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Onomatopoeic Words in Manipuri

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Onomatopoeia is a word or process of forming words whose phonetic form is perceived as imitating a sound, or sound associated with something that they denote (P.H. Mathews p.256). In other words, onomatopoeia is related to the process of the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (R.E. Allen, 1990). In every language some words are onomatopoeic words whose mere pronunciation expresses their meaning explicitly. Imitating some natural sound produced by birds, animals, instruments, etc. forms an onomatopoeic word.

This paper attempts to reveal the onomatopoeic words of Manipuri. Onomatopoeic words play a major role in the formation of Manipuri words. These might have helped in the emergence of Manipuri as a distinct language from within related languages/dialects. No doubt, onomatopoeic words are universally found in every language. In Manipuri, many of these may correspond to the sounds produced by a particular process, thing or being in the environment. They assume specific characteristics and become sort of native expressions in the language. In course of time because of sound changes, which may be regular or irregular, the degree of similarities between the sound produced by the process, thing or being in the environment is partially or completely modified. Sometimes it needs a lengthy historical process to examine the origin of the onomatopoeic words as they pass through many generations.

Onomatopoeic words differ from language to language. The sense of arbitrariness between the sound form and the meaning is not so arbitrary if onomatopoeia is responsible for the creation of linguistic expression. It is possible to recognize the meaning of a sound form from the very sound produced by a particular thing, being or process. Therefore the sound form and its meaning are very closely related.

If the words are created on the basis of onomatopoeia there should be a tendency of universal phonetic similarity in languages partially or wholly. But in course of time, language change took place and so the closeness between the sound form and the meaning may have disappeared. If the relation between the sound form and the meaning disappeared then it may be claimed that they are not onomatopoeic words.

Many a time we use onomatopoeic words particularly when we communicate with children and in the Motherese. A mother may communicate with her child through some sounds produced by the very object, creature, thing, etc. as an aid for the initial processes of language acquisition.

Examples in Manipuri

/mo/	'cow' as the sound produced by a cow'
/g↔w/	'dog' as the sound produced by a dog'
/Nijaw/	'cat' as the sound produced by a cat'

Onomatopoeic words in Manipuri may be discussed under the following heads.

Onomatopoeic Words Used As Noun

Manipuri language has a number of onomatopoeic words used as nouns. The meaning of the onomatopoeic words is correlated with the sound. These words may be classified into the following heads:

Imitative Sound Produced By Birds

A number of nouns in Manipuri are closely associated with the sounds produced by birds. We use these words in speech and in writing and the hearer immediately understands them. They are used repetitively, i.e., in reduplicative form.

Examples of such words are,

/cek cek/	'the sound produced by a bird'
/kwak kwak/	' the sound produced by a crow'
/ku-u ku-u/	'the sound produced by a cuckoo'
/bak bak/	' the sound produced by a duck '
/kok kok/	' the sound produced by a hen'
/pi-t ^h a-doj pi-t ^h a-doj/	' the sound produced by a peey wit, lapwing'

Imitative Sounds Produced By Animals

Imitating the sound produced by animals also produces many words in Manipuri. They are also repetitive in character.

Examples of such words are

/g↔w g↔w/	'the sound produced by a dog'
/w↔w w↔w/	'the sound produced by a dog'
/Nijaw Nijaw/	' the sound produced by a cat'
/mo mo/	' the sound produced by a cow'
/ok ok/	' the sound produced by a pig'

Imitative Sound Produced By Instruments and the Like

Manipuri possesses many of words that are imitative of mechanical sounds produced by instruments. They are also repetitive in character.

For example:

/kriN kriN/	'the sound produced by a bicycle bell'
/krek krek/	' the sound produced by a cart when it moves'
/gega gega/	' the sound produced by a door when it moves'
/gijaw gijaw/	' the sound produced by a bangle'
/tek tek/	' the sound produced by a clock'

/triN triN/ 'the sound produced by a guitar (or a musical instrument having a string).'

Sounds Produced By Imitating Natural Sounds in the Environment

Some onomatopoeic words in Manipuri are produced by imitating the sounds produced by natural sounds caused by different kinds of actions. Human ear perceives these sounds differently as created by different things. It means, a specific sound refers to a specific action and the action refers to a particular thing.

For example:

/crok crok/	'the sound of running water.'
/bruN bruN/	' the sound produced by boiling water'
/gr↔N gr↔N/	' the sound produced by burning (fire)'
/g↔m g↔m/	' the sound produced by running (somebody)'
/kok kok/	' the sound produced by knocking (to a door etc.)'
/pek pek/	' the sound produced by breaking of wood and the like.'

Onomatopoeic Words Used as An Adverbs And Adjectives

Onomatopoeic words can be used as an adverb of manner if they are followed by a verbal noun.

For instance,

/hik hik k↔pp↔/	'to sob with lamentation or to weep bitterly (producing the sound <i>hik hik</i>)'
/si si kamb↔/	'to blow with a hissing sound'
/ iN iN k ^h iNb↔/	'to produce jingling sound'
/ ↔m ↔m lupp↔/	'to dive into water with a splashing sound'
/gr↔N gr↔N cakp↔/	'to burn with a crackling sound'
/ ↔w ↔w N↔wb↔/	'to fry with a sizzling sound'
/p ^h r↔N p ^h r↔N k ^h ↔pp↔/	'to flap with a flapping sound'

If the above examples are followed by a pure noun, they are particularized by the preceding onomatopoeic words by functioning as adjective. For example,

- /hik hik k↔pp↔ ↔NaN/ 'the child who is sobbing bitterly'
 /si si kamb↔ lin/ 'the snake which produced the hissing sound'
 /|iN |iN k^hiNb↔ kaNsi/ 'the bell which produced the jingling sound'
 /|↔m |↔m lupp↔ ↔NaN/ 'the child who dives into water'
 /gr↔N gr↔N cakp↔ m↔j/ 'the fire that is burning with a sound'
 /|↔w |↔w N↔wb↔ Na/ 'the fish which is fried with a sizzling sound'

The verbal nouns *k^hoNb↔* and *lawb↔* 'to produce some sounds' are near synonymous. The first one is appropriately used for animate and the last one is for inanimate objects. For instance,

(a) Onomatopoeic word with verbal noun *k^hoNb↔*

- /g↔w g↔w k^hoNb↔/ 'the crying sound of a dog'
 /mo mo k^hoNb↔/ 'the crying sound of a cow'
 /Nijaw Nijaw k^hoNb↔/ 'the crying sound of a cat'
 /kwak kwak k^hoNb↔/ 'the crying sound of a crow'
 /cek cek k^hoNb↔/ 'the crying sound of a bird'

(b) Onomatopoeic word with verbal noun *lawb↔*

- /ge ge lawb↔/ 'the sound produced by a door etc. when it is opened or shut'
 /keN keN lawb↔/ 'the sound produced by hitting two glasses etc.'
 /doN doN lawb↔/ 'the sound produced when bombs blast'
 /hru hru lawb↔/ 'the sound of howling (wind)'
 /pot pot lawb↔/ 'the sound of honk (horn)'

If a pure noun also follows the above examples, they are particularized by the preceding onomatopoeic words by functioning as adjective.

For example,

/ge ge lawb↔ t ^h oN/	the door which produced the a noise sound when it is opened or shut'
/keN keN lawb↔ gilās/	'the glass which produced the clinking sound'
/hru hru lawb↔ nuNsit/	'the wind which moves by producing the howling sound'
/pot pot lawb↔ horon/	'the horn which produced the honk sound'

In such a process, in Manipuri, a considerable number of sounds can be used as words deriving from mimicry sounds produced by natural objects or living beings. For example;

/gr↔N gr↔N N↔Nb↔ noN/	'the rain which has a thundering sound'
/gru gru teNb↔/	'to wash one's throat producing gurgling sound'
/kr↔k kr↔k cikp↔/	'to bite something producing the crunching sound'
/k ^h ro k ^h ro k ^h otp↔/	'to scratch producing the scratching sound'

Verbal noun *k^hoNb↔* 'cry' follows the onomatopoeic words if the sound is produced by an animal or bird. It functions as an adverb. Further it can be followed by a noun, e.g. *m↔k^hol* 'sound' to function as an adjective:

Sounds Produced By Animals

/g↔w g↔w k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a dog'
/mo mo k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a cow'
/Nijaw Nijaw k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a cat'

Sounds Produced By Bird

/kwak kwak k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a crow'
/cek cek k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a bird'
/ku-u ku-u k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a cuckoo'
/bi bi k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a duck'
/kok kok k ^h oNb↔/	'the sound which is produced in the nature or the manner of a hen'

Many sounds as produced by the different animals, birds etc. their names are also varied. For example, *kwak* refers to 'crow', *g↔w* refers to 'dog', *cek-(ucek)* refer to 'bird', *ok* refers to 'pig', *Nijaw* refers to 'cat' etc.

If the above examples in (I) and (II) are followed by a noun, they remain as an adjective. For instance,

/g↔w g↔w k ^h oNb↔ huj/	'the dog which produced the sound bark bark'
/cek cek k ^h oNb↔ ucek/	'the bird which produced the sound chirp chirp'
/Nijaw Nijaw k ^h oNb↔ h↔wdoN/	'the cat which produced the sound mew mew'
/bi bi k ^h oNb↔ Nanu/	'the duck which produced the sound quack quack'

Onomatopoeic Verb in Manipuri

Manipuri language has a few onomatopoeic verbal nouns. Such words in the language can be divided into two.

Total Onomatopoeic Word

In such cases, the root is exactly derived from the imitating sound of an action. For example,

/N↔Nb↔/ 'roaring or crying sound of animals'

/k^hotp↔/ 'scratching sound'

/tekp↔/ 'breaking sound of a stick etc.'

/k↔kp↔/ 'cutting sound of something'

Partial Onomatopoeic Words

In this group a part of a verb is produced imitating the sound and the other part is not imitating the sound. These imitating sounds can occur initially or finally in the words. It is possible to form many of such words in Manipuri comprising '*imitating sound plus verbal noun*' or '*noun plus imitating sound*'. The following examples may be cited:

/pok + k^hajb↔/ 'pok/ 'sound of blasting' + /k^hajb↔/ 'separate' > blasting'

/cek + k^hajb↔/ 'cek/ 'sound of breaking'+ /k^hajb↔/ 'cut' > break'

/se + gajb↔/* 'set/ 'sound of tearing' + /kajb↔/ 'cut' > tear'

*{*t* in the root *set* has been merged with *k* and changed to *g* (*a morphophonemic process*)}.

/na + k^hokp↔/ 'na/ 'nose'+ /k^hokp↔/ 'sound of breathing' > snore'

Onomatopoeic Form in Compound Word

In Manipuri, many compound words are also formed by combining two roots – one is associated with a sound and the other is not. For instance;

/u/ 'tree' + /cek/ 'sound of chirp' > ucek 'bird'

/wa/ 'bamboo' + /ja/ 'sound of noise' > waja 'bird (archaic)'

/tok/ 'a sound' + /su/ 'pound' > toksu 'a tool for pounding clod'

Conclusion

Onomatopoeic words may reveal the sources of origin of human languages. Similarities in different languages are not purely by chance. In fact, it is the matter of relationship between the sound and the object. It is not surprising that many universal similarities are the real products of onomatopoeia. Linguistic change, in many respects, distort the closeness of the sound and the meaning. In due course the phonetic resemblances split either through linguistic contact or in other ways the resemblance between the sound and the object are distorted or lost.

It also seems that etymologically the reduplicative forms have been reduced when it becomes a content word or functional word in the language concerned. For example, in Manipuri *kwak kwak* 'the sound produced by a crow,' becomes a word *kwak* 'crow' by reducing the reduplicative form. In the same respect *Nijaw Nijaw* the sound produced by a 'cat' also becomes a word *Nijaw* 'cat'. This word is found in Gangte, a Kuki-Chin dialect, by reducing the repeated sets of sounds *Nijaw*. The word *ok* 'pig' in Manipuri can be correspondent to *vok* in Purum, as the sound produced by a kind of animal 'pig'. Probably we can speculate that one or more sets of sounds – *vok vok* has been reduced to a single set and appears as *vok* 'pig'. Therefore, it can be postulated that mimicry is the source of onomatopoeic words.

This article illustrates the role of onomatopoeic words and their different grammatical functions in Manipuri. Many grammarians have neglected the study in the formation of word through onomatopoeia.

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