

Sound symbolism in female images creation (based on American song folklore)

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Abstract. The way listeners of folk songs assign meaning to words, words to images constitute a fundamental issue in language development. Phonemes may appear sound symbolic and possess clear semantic profiles when properly backed by other stylistic means and relevantly interpreted. Their interpretation also depends on historical, cultural, and social issues. Lexical simplicity of folk songs is balanced by phonetic means, onomatopoeia, assonance and alliteration in particular, which develop sensory perception of images. Female images creation requires specific sound symbolic clusters stipulated by female characters' traits.

Keywords: *sound symbolism, onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, female images, American folk songs.*

Introduction. In a language, there are cases when sounds correspond to meanings, which is known as sound symbolism. This phenomenon has been of an interest with many a scholar. As early as in the eighteenth century, M. Lomonosov started investigations that resulted in the theory which proved the abovementioned statement. Other scientists from different countries developed his scientific ideas and significantly contributed to the topic. In particular, J.J. Ohala investigated the symbolic use of voice pitch; E.S. Morton analysed the role of sound symbolism in non-human vertebrate communication; the function of sound was studied by P.F. Ostwald; T.M.S. Priestly, L.R. Waugh and R. Jakobson provided the analysis of sound symbolism in poetry; K. Shinohara and S. Kawahara illustrated a cross-linguistic study of sound symbolism in terms of size images. There have been experiments focused on gendered sound symbolism (M. Babel, A. Cutler, M. D'Imperio, K. Johnson, G. McGuire, J. McQueen, K. Robinson, E. Strand,) too, though they mainly covered specific markers that contributed to the overall male and female sound effects if voices were under consideration. In this light it proves legitimate to develop gender-related issues in stylistic phonetics and conduct a research based on American song folklore.

Objective, material, methodology. This paper presents research results obtained in the course of American folk song analysis. An American folk song is one of the basic elements to incorporate the American culture. It provides a tight connection with ancestors and vast knowledge of the real world. A folk song bears linguistic characteristics, which facilitate the mechanism of communication and data interpretation [12]. Phonetic means have always been a simple, but effective way to help perceive information before its detailed analysis. Sound symbolism found in the selected songs significantly contributed to decoding data and creation of female images in particular. Different recorded, written and online sources were used and above 100 American folk songs with female images were processed with respect to sound symbolic elements and the outcome of the analysis showed dependence of image characteristics on phonetic lining the descriptive and background words had. The paper **aims** to give a comprehensive account of interconnection of words and feelings, tangible and intangible language signs. Its purpose is to demonstrate how images may appear out of random recurrence of sounds.

Results and discussion. To explain the results, it is crucial to give several key definitions related to sound symbolism and its constituents. According to L. Hinton [3], *sound symbolism* is the study of the relationship between the sound of an utterance and its meaning. R. Jakobson and L. Waugh [4] focus on natural associations between sound and meaning. Most encyclopaedias of linguistics [15; 6] refer to *onomatopoeia* when describing sound symbolism, whereas Y. Malkiel [7] uses the term *phonosymbolism* to mean *sound symbolism*. E. Sapir [11] stated that the meaningful combinations of vowels and consonants (words, significant parts of words, and word groupings) derive their functional significance from the arbitrary associations between them and their meanings established by various societies in the course of an uncontrollably long period of historical development. Taking into account all the presented opinions and the characteristics typical of language, culture, and society in complex I will use the term **sound symbolism** as a general term for relationships between sound and meaning, with onomatopoeia, assonance and alliteration as its special elements considered.

According to Longman Pronunciation Dictionary [16], the term *onomatopoeia* means the imitation of a sound, or "making or creating names" in the Greek language if regarded literally. Thus, onomatopoeia occurs when a linguistic sound imitates sounds of the real world. As for American song folklore, lullabies are rich in this stylistic means, mainly representing similar words such as *hush-a-bye* ("All The Pretty Little Horses"), *hush* ("Hush, Little Baby", "Cradle Song"). In some cases lullabies contain onomatopoeic verbs to create natural sounds of silence or noise, key to make a child comfortable while sleeping, for example *to creep*, *to tiptoe* ("Mighty Lak' A Rose"), *to crow* ("Cradle Song"). There is no specific vocabulary to describe the mother directly, she may or may not be addressed to with the word "mommy", nevertheless, the featured cases of onomatopoeia indirectly concentrate on the atmosphere around, which was obviously created by the mother. In each and every lullaby she seems a guardian, a protectress, an angel.

However, to the author's best knowledge, folk songs must be relevantly investigated for alliteration and assonance as well. **Alliteration** is a stylistic literary device identified by the repeated consonant (usually the first consonant in stressed syllables or at the beginning of words) in a series of multiple words or phrases and

assonance conveys similar description related to vowel sounds [15; 16]. These stylistic means, when viewed in complex, manage to interpret a bundle of interrelated sensor and emotional states a listener may develop in the course of enjoying a song. For proper and accurate exegesis the proved scientific results [1; 2; 5; 6] were applied. It remains to prove assumptions with the results and their thorough interpretation.

Lullabies are interesting from linguistic perspective and their further analysis proves it. As may be seen below, they are abundant with long /i:/ and short /i/ phonemes, which occur both in stressed and unstressed syllables:

“All the Pretty Little Horses”: *sleepy little baby, pretty little horses, little lamby, little thing is crying ‘Mammy’.*

“Cradle Song”: *I will bring for you little lovely dream, a little lovely dream, a still little dream; sweet sweet shut your eyes; sleep, sleep my darling.*

“Mighty Lak’ A Rose”: *sweetest little feller; with eyes so shiny blue; when he's a-sleepin' in his little place; kiss 'im in his sleep.*

The diphthong /aɪ/ also proved to be productive for pacifying conditions, as it resembles the word “bye-bye”, for example: *hush-a-bye, cry, eye, my, time, wild, child, fly, sky, mighty* and many more.

Alliteration is mainly represented by repeatedly used voiceless consonants, – aspirated /p/, /t/, /k/, and sibilants /s/ and /ʃ/ are an often case. Kids are pacified to sleep, therefore songs do not manifest aggressive sounds. Moreover, a calming effect is achieved with the help of sonorants /m/, /n/, /l/, which adds caress, tenderness and love to the whole situation and to the image of the mother in particular. The examples from the assonance section show combinations of “pleasant” vowels and “comforting” and “tender” consonants.

Similar cases are spotted when considering the image of the mother in other songs but for lullabies. Even though American song folklore scarcely represents songs with the targeted image (“Mary’s Grand Old Name”, “A Boy’s Best Friend Is His Mother”, “I Want A Girl – Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad”), it is crucial to highlight key observations. Each song name sounds positive and serious. However, some of them are lexically a bit sarcastic and ironical. Serious and kind “Mary” is opposed to airy and plain “Marie” in “Mary’s Grand Old Name”. The song “I Want A Girl – Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad” describes the boy’s dreams in terms of his hypothetical wife, and he hardly seems to have found any, which is sad. And only “A Boy’s Best Friend Is His Mother” has its name and its contents matched, though it is also a sad song as it depicts a boy’s feelings of regret after his mother’s death.

Each element can be properly treated if a listener has profound knowledge in history, culture, and traditions. But will one’s mind draw any parallels without vertical context? The overall combination of sounds, words, melody will be considered to create images when general knowledge is found inconsistent.

Onomatopoeia is not a welcome case here, and the assumed reason for that may be miscellanea or neutral environment. Whilst the songs present no clear assonance and alliteration either:

“Mary’s Grand Old Name”: *And there is something*

there that sounds so square; There is no falseness there.

It may be arguable that sibilants /s/, /z/, /θ/, /ð/ make alliteration effect here, but they prevail in tight connection to the image of the mother, making it harsh, rough and angry. The story tells that generally the mother is loved and negative feelings of anger and harshness appear only when Mary is addressed “Marie” because of a new fashion for French. Besides, the song is performed by a girl by name Mary and she sings about her feelings openly.

“I Want A Girl – Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad”: *Girlie; just like the little girl; She was a pearl and the only girl that Daddy ever had; A good old fashioned girl with heart so true; Mother dear looks up at Dad with love light in her eye.*

The descriptive words contain /l/ sound, which stands for love and tenderness, so it corresponds to the feeling of love the mother manifests.

Pointing out rare cases of sound symbolism in the mentioned songs, the author does not dare conclude that phonetic means are non-proportionally diffused within songs or are deliberately avoided. Such result requires cross-analyses. First, lullabies are simple, pure folk songs made up collectively, the so called “everyday songs”. The songs about the mother with distinct images and supportive vocabulary have authors. It’s typical of American song folklore as America, a comparatively young nation, formed only several centuries ago. Therefore American folklore can’t escape accurate time periods and authors [12]. Supposing that, the conducted research showed the following aspects: folk songs have simple lyrics and numerous means of stylistic syntax [13] and stylistic phonetics while the songs with authors are linguistically “smarter”, have more complex and structured constructions and depict a wider variety of feelings. Their authors are writers, poets, composers who are professional masters of word and undoubtedly gravitate to semasiology [14] and refined melody [8; 9].

To continue the topic, the song “Just Before The Battle, Mother” must be marked as the one that stands out. It possesses the onomatopoeic words imitating the war sounds (“hark” and “swell”) and nothing mother-like from the first glance. Assonance is represented by /i:/ and /ɪ/ sounds (*Some will sleep beneath the sod; With the enemy in view.*). According to some researchers, these sounds may also convey affright when in relevant framing. The framing is made up of onomatopoeia (“hark” and “swell”) and alliteration, which features numerous cases of voiced consonants /b/ (**b**attle, **b**rave, **b**anner, **b**ugles, **n**obly), /ð/ (*mother, with*), /t/ (*perish, right, cruel, traitor, freedom*), /g/ (*god, give, forget, signal*). These sounds are meant to inspire sharp actions. D. Crystal [1] finds /k/, /g/ ugly and rough and they are finely integrated in the “war” words (*forget, cruel, kill, signal, cry*). Thus, the background for the images is dull and gloomy, the soldier’s mood reflects every element. The image of the mother gets distinct in the refrain section where sonorant /m/, /n/, /l/ sounds cushion the external conditions and generate a convincing image on this very opposition:

*Oh, I long to see you, mother,
And the loving ones at home,
But I'll never leave our banner,
Till in honor I can come.*

Negative perception due to ugly sounds can be illustrated in the song "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" with the image of the aunt. The song is flooded with /d/ (*dead, bed, head, died, old*), /g/ (*goose, go, gray, gander*), /ð/ (*feather, mother*) and /t/ (*gray, scratch, crying*). The meanings of these words absolutely correspond to sharp, intermittent feelings they evoke. Even positive words *mother, feather* and *head* describe a dead goose who is a mother itself to goslings. Aunt Rhody must be sympathized to, she does not possess beauty or caress, she is disorganized and miserable.

Finally, the image of the wife and the image of the loved woman are to be considered. Generally speaking these images are often undistinguishable from the perspective of sound symbolism. They incorporate elements typical of descriptions of love, caress, and tenderness. In the majority of cases the level of image perception equals the one in lullabies. Consequently the songs with extra intricacies are in focus. A good example to illustrate these is the song "Cindy". It is traditional, which implies a significant array of sound symbolic issues. The beginning is ballasted with /s-ʃ-z-θ-ð/ sibilants and this partial alliteration slightly echoes the name "Cindy":

*You ought to see my Cindy
She lives away down south
She's so sweet the honeybees
Swarm around her mouth.*

Chorus:

*Get along home, Cindy Cindy
Get along home, Cindy Cindy
Get along home, Cindy Cindy
I'll marry you some day.*

Listeners do not witness onomatopoeia, but the illustrated alliteration imitates pleasant "buzzing" of the bees, which also mingles with the meaning conveyed. Moreover, the Dictionary of Symbols [10] interprets the bee as the symbol of Goddess, love, soul and heaven with many cultures. Bees swarm around the most beautiful "flower". Sounds /s/ and /θ/ are often regarded rabbit-hearted, the

girl is perceived as the one who is afraid to fall in love. Sounds /s/, /n/ and /t/ have diminutive meaning in many languages, while /d/ is "big". This contrast is developed in the last three stanzas beginning with the following one where a petit slim girl counters big love:

*I wish I had a needle
as fine as I could sew.
I'd sew that gal to my coat-tail
and down the road I'd go.*

*Cindy in the springtime
Cindy in the fall
If I can't love my Cindy
I'll have no girl at all.*

Waves of /s-n-d/ and /t-d-n/ throughout the storyline and her name evoke stable and balanced feelings to the girl. As for assonance, /i:/ and /ɪ/ sounds stand out so obviously in every line that it has an effect of peace and eternal love.

Conclusions. The research results give a reinterpretation of the role of sound symbolism in culture and language learning, and show that sound symbolism proves advantageous for learning conditions that influence our understanding the reality and creation of images based on its facts. American folk songs flexibly integrated onomatopoeic words and relevant sound symbolic combinations into their world. Some of them successfully evolved into a new word or remain in the domain of perception. There is evident relationship between sound and meaning, its synergy contributes to creation of proper images and depicts sensory information on the intangible level. The presented analysis proves that sound symbolism is pointless unless judged with all the conditions considered. They hardly ever depict a character directly, but undoubtedly present the background, or a certain halo round it. Vocabulary simplicity is balanced by perceptive sound clusters. So, the role of sound symbolism in image creation processes proves crucial but subtle and unintrusive at the same time.

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**Звуковой символизм в создании женских образов (на материале американского песенного фольклора)
Г. Сташко**

Аннотация. Фундаментальным вопросом в развитии языка есть то, как слушатели народных песен понимают алгоритм присваивания смысла словам, а слов образам. Фонема может нести символичность и обладать четким семантическим профилем при правильном окружении другими стилистическими средствами, если она релевантно интерпретирована. Интерпретация также зависит от знания исторических, культурных и социальных процессов. Лексическая простота народных песен часто уравнивается фонетическими средствами, в частности, ономапеей, ассонансом и аллитерацией, которые развивают чувственное восприятие образов. Создание женских образов требует специальных звуко-символических кластеров, что обусловлено специфическими чертами женского характера.

Ключевые слова: *звуковой символизм, ономапеея, аллитерация, ассонанс, женские образы, американские фольклорные песни.*