Paper Title: ICONICITY AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE. EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES ON PERCEPTION OF JAPANESE ONOMATOPEIA BY RUSSIAN LANGUAGE SPEAKERS.

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Abstract

Key words: iconicity, onomatopoeia, Japanese language, Russian language, perception.

Iconicity is an inherently interdisciplinary phenomenon, involving linguistic and textual aspects and linking them to visual and acoustic features. It is obvious that iconicity can be discovered in all circumstances in which language is created, ranging from language acquisition and processes of language change, to translation and the more literary uses of language.

It is known that iconicity in any language is widely presented through sound symbolism and onomatopoeia. The sound shell of onomatopoetic words is formed based on acoustic characteristics of natural sounds. However, it is important to mention that phonetic toolkits used for natural sound imitation are often not the same (vary) in languages.

It is considered that human language can imitate all of the existing sounds. However, the Japanese language is considered to be very inflexible when it comes to phonetic variations. It is therefore interesting to observe the sound symbolic and onomatopoetic words interpretation of phonetic invariants and their place in systems of two languages (Japanese and Russian).

In order to define the perception level of iconicity of Japanese onomatopoetic words (the ぎおんご giongo group) a psycholinguistic experiment was conducted at one of the Universities of Russia (Byisk) and involved the survey of 54 non-Japanese speaking students from the age group 18 to 22 y.o. Experiment material represented 17 Japanese onomatopoetic words from two thematic groups: inanimate nature sounds and wildlife sounds. The primary criterion used for words selection for the experiment was the existence of the “onomatopoetic couples” in both languages. Students were instructed to listen to the material only once and select the analogue from the list of Russian sound symbolic words.

According to the results in Table 1 the percentage of Japanese onomatopoetic words recognized by Russian students was relatively high. The most widely recognized words as りんりん
rinrin (analogue in Russian динь-динь), ちくたく chikutaku (analogue тик-так) and こけこっこ kokekokko (analogue in Russian кукареку). A high degree of recognizability can be explained by certain similarities in the phonetic systems of the two languages.

Interestingly enough, those Japanese onomatopoetic words that are not phonetically similar to the Russian analogues were also identified correctly. This can be largely explained by such linguistic phenomenon as intralingual iconicity that tends to preserve the quality of nature sounds by using various linguistic technics to transfer them between languages.

Nevertheless, there were a few words that caused difficulties with recognition. We can assume that in these cases the specific, not typical for the Russian language phonetic shell of Japanese onomatopoeia prevented those words from being recognized by the listeners. That proves that the level of iconicity can be different even in onomatopoetic words.

Thorough analysis of the experiment results indicates that the recognition of sound symbolic words from different systems languages occurs as a result of the following factors:

1. External phonetic similarity that exists between onomatopoetic words of different systems languages. This phenomenon is called Universal Language Iconicity;

2. The preserved quality of natural-born sounds of onomatopoetic words of unrelated languages regardless the difference of the phonetic methods (technics) used for its denotation. This phenomenon is called Intralingua iconicity.