

Type, Meaning, and Usage Onomatopoeia in Japanese Comic “Grand Blue”

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the form, meaning, and usage of onomatopoeia in Japanese comics. The data used is the Japanese onomatopoeia contained in the data source, which is the first volume of the “Grand Blue” comic by Kenji Inoue & Kimitake Yoshioka. This research uses qualitative descriptive and a literature study method. The theory used is Hamano’s to identify their meaning based on phono-semantics. The analysis results found that the forms of onomatopoeia, which are the symbols of sounds, determine their meaning. We also found four functions of onomatopoeia: forming the names of objects or sound imitations, forming the names of actions, indicating conditions, and forming character emotions.

INTRODUCTION

Humans created language to communicate and interact with other humans. Aitchison (2008, p. 21) argues that language is a system formed from agreed voice cues characterized by structural dependence, creativity, placement, duality, and cultural transmission. In the routine of life, humans always use symbols or symbols in communicating (Chaer, 2012, p. 39; Mulyani & Saifudin, 2022; Saifudin, 2021). Humans try to imitate and create words based on the sound of what they see, hear, and feel in the surrounding environment. Therefore, words formed based on imitating sounds are called onomatopoeia (Febriyanti, 2012).

According to Chaer (2012, p. 47), onomatopoeia is a vocabulary formed based on imitating sounds in an ongoing situation. The emergence of onomatopoeia as a language subsystem is unique because its form is formed by imitating the sounds heard from living things and inanimate objects and poured into language through a phonological system. Almost all languages in the world know onomatopoeia, but one language and another language have various forms of onomatopoeia. This is because the phonological system in each language is different, even though the sound that is imitated comes from the same thing (Mar’at, 2015). One of the countries that have a diversity of onomatopoeic vocabulary is Japan.

Kindaichi (Sumirat, 2010) explains that Japanese onomatopoeia is divided into two main categories. Imitation of sound that is heard directly by the human sense of hearing (ears), namely *Giongo* (derived from inanimate objects including plants) and *Giseigo* (derived from living things such as humans and animals). The imitation of sound that connects other senses such as taste, touch, and sight to represent a situation that does not make a sound, namely *Gitaigo* (state or motion of inanimate objects), *Giyougo* (state or movement of living things), and *Gijougo* (expressing human feelings).

The number of Japanese onomatopoeias used ranges from 2000 to 4500 words (Ono, 2007). Japanese people often use onomatopoeia in everyday life because it has a strong nuance in taste and gives a livelier impression (Chang, 1990). In addition, onomatopoeia can describe situations and conditions that occur without a long and complicated explanation so that someone immediately understands the situation in question. Yamamoto

(1993) also argues that the use of onomatopoeia is not only limited to daily life but is also applied in advertising, novels, magazines, comics, and so on.

Although often used in everyday life, Japanese onomatopoeia has a very complex symbol system. Around 88.7% of 102 international students studying Japanese said that Japanese onomatopoeia was challenging even after checking its meaning in a dictionary (Tsygalnitsky, 2008). For example, some onomatopoeias have similar meanings to sparkle, namely *kirikira* and *pikapika*, but the differences between the two are very slight.

As a language subsystem, onomatopoeia cannot be used without the speakers of the language agreeing on the system. The language system referred to here refers to onomatopoeia as words. Therefore, the sound source must be analyzed phonologically to match its form into a usable language element. For that, language speakers can search and match phonemes in their language that can represent the meaning of the phenomenon in question. In the end, the phoneme arrangement automatically has a meaning that can represent an idea or concept. As a result of this process of creating and understanding onomatopoeia, an understanding of phonology and semantics becomes important in analyzing onomatopoeia.

Phonology is one of the linguistic fields that examine a language’s sound system and the differences in various sounds so as to be able to distinguish meaning (Soepardjo, 2012). Phonology has two sub-fields, namely phonetics and phonemics. Phonetics analyzes the way humans make language sounds without regard to distinguishing meaning. In contrast, phonemics analyzes the sounds of the language based on its ability to manipulate meaning and its role in the language (Clark & Yallop, 1995). Meanwhile, semantics is one of the fields of linguistics that analyzes meaning. During the development of linguistics as a whole science that analyzes language, semantics became a branch of linguistics whose understanding is lower and more thorough than other branches of linguistics, such as morphology or syntax. This is because the object of semantic study in the form of meaning is very unstructured. After all, arbitrary language does not require a relationship between the word as a symbol that marks with the concept marked (Chaer, 2012, p. 32). One of the most comprehensive studies on Japanese onomatopoeia belongs to Shoko Hamano in her dissertation entitled “The Sound-symbolic System of Japanese.” Hamano uses a phono-semantic approach to decipher the meaning of onomatopoeia.

The uniqueness of onomatopoeia as a language unit that tends to be short but dense in information and can liven up the atmosphere is often found in literature, especially in comics. If there are no onomatopoeias in comics, then readers will have difficulty understanding what is happening. Even if the reader can understand the scene through illustrations, the scene will feel blander and more lifeless. This is why onomatopoeia is one of the most important elements in comics. One comic that uses a lot of onomatopoeia is *Grand Blue* by Kenji Inoue & Kimitake Yoshioka. *Grand Blue* centers on the story of a young college student named Iori Kitahara, who is about to start his college life by living in his uncle’s dive shop, “Grand Blue,” near the coast of Izu City.

Research on Japanese onomatopoeia is not the first to be conducted. One of the studies is Tri Sutrisna’s thesis (2017) entitled “Japanese Onomatopoeia Translation Strategy in Manga *One Piece* (Translation).” The results of her research found that there are similarities in word forms in the form of essential words, forms of morpheme compounding, and the arrangement of similar morpheme forms. Meanwhile, the difference between the two is in the phonemes that make up the onomatopoeia of each language, which is limited to the phonological limitations of each language.

The second research was conducted by A’tin Nurjanah Yuniarti (2017), entitled “Analysis of Phonological Forms and Meanings of Glottal Stop Sound Onomatopoeia.” The results of her research found that there were seven kinds of meanings in the onomatopoeia of glottal stop sounds. The meanings are fast movement, human voice, human activity/movement, human condition/feeling, human physical character, natural phenomenon, and moving objects.

The novelty of this research is that researchers identify onomatopoeic words that appear especially in comics through a phono-semantic approach. By using this approach, we can understand the type, meaning, and usage of onomatopoeia intended by the author in describing the situation and context.

METHOD

The method used in this research is the qualitative description method. For the data collection stage, researchers used the literature study method and note-taking technique. A literature study is a data collection method directed at finding data and information through documents, including written documents, photos, images, and digital documents, that can support the research process (Sugiyono, 2011). The theory used in this research is the theory of onomatopoeia, according to Shoko Hamano, to describe the form, meaning, and usage of its use. When an onomatopoeia has a *sokuon* symbol (ツ), the romaji symbol (Q) is used in the middle or the end of the onomatopoeic syllable. Also, the symbol *hatsuon* (ン) uses the romaji symbol (N).

The steps taken by the research include: (1) reading the comic as a whole; (2) collecting onomatopoeia words that only appear outside the conversation dialogue text balloon. The data that has been obtained will be analyzed by (1) identifying the context of onomatopoeia appearance in accordance with the existing image by describing an event; (2) describing each element of onomatopoeia word formation and the meaning of each element; (3) identifying the usage of the onomatopoeia in question; and (4) concluding the results of the analysis by explaining the interpretation based on the context of appearance and the meaning of each element in the onomatopoeia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data collection, 184 onomatopoeia words were found in the Grand Blue comic volume 1. From the data that has been collected, researchers only take 7 onomatopoeia data with the most occurrences which are as follows.

Data	Description	Number of Occurrences
[gachaQ]	Door opened	11 times
[suta-suta]	Walk straight	7 times
[poNQ]	Pat on the shoulder	6 times
[gara-gara]	Sound of cartwheel	5 times
[goku-goku]	sipping drink	4 times
[dokiQ]	beat rapidly	3 times
[zaba]	big splash	3 times

Onomatopoeia [*gachaQ*]



Picture 1 Onomatopoeia [*gachaQ*], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ガチャッ
ga/cha'/
KV/KSV/Q/

Analysis:

In the picture above, it can be seen that Chisa is carrying a box to give to lori. Chisa enters lori’s room by opening the door, and then the word [*gachaQ*] appears. This onomatopoeia belongs to the *giongo* type because the sound imitation comes from an inanimate object, namely an open door.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /g/ is associated with the meaning hard surface, not flexible, stiffness, throat sound, heavy/big/rough. K2 /c/ in /cha/ is associated with the meaning of shifting. V1 /a/ is associated with the meaning of broad surface, conspicuous, and overall excitement. The /Q/ ending suggests that the movement stops suddenly and intensely. The word [*gachaQ*] functions as a name for objects or sound imitations to describe the distinctive sound of opening a door.

Based on the sound imitation analysis above, it can be concluded that the onomatopoeia [*gachaQ*] was formed because a hard and large object shifted away from the wooden joint. The door then produces a loud but momentary sound, creating a word imitation of the sound of a door opening.

Onomatopoeia [*suta-suta*]



Picture 2 Onomatopoeia [*suta-suta*], (Grand Blue, 2014)

スタスタ
su/ta/su/ta/
KV/KV/KV/KV

Analysis:

The picture above shows lori asking Kouhei for help decorating his room to make it look like an average room. lori, surprised to see the result of decorating his room, walked straight past Kouhei without paying attention to what his friend said and then the word [*suta-suta*] appeared. This onomatopoeia is a type of *giyougo* because the imitation of the sound appears to describe the movement of a living being, namely a person walking fast.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /s/ is associated with the meaning of flowing liquid surface, light touch, movement of granular objects, calm, fresh, neat/clever, separation, light/small/smooth. K2 /t/ is associated with the meaning of blow/contact with a blow, agree/agree, firm/steady. V1 /u/ is associated with slightly prominent and small. V2 /a/ is associated with the meaning of large surface, conspicuous, whole, and excitement. This onomatopoeia also suffers from duplication, which shows the impression of the movement/phenomenon happening repeatedly or over a long period of time. The word [*suta-suta*] functions as a name of an action to emphasize what the person is doing, namely walking fast.

Based on the sound imitation analysis above, it can be concluded that the onomatopoeia [*suta-suta*] is formed from the depiction of limbs (feet) rubbing against each other quickly. The foot also treads on the floor

surface quickly, and the movement occurs repeatedly and regularly, creating an imitation of the sound of a person walking straight.

Onomatopoeia [poNQ]



Picture 3 Onomatopoeia [poNQ], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ポンッ
po/n/
KV/N/Q/

Analysis:

In the picture above, Kouhei is depressed because he did not get any new members in the extracurricular club. Then Iori came to encourage him by patting Kouhei's shoulder, and the word [poNQ] appeared. This onomatopoeia belongs to the *giyougo* type because the imitation of the sound appears to describe the action of a living being, namely patting someone's shoulder.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /p/ is associated with meaning fast/sudden movement, breaking the surface of flexibility, exploding, stretching, breaking, light/small/smooth. V1 /o/ is associated with the narrow surface, simple, partial, and furtive. K2 /N/ gives the impression of flexibility and stops by leaving a resonance/echo. The /Q/ ending gives the impression that the movement stops suddenly and intensely. The word [poNQ] functions as a name of an action to emphasize the person's activity of patting the shoulder.

Based on the sound imitation analysis above, it can be concluded that onomatopoeia [poNQ] is formed from a person's palm touching the shoulder, which has a narrow surface. The sound imitation leaves an echoing sound and then stops suddenly.

Onomatopoeia [gara-gara]



Picture 4 Onomatopoeia [gara-gara], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ガラガラ
ga/ra/ga/ra/
KV/KV/KV/KV

Analysis:

In the picture above, a man is seen carrying a cart to transport oxygen cylinders used during diving activities. The activity carried out by the man produces the word [*gara*]. This onomatopoeia is included in the *giongo* type because the sound imitation produced comes from inanimate objects, namely moving cartwheels.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /g/ is associated with the meaning hard surface, not flexible, stiffness, throat sound, heavy/big/rough. K2 /r/ is associated with the impression of sliding/rolling, smooth movement. V /a/ is associated with broad surface meaning, conspicuous, and overall excitement. This onomatopoeia also experiences duplication, which shows the impression of the movement/phenomenon happening repeatedly or for a long time. The word [*gara-gara*] functions as a name for objects or sound imitations to describe the distinctive sound of the moving cartwheels.

Based on the sound imitation analysis above, it can be concluded that the onomatopoeia [*gara-gara*] is formed because the wheels of the cart are solid and hard, rolling on the ground with a large surface. The cartwheel also does not move just once but repeatedly, creating an imitation of the sound of a moving cartwheel.

Onomatopoeia [*goku-goku*]



Picture 5 Onomatopoeia [*goku-goku*], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ゴクゴク
go/ku/go/ku
KV/KV/KV/KV

Analysis:

The picture above shows Iori taking a sip of the liquor he attended at the celebration party held by his seniors. The activity performed by Iori produces the word [*goku-goku*]. This onomatopoeia belongs to the *guyougo* type because the imitation of the sound appears to describe the action of living beings, namely sipping drinks.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /g/ is associated with the meaning hard surface, inflexible, stiffness, throat sound, heavy/big/rough. K2 /k/ is associated with swelling, perfection, openness, emptiness, outward/inward movement. V1 /o/ is associated with the meaning of narrow surface, simple,

partial, and furtive. V2 /u/ is associated with the meaning of through a narrow hole that bumps (or not), soft sound. This onomatopoeia also experiences duplication, which shows the impression that the movement/phenomenon repeatedly occurs or for a long time. The word [*goku-goku*] functions as a name of an action to emphasize the activity the person is doing, which is gulping down drinks.

Based on the analysis of sound imitation above, it can be concluded that the onomatopoeia [*goku-goku*] is formed based on the throat moving because of the liquid flowing in. The movement of the throat that pushes the liquid repeatedly occurs, creating an imitation of the sound of someone sipping a drink.

Onomatopoeia [*dokiQ*]



Picture 6 Onomatopoeia [*dokiQ*], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ドキッ
do/ki'
KV/KV/Q

Analysis:

The picture above shows lori, who was surprised by the presence of a woman who approached him when lori was helping his seniors prepare diving equipment. The emotional feeling felt by the character gave rise to the word [*dokiQ*]. This onomatopoeia is the *gijougo* type because the imitation of the sound appears to emphasize the character's emotion, namely beat rapidly.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /d/ onomatopoeias with K1 /d/ is associated with fast/sudden movement, contact with rigid surfaces, heavy/large/rough. K2 /k/ is associated with swelling, perfection, openness, emptiness, outward/inward movement. V1 /o/ is associated with the meaning of narrow surface, simple, partial, and furtive. V2 /i/ is associated with the meaning of line/something thin and elongated, loud sound, steadiness. The /Q/ ending gives the impression that the movement stops suddenly and intensely. The word [*dokiQ*] functions as a forming character's emotions to emphasize the feelings experienced by the character, namely beat rapidly.

Based on the sound imitation analysis above, it can be concluded that onomatopoeia [*dokiQ*] is formed based on the heartbeat that reacts quickly to phenomena that make the character happy. The sudden expansion and contraction of the heart create a sound imitation that describes the feeling of happiness.

Onomatopoeia [*zabaQ*]



Picture 7 Onomatopoeia [*zabaQ*], (Grand Blue, 2014)

ザバッ
za/ba'
KV/KV/Q

Analysis:

The picture above shows lori practising swimming before he can dive with his friends. lori, who was traumatized by the water, suddenly comes out of the water, followed by the word [*zabaQ*]. This onomatopoeia is a *qiongo* type because the sound imitation comes from an inanimate object, namely a big splash of water.

According to Hamano (1986), onomatopoeia with K1 /z/ is associated with the meaning of a flowing liquid surface, light touch, movement of granular objects, calm, fresh, neat/intelligent, and separation. K2 /b/ is associated with the meaning of breaking the surface, breaking, and firmness. V /a/ is associated with broad surface meaning, conspicuous, and overall excitement. The /Q/ ending gives the impression that the movement stops suddenly and intensely. The word [*zabaQ*] functions as an indicating condition to clarify an object, namely a large splash of water.

Based on the analysis of the sound imitation above, it can be concluded that the onomatopoeia [*zabaQ*] comes from a puddle of water that starts out calm and becomes splattered. The interaction with an object that stops suddenly causes the phenomenon described as a large splash of water.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that onomatopoeia, which is a symbolization of sound, determines its meaning. The existence of a specific meaning in each phoneme forming onomatopoeia allows for the emergence of familiarity with the meaning of similar phonemes forming onomatopoeia, making it easier for readers to understand the meaning of onomatopoeia. In addition, there are four usages of onomatopoeia, namely, forming the names of objects or sound imitations, forming the names of actions, indicating conditions, and forming character emotions.

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