless phonemes; stops, and even an affricate. The diversity within the initials list, as also in the finals list, is thus evident - but misleading. For in this diversity there is an underlying unity (less obvious but nevertheless tangible): what unifies these consonants (both initial and final) is the fact that they belong to one and the same type, viz. plosives (/tʃ/ is an affricate - but on this see below). Acoustically, plosives are essentially pulses, and it is only natural that they are used in onomatopoeic designations of a pulse. (As to affricates, the initial element here tends to be of a pulse-like nature; thus affricates, too, are a natural - if somewhat less accurate - rendering of a pulse.) Hence plosives (as well as affricates) in onomatopoes designating pulses are not purely phonetical, asemanic groupings - they are "semantically loaded", and charged with the delicate task of conveying meaning; whenever an onomatopoeic designates a pulse, it is primarily the plosives that do the semantic job for the entire onomatopoe. Plosives in Instants are an example of what I term the phonemotype. Summing up the essential components that go to make up the onomatopoes cited above, we come to the general pattern followed (with remarkably few deviations) in the formation of onomatopoeic roots designating the pulse in the most diverse languages. In terms of phonemotypes, the general pattern for Instants is as follows (for symbols, see below):

$\frac{PLOS}{AFFR} + \check{V}OC + PLOS.$

Illustration 2: Tonal Post-Pulse Instants-Continuants /6/. These onomatopoes designate a complex sound - basically the combination of a pulse followed by a resonant tone (e.g. the ringing sound produced by string or bell). Cf. Eng. tang, ting, ping, bang, twang, clam, knell (O.E. cnyllan); Est. tinn - high-pitched ringing sound (of a string), plongutama - to ring (as of a string plucked), pumm - powerful resonating blow (as with a fist), till - prolonged high-pitched ringing sound (as of a small bell); B. tan - sound of metal struck, ton - imitative of resonant sound produced by heavy object striking smth hollow, ten - ringing sound (as of metal struck lightly), den-den - faint ringing sound (of a string); Indon. letang - sound of hammer on metal, ting - sound of a small bell, bong - imitation of sound produced by beating a large drum, lebam - loud sound of object falling on resonant surface, bum - sound of a gun or bomb. The root-

initial and root-final consonants in these examples are, respectively, /t,p,b,k,d,tʃ/ and /ŋ,n,m,l/. The case for the initials is the same as in the above-mentioned Instants: they belong to the plosives phonemotype, and they render the initial pulse. The case for the finals is that they are all sonorants; acoustically, sonorants are predominantly tonal entities; it is therefore only natural that the sonorant phonemotype is used in onomatopoeic designations of tone. In terms of phonemotypes, the prevailing general pattern for Tonal Post-Pulse Instants-Continuants is this:

$\frac{PLOS}{AFFR} + \check{V}OC + SON^{NAS/LAT}.$

Illustration 3: Pure Noise Continuants /7/. These onomatopoes designate pure noise - that is, various hissing, swishing, whispering sounds. Cf. Eng. hiss, hush, huff, flush, slosh, swish, swash; Est. sahisema - to rustle, husisema - (dial.) to hiss, kahisema - to whisper gently through the leaves (of wind), to swish (of clothes), habisema - to whisper gently through the leaves (of wind); B. ysyl-dau - to hiss (of a goose or a snake), bysyldau - to hiss; to whisper, syj - swishing sound (caused by rapid movement), sajlau - (dial.) to whistle (of a bullet); Indon. desah - imitation of sound of polishing; the rustling of leaves in rain, sis - hissing, lesus - a whisper, kesik - rustling; whispering, kesu-kesi - leaves rustling in the wind. A cursory overview of root-initial and root-final phonemes gives a bizarre and discouraging picture. But a closer look yields two systematic subpatterns. Subpattern one is furnished by the entire English material and part of the Estonian (sahisema, husisema) and Indonesian (desah, sis) material: the initials /h,f,s/ and the finals /s,ʃ,f,h/ - different as they are, they all fall into the category of voiceless fricatives. Subpattern two does not have fricatives for both initials and finals, but it does consistently have one fricative - either initial or final - coupled practically with any other final consonant (as in Est. habisema, B. syj) or, respectively, any other initial consonant (as in Est. kabisema) or even with no final/initial consonant whatever (see Indon. kesu-kesi, B. ysyl-dau). The zig-zag puzzle of the subpatterns resolves into the following comprehensive general pattern:

$\frac{FRIC^{\wedge}}{FRIC^{\wedge}} + \check{V}OC + \frac{FRIC^{\wedge}}{(CONS)}.$

The purport of this is that for the "portrayal" of pure noise at least one voiceless fricative (initial or final) is obligatory in the onomatopoeic roots of a

given language (though some languages, like English, evince the redundant feature of employing even two voiceless fricatives, initial and final). The voiceless fricative phonemotype, in itself acoustically pure noise, is the echoic correlate of pure noise designated by onomatopoes of this kind. It is hoped that illustrations 1,2 and 3 help to trace the logic in isolating the notion of the phonemotype. One of the fundamental principles at work in the domain of onomatopoeia (and, mutatis mutandis, sound symbolism) is the principle of homogeneity: structural acoustic elements of the referent sound (i.e., the sound designated) are iconically rendered, in the corresponding onomatopoe, by structural phonetic elements belonging to the same acoustic type. Phonemes in the onomatopoeic root are thus correlated with the elements of the referent sound - but indirectly, via the phonemotype, the latter acting as a go-between or intermediary /8/. Given the acoustic structure of the referent sound (together with the known phonetic peculiarities of the language in question) we can safely predict (in approx. 80-90 per cent of all cases) the phonemotype pattern of corresponding onomatopoeic roots (though not its concrete phonemic realization). The crucial unit in an onomatopoe's structure is, then, the phonemotype - and not the phoneme.

The articulatory phonemotype in sound-symbolic words, though differing somewhat from the acoustic phonemotype of onomatopoes, is fundamentally the same entity as the one outlined above (a detailed analysis calls for discussion in a separate paper).

The phonemotype in the iconic vocabulary of languages possesses a number of highly specific features. To name just a few:

- The phonemotype is a semanticized entity.

- It is a two-faceted entity, both phonetical and semantic. (Here one might even be tempted to introduce the sesquipedalian term "phonemosemotype", or rather "phonosemotype").

- The phonemotype is able to dissect phonological space in a manner impossible for phonemes, a manner peculiar only to itself; cf. the phonemotype of labials in designations of rounded shape: the fundamental phonetic dichotomy of consonant/vowel is here irrelevant. /9/

- The phonemotype is a psycholinguistic reality.

- It is, further, inter-disciplinary in essence.

- The phonemotype is a cross-linguistic phenomenon.
- Being basically an ontological entity, it may be, and is, employed as a methodological instrument.

Further evolvement of the notion entails discussion of such problems as fuzzy sets and language as choice and chance.

The notion of the "semantically loaded" phonemotype (coupled with that of onomatopoeic patterns) leads us to realize the intrinsic limitations of the long-standing belief that root morphemes, though divisible phonetically or semantically, are allegedly indivisible phoneto-semantically. Root morphemes can to a large extent be structured in terms of phonemotypes.

As demonstrated by recent research, units like the phonemotype are proving themselves adequate instruments not only in language-specific phonosemantics, but also in typological phonosemantics /10/ as well as in typological paleolinguistics. For the latter, cf. Prof. R. Wescott's view: "... sound correlations in ... language families of great internal time depth must be formulated either sub-phonemically, in terms of articulatory or acoustic features, or transphonemically, in terms of morphophonemes" /11/. This transphonemic reference is, as has been shown, the very essence of the phonemotype, instrumental in tapping the largely untapped iconic (onomatopoeic and sound-symbolic) resources of the world's languages.

Symbols

CONS - (any) consonant
 PLOS - plosive
 AFFR - affricate
 SON - sonorant
 NAS - nasal
 LAT - lateral : /l/
 ^ - voiceless : FRIC^ - voiceless fricative
 V̇OC - short vowel
 () - brackets for optional components

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