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## The Use of Onomatopoeia in Literature: Selected Poems

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### Abstract

Onomatopoeia is the phenomenon that is used to imitate natural sounds as the ringing of bells ,the singing of birds, the sound is made an echo to the sense .It is the formation or making of a word by imitating the sound of the noise or action designated or made such as twitter ,hiss ..etc.

The present paper deals with the problem of the relation between onomatopoeia and arbitrariness and how the poets use onomatopoeic words in literature .It also discusses why those poets use these words and in which way.

The use of onomatopoeia in literature is clarified by analyzing some selected poems by different poets and in different ages and different periods

The research concludes that onomatopoeia is a beautiful phenomenon which is found in all languages and every day there is a new one according to the things and objects that are invented or used as well as poets use of onomatopoeia to access the readers' auditory sense and create rich and beautiful sounds capes .

### **Introduction**

The most striking characteristics of language by comparison with other codes or communication system are its flexibility and versatility. There are four properties of language: arbitrariness is one of them. The term arbitrary is used to mean something like "inexplicable in terms of some more general principle" (Lyons ;1990:19). It is generally the case that there is no natural connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. For example, the word *نقطة* in Arabic has no relation to its shape. The arbitrary relationship between the linguistic signs and the objects used to indicate the forms of human language is called arbitrariness. (Yule :1985:18-19) . Onomatopoeic words are considered a part of the natural sounds "theory of language" origin (Ibid) .There are sporadic instances in all languages of what is traditionally referred to as onomatopoeia : the non –arbitrary connection between the form and the meaning of such onomatopoeic words as Cuckoo, peewit, crash in English .But the vast majority of the words in all languages are non- onomatopoeic : the connection between their meaning is arbitrary in that ,given the form , it is impossible to predict the meaning and given the meaning ,it is impossible to predict the form (Lyons ;1990:19).

Sounds alone are the basis of a limited number of words, called echoic or onomatopoeic like "bang, burp, splash, tinkle, pig, and bobwhite. Leonard Bloomfield (1933:156) distinguishes between words which are actually imitative of sounds, like meow, moo, and bow-wow, and differ from language to another. To the speaker, it seems as if the sounds were especially suited to the meaning like bump, flick .Such words frequently show doubling ,sometimes with slight variation ,as in bow-wow , choo -choo, and pe(e) wee ,the last of which by its sound is merely suggestive of tininess –equality that could hardly be limited in sound save by a reduction in volume –and is hence symbolic though as the name of a bird it is , like its variant peewit (or pewit) ,actually a fair , imitation of birds' cry .(Pyles ; 1971:276)

Onomatopoeia can be defined as the formation of words whose sound is imitative of the sound of noise or action designated such as hiss, buzz, and bang.(Harper;2010:p1) such words are used for poetic or rhetorical effect .(Ibid:1)

Also, it can be defined as it uses to imitate natural sounds as the ringing bells ,the singing birds ,or voices animal .In a broader sense it refers to any combination of imitative sounds and rhythms that are used to reinforce the sense or moods of a passage of poetry or prose.( Ibid :7)

Notari(2015:1) states that onomatopoeia is one way a poet can create sounds in a poem. These words actually look like the sounds they make, and one can almost hear those sounds as one reads such as “slam, splash, bam,

babble, warble, gurgle, mumble, and belch" . On the other hand , Goodword (2015:p.2) defines it as the status of a word whose pronunciation imitates its meaning, e.g. "buzz, crack, clink, clank, clang, fizz, thump, slurp, sizzle" .Besides, Harper (2015:1064) adds that (onom) means words containing sounds similar to the noises they describe ,for example hiss , bang and pop . Furthermore ,Nordquist (2017:1) clarifies that onomatopoeia is the use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to . According to him, onomatopoeia is sometimes called a figure of sound rather than a figure of speech .

### **The Origin of The Word Onomatopoeia**

It is a Greek word meaning "name –making" for the sounds literally create the meaning. They are sometimes called echoism (Abrams, 1993:138). Greek onomatopoeia, from "onoma " name and poiein, to make .it is the formation of words from sounds which seem to suggest and reinforce the meaning. This accounts for words like "murmur ", cuckoo, buzzing, twitter when applied to the choice of words in poetry, whereby the sound is made an echo to the sense; onomatopoeia has a real value .The most obvious examples are those in which the sense to be echoed is itself a sound. (Scott: 1980 : 200-201)

According to Good word ( 2015:p 1 ) "onoma" comes from the Proto-Indo European root(o) nomen-name" with a fickle initial that came and went over the course of indo -European language history for no apparent reason .

Rundgren (2015:5) states that the word onomatopoeia comes from the combination of two Greek words ,one meaning "name" and the other meaning "I make" , so onomatopoeia literally means "the name (or sound)I make.' That is to say that the word means nothing more than the sound it makes. "Booing", for example, means nothing more than it sounds like .It is only a sound effect.

Many onomatopoeic words have come to mean other things related to the sounds they make. "Slap" for instance, not only means the sound that is made by skin hitting skin, but also the action of hitting someone (usually on the face) with an open hand. "Rustle" is the sound of paper brushing together, but it also indicates the action of someone moving papers around and causing them to brush together, thus making this noise. And of course, "twitter" is now much more than just the sound birds make ( Ibid ).

### **Kinds of Onomatopoeia:**

According to Ullmann (1962: 84-85) ,there are two types of onomatopoeia primary onomatopoeia which refers to the imitation of sound by sound which is truly an echo to the sense as buzz ,crack ,growl, whiz, etc. and secondary onomatopoeia in which the sound evoke ,not an acoustic experience ,but a movement ( dither ,slither, wrinkle) or some physical or moral quality ,usually unfavorable such as gloom , slimy , slick , sluggish) While Bloomfield (1933: 156) distinguishes between words which are actually imitative of sounds ,like ( meow, moo) and those which are

symbolic somehow illustrating the meaning more immediately than do ordinary speech –forms such as bump and flick. Besides, Lyons (1977: 102-105) uses the terms primary iconicity (for onomatopoeia) and secondary iconicity for sound symbolism.

On the other hand, Cruse (1986: 34) remarks that there are some phonetic sequences, yet they do not correspond to grammatical elements. Such elements are of two types: the first is onomatopoeic phonetic sequences that "resemble their referents editorially, like hum, buzz, meow, gang...etc. While the second type of 'meaningful phonetic sequence is what he calls "sound symbolism" where there is no question of auditory resemblance" (Ibid:34). He exemplifies this phenomenon by initial consonant clusters in glitter, glimmer, slither, slouch...etc. The sounds of words sometimes give support to the sense. They can be of two types: onomatopoeia and phonetic intensives. Onomatopoeia may be used both in a narrow and broad sense (Abrams, 1993: 138).

- 1- In a narrow sense, it designates a word, or a combination of words whose sound seems to resemble closely the sound it denotes, such as hiss and buzz. The seeming similarity is due as much to the meaning, and to the feel of articulating the words, as to their sounds.
- 2- In the broad sense, onomatopoeia is applied to words or passages which seem to correspond to, or to strongly suggest what they denote in any way whatever, in size, movement, or force, as well as sound.

Phonetic intensives, on the other hand, is another group of words "whose sound, by process as yet obscure, to some degree connects with their meaning. An initial fl- sound, for example, is often connected with the idea of moving light, as in flame, flare, flash, flimmer, and gl- sounds also frequency accompanies the idea of light, usually unmoving as in glare, gleam, glint, glow. (Arp, 1998: 760).

Hugh Bredin (1996:2,3,4) points out that there are three types of onomatopoeic words:

- 1- Direct onomatopoeia: The denotation of a word is a class of sounds. The sounds of the word resembles a member of the class to explain it simply (The sound of the word resembles the sound that it names, such as hiss, moan, whirr and buzz. However, he also suggests that none of these words is exactly like the sound that it denotes. There are higher and lower degrees of onomatopoeic words resemblance and the number of words which have quite a high degree of resemblance, is relatively small such as hiss
- 2- Associative onomatopoeia: it occurs whenever the sound of a word resembles a sound associated with whatever it is that the word denotes. Some examples of this are cuckoo, bubble, smash, and whip. None of these words has a sound that resembles the objects or actions that they

denote ,for instance , cuckoo is bird's name ,but its acoustic resemblance is to the song that it produces , not the bird itself .The word barbarian ,by which some foreigners called ancient Mongolians, is an example of this type .Its root ,the Greek word barbaroi, was devised as a name of non-Greeks because their strange languages sounded to Greek ears like the stuttered syllables “ba-ba”. Association is just as much a matter of degree as is acoustic resemblance .There is a close association of sound and object in the case of cuckoo ,but a very slight association in the case of scratch or spatter.

- 3- Exemplary onomatopoeia: its foundation rests upon the amount and character of the physical work used by a speaker in uttering a word. Words such as nimble and dart require less muscular and pulmonary effort than do sluggish and slothful. Also, their stopped consonants encourage a speaker to say them sharply and quickly, whereas the latter two words can be drawn out slowly and lazily .The word sound nimble does not sound like anything that can be denoted by the word, and it cannot resemble the idea connected to it , since concepts have no sound. Instead, the word sound instantiates or exemplifies nimbleness, since it is itself a nimble sound. (Ibid: 1996:1)

Bredin (1996:555-569) points out that there are two kinds: the strict or narrow kind of onomatopoeia is alleged to occur whenever the sound of a word resembles or imitates a sound that the word refers to. The word “strict” and “narrow” suggest that the sense in question is a kind of original usage or practice , in respect of which other senses of onomatopoeia are metaphorical or perhaps extensional enlargement . He adds that according (Quintilian sInstitutiooratoria) , which laid the foundations for all subsequent descriptions and theories of figurative language ,an onomatopoeic word refers here to what its etymology implies : namely the creation of a word ( exnovo) .(Quintilian remarked in passing that the Greeks regarded word creation as a virtue ,whereas among the Romans it was rarely acceptable : a fascinating glimpse into the contrast between the two great cultures of classical Europe (Ibid:569).

Todd Rundgren ( 2015:3-5) lists five categories of onomatopoeic words according to how they are used:

- 1- Words related to water: These words often begin with sp- or dr- .words that indicate a small amount of liquid often end in -le.

( sprinkle/drizzle)

- Splash
- Spray
- Sprinkle
- Drip

2- Words related to the voice: sounds that come from the back of the throat tend to start with a gr-sound whereas sounds that come out of the mouth through the lips, tongue and teeth begin with mu-:

-giggle  
-Growl  
-grunt  
-gurgle  
-murmur  
-mumble  
-chatter  
-blurt

3- Words related to collisions : collisions can occur between any two or more objects .Sounds that begin with -l- usually indicate collisions between metal or glass objects . Words that end in -ng are sounds that resonate .Words that begin with th- usually describe dull sounds like soft but heavy things hitting wood or earth .

-clarp  
-clatter  
-click  
-clink  
-Ding  
-Jingle  
-slap  
-thud  
-thump  
-bam  
-bang

4-Words related to Air: air does not really make a sound unless it blows through something .Thus, these words describe the sounds of air blowing through things or of things rushing through the air. "Whisper" is on the list and not the voice list because the voice is not used in whisper . persons only use the air from their lungs and the position of teeth, lips and tongues to form audible words.

-flutter  
-fisst  
-swish  
-swoosh  
-whizz  
Whip  
-whisper

5- Animal sounds: if you have spent a significant amount of time with people from other countries, you know that animals speak different

languages too. Depending on where a chicken is from, e.g. she might cluck-cluck, bok-bok or cot cot codet. In The United States, however, animals speak English:

- arf
- baa
- bark
- cheep
- cluck
- cuckoo
- cock-a-doodle-doo
- purr
- tweet

6- Miscellaneous examples: onomatopoeia can also be found in literature, songs and advertisement as well such as:

“chung, chug, chug, puff, puff, puff-ding, dong-ding-dong. The little train rumbled over the tracks “( watty piper (arboldmunk),the little engine that could )

Plop ,plop- fizz ,fizz ,oh what a relief it is (slogan of Alka Seltzer ,U.S)

Onomatopoeia every time I see ya

My senses tell me hubba. (Ibid:5)

#### **Examples upon the use of onomatopoeia:**

##### **1- The sheep went “Baa”**

2- It is unusual for a dog to **bark** when visitors arrive .

3-Silence your cell phone so that it does not **beep** during the movies .

4-The best part about music class is that you can **bang** on the drum.

5-The dishes fell on the floor with a **clatter**

6- The cash register popped open with a heartwarming ca-ching.

7-Nothing annoys me more than rapidly **clicking** your pen.

8- Jacob could not sleep with the steady **drip –drop** of the water coming from the sink.

9- If you want the red team to win ,**clap** your hands right now!

10- They knew that the principal was coming because they heard the **jingle** of his keys .

11-Billy will cry if you **pop** his balloon.

12-Most cats **purr** if you pet them behind the ears.

13-When he saw the cheese ,the mouse couldn't help but to **peep** excitedly.

14- The wolves **howled** at the moon.

15-The sound of the ocean is so soothing, a beautiful **murmur**.

#### **The Relation Between Onomatopoeia and Poetry**

Poets use onomatopoeia to access the reader's auditory sense and create rich sounds capes .It is one of many poetic devices dealing with the sounds of poetry. In a broader sense it refers to any combination of imitative sounds and rhythms that are used to reinforce the sense or moods of a passage of poetry and prose .

Onomatopoeia is one way that poets convey sound .When a poet uses onomatopoeia ,the word itself looks like the sound it makes ,and somehow one “hears “it as one reads.

One has to take a look at how onomatopoeia is actually used in poems. There are three kinds of poetry according to Ezra Pound(1918:56)these are:

- 1-Melopoeia
- 2-phonopoeia
- 3- Logopoeia

Melopoeia is a Poundian term to describe the kind of poem which induces “emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech ".He stated that the maximum amount of melopoeia is to be found in poems that are written to be sung ,chanted or read a loud .(Pound;1918:56-58)

Logopoeia is used to describe a poem which induces both melopoeia and phanopoeia by stimulating the associations (intellectual and emotional) that have remained in the receiver’s consciousness in relation to the actual words or word groups employed. ( Ibid )

Phanopoeia is a term coined by Pound to describe a poem which relies upon “throwing a visual image on the mind . “He went on to say that this is particularly exemplified by Chinese poetry because the Chinese language is composed of pictograms .Besides, it is the use of words in poetry to suggest visual images. (Ibid)

And it Is defined as “casting of images upon the visual imagination ,throwing the object (fixed or moving) on the visual imagination .In the first publication of these three types ,Pound refers to phanopoeia as “ imagism” (Ibid:2)

**Examples of using onomatopoeia in selected poems by different poets:**

**Onomatopoeia and phanopoeia:**

Onomatopoeia in its more complicated use, takes the form of phanopoeia . Phanopoeia is a form of onomatopoeia that describes the sense of things rather than their natural sounds . (Ezra;1918: 58)

In his poem “Snake”, D.H Lawrence illustrates the use of this form:

“He reached down from a fissure in the earth –wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft –bellied  
Down ,over the edge of the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap ,in a small clearness  
He sipped with his straight mouth.....

The use of hissing sounds, together with the rhythm and other devices, creates a picture of a snake in the mind of the readers .

**-First Example :**

“The Bells “ by Edgar Allen Poe begins with a benign look at bells and how sweetly they can sound ,but in Poe fashion ,he moves to a darker ,more sinister role that bells play in life.

“ How they clang ,and clash ,and roar!  
 What a horror they out pour  
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!  
 Yet the ear it fully knows  
 By the twanging  
 And the clanging  
 How the danger ebbs and flows;  
 Yet the ear distinctly tells,  
 In the jangling  
 And the wrangling  
 How the danger sinks and swells ;  
 By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells ,  
 Of the bells ,  
 Of the bells ,bells ,bells ,bells ,  
 Bells ,bells ,bells---‘  
 In the clamor and clang or of the bells!

Let’s look at the onomatopoeia ,in the poem .When Poe uses words like ,clash, clang , roar ,jangling, clamor and clangor, we hear the discordant noise of the bells ,not a sweet sound .It reminds us of a fire alarm .....something that jars the senses .This is the exact effect that Poe is hoping to produce . Even though the word “bells” itself by choosing this type of words ,Poe creates a dark ,frightening mood

**Second Example:**

“Storm” by Olisha Starr  
 “ Booming and baning Thunder in the air  
 Crashing and rumbling waves against wet rock  
 Bombing and scraping ,lighting the sky  
 Swishing and sloshing rain on a windscreen  
 Metallic thuds on a tin roof  
 Howling and Moaning ,wind attacking  
 (Notari;2015:2-3)

**3-Third Example :**

Alfred Lord Tennyson's (MorteD’Arthur).Tennyson was one of the most famous poets of the Victorian era .This is his medievalist poem in while he chronicles the death of the legendary King Arthur “I heard the ripple washing in the reeds”.

**Fourth Example:**

"The Pied Piper of Hamelin” by Robert Browning who popularized the dramatic monologue.The shrill “ noise of his pipe as being enchanting to the rats of different sizes (both “plodders” and “friskers “ are onomatopoeic

terms ) that the piper led out of the town." Scrape", "munch" and "crunch" each enhance the images of his poem with audible sounds .

**5-Fifth Example**

"Cynthia in the Snow" By Gwendolyn Brooks in this poem , she uses onomatopoeia to depict a girl's thoughts about the snow: The snow softly falls as it "hushes " and "Shushes" the cars that drive in the street and the snow "flitter –twitters" around in the girl's mind ,before it "whitely whirs away".

**6-Sixth Example:**

Vachel Lindsay (The Congo)

Beat on empty barrel with the handle of a broom

Hard as they were able ,

Boom, boom, Boom,

With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom

Boomlay , Boomlay , Boomlay, Boom.

He used onomatopoeia with great variation in combination with rhythm.

**7- Seventh Example:**

"Honky Tonk in Cleveland Ohio" By Carl Sandburg(1878-1967)

It's a jazz affair , drum **crashes** and cornet **razzes**,

The trombone pony **neighs** and the tuba jack as **snort**.

The banjo tickles and **titters** to awful.

Sundburg uses onomatopoeia to recreate the sound and feeling of a honky-tonk bar.

**8- Eighth Example:**

"The Highwayman " by Alfred Noyes :

Over the cobbles he **clattered** and **clashes** in the dark inn-yard,/ he **tapped** with his whip on the **shutters**, but all was locked and barred; **Tlottlot, tlottlot!**Had they heard it ?The horses hooves ,ringing clear; **Tlottlot, tlottlot**,in the distance !Were they deaf that they did not hear?

**9- Ninth Example**

"The Rusty Spigot" by Eve Merriam

The rusty spigot

Sputters

Utters

A splutter,

Spatters a smattering of drops,

Gashes wider;

Slash

Splatters

Scatters

Spurts

Finally stops sputtering

And plush!  
Gushes rushes splashes  
Clear water dashes.

She creates a sense that water is fun through onomatopoeia and other sound devices.

### 10- Tenth Example :

“Fossils” by Ogden Nash

-There were no drums or saxophones ,

But just the **clatter** of their bones ,

**Rolling , rattling** carefree circus,

Of mammoth polkas and mazurkas,

Here he uses onomatopoeia to contribute to the humor .

There are so many other examples of using onomatopoeia by poets.

### Conclusion

In language ,there are a number of literary devices frequently categorized as a figure of speech ,such as onomatopoeia which is defined as a word which imitates the natural sounds of a thing .It creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described ,making the description more expressive and interesting .For instance ,”the gushing stream flows in the forest” is a more meaningful description than just saying ,”the stream flows in the street”. The reader is drawn to hear the sound of a “gushing stream” which makes the expression more effective .In a broader sense it refers to any combination of imitative sounds and rhythms that are used to reinforce the sense or mood of a passage of poetry or prose.

Onomatopoeia is the sounding word which depends on imitating the movement of something that has a relation with the object that one imitates . It may be animal or machine or water etc. so the movement of the tongue inside the bird leads to make the sound of twitter which is the onomatopoeic word

According to the researcher's point of view , onomatopoeia is the formation or making a word by imitating natural sound of the noise or action designated or made such as twitter ,glop pita ,gloppita . Onomatopoeia can be divided into :

1- Noisable onomatopoeia :

a- Objects ( air , water ....)

b- Things (keys ,door...)

2-Action onomatopoeia ( animal such as baa, twitter )

If one hears a sound that has a relation either with objects like water ,air ... e.g. **tish** the dropping of water or with things e.g. the sound of keys ,door ,or jingle .These words are named as onomatopoeia of noise because of their sounds whether beautiful or not .

On the other hand, action onomatopoeia deals with the sound movement of something which is like an animal so it has a sound like baa ,

howl ...etc .They may make this sound because they move or they want to talk with each other . They are expressing sexual desire or are afraid of something or they may want to eat or dance ....etc, such as the bee when it dances and performs a beautiful dance and sound which all of us can hear it.

Poets use onomatopoeia to access the reader's auditory sense and create rich sounds capes .It is one of many poetic devices dealing with the sounds of poetry .

Finally , words are used to tell what is happening. Onomatopoeia on the other hand ,helps the readers hear the sounds the words reflect .Hence, the reader can enter the world created by the poet with the aid of these words. The beauty of onomatopoeic words lies in the fact that they are bound to have an effect on the readers' senses whether they are understood or not. Moreover, a simple, plain expression does not have the same emphatic effect that conveys an idea powerfully to the readers .The use of onomatopoeic words helps to create emphasis in speech .

#### **المستخلص:**

**استخدام المحاكاة الصوتية في الادب : قصائد مختارة**

**غفران عبد الحميد علي**

المحاكاة الصوتية هي ظاهرة تستخدم لتقليد الأصوات الطبيعية كرنين الأجراس، وغناء الطيور، الصوت الذي يحدث هو صدى إلى الشعور به . المحاكاة الصوتية هو تشكيل أو صنع أو عمل كلمة عن طريق تقليد صوت الضوضاء أو عمل يصمم أو يشكل مثل تغريدة العصافير والهسهسة والطققة.. الخ.

تتناول هذه الدراسة مشكلة ما هي العلاقة بين المحاكاة الصوتية و العشوائية و كيف يمكن للشعراء استخدام الكلمات المحاكية في الأدب؟ ولماذا يستخدم هؤلاء الشعراء هذه الكلمات، وبأي طريقة؟

ان استخدام مفردات المحاكاة الصوتية في الأدب يوضح من خلال تحليل بعض القصائد المختارة لشعراء مختلفين ومن مختلف العصور في فترات مختلفة .

يخلص البحث إلى أن كلمات المحاكاة الصوتية هي ظاهرة غريبة وجدت في جميع اللغات وفي كل يوم لدينا كلمة جديدة وفقا للأشياء التي تخرع أو تستخدم ،كذلك الشعراء يستخدمون هذه المفردات للوصول إلى الشعور السمعي للقراء وخلق اصوات غنية وجميلة لدى القارئ.

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