Expressiveness in mimetic syntax: Quantitative evidence from Japanese and English

This paper quantitatively examines the correlation between the syntactic realization and morphological expressiveness of sound-symbolic, mimetic words in Japanese and English. Based on his field data in Siwu, Dingemanse (2011: Ch. 6) points out that mimetics ("ideophones" in his terms) show more expressive features, such as vowel lengthening and prosodic foregrounding (see Zwicky & Pullum 1987), in their free forms (i.e., adverbial, attributive) than in their bound forms (i.e., adjectival, predicative) (see Akita & Matsumoto (forthc) for a similar observation). I pursue the crosslinguistic applicability of this proposal based on quantitative comparisons of predicative and non-predicative uses of Japanese and English mimetics in WebCorp (see Hundt et al. 2007).

The investigation was limited to "**Q**uotative" constructions (J: *-to*-marked adverbial form; E: *go*-quotation) and **V**erbal constructions (J: *su*-incorporated form; E: simple verb form) (see Tamori & Schourup 1999). 212 Japanese geminate-ending mimetics (e.g., *huwaQ* 'fluffy') were taken from Kakehi et al. (1996), listed with their two common expressive counterparts: partially reduplicated (e.g., *huwahuwaQ*) and triplicated forms (e.g., *huwahuwahuwaQ*) (see Nasu 2002). 178 English onomatopoeic words (e.g., *quack*) were taken from Kloe (1977), expressivized by repetition (e.g., *quack quack*) and vowel lengthening (e.g., *quaaack*). Some actual instances are cited in (1) and (2).

(1) a. ***NikonikoQ-to-si****-te kawairasii egao-no ko* 'a girl with a cute *beaming* smile' (V, reduplication)
(http://www.geocities.jp/barsmoke_osaka/1-08-e003.htm)
b. ***nikonikonikoQ-to*** *warau omago-san* '[his] grandchild who smiles *beamingly*' (Q, triplication)
(http://gendai.net/articles/view/kenko/136962)

(2) a. *wildflowers with a large stick that* ***swoosh-swooshed*** *through the air* (V, reduplication)
(http://www.kevinpkeating.blogspot.com/)
b. *His robe* ***went "swoooosh"*** *and his hand pointed to…* (Q, vowel lengthening)
(http://www.uesp.net/wiki/Daggerfall:A_Tale_of_Kieram)

Table 1 shows the mean rates of verbal uses. Paired *t*-tests revealed that in both languages base forms are significantly more likely to appear as verbs than expressive forms (J: vs. reduplication: $t\,(150) = 1.98$, $p < .05$; vs. triplication: $t\,(151) = 1.98$, $p < .001$; E: vs. vowel lengthening: $t\,(25) = 2.06$, $p < .001$; vs. reduplication: $t\,(41) = 2.02$, $p < .001$). Moreover, particularly expressive forms (e.g., triplicated ones) were particularly frequently found in the non-predicative constructions.

Table 1. Mean verbal realization rates (V/(V+Q)×100; with the total numbers of instances)

	base (*huwaQ*, *quack*)	vowel lengthening (*quaaack*)	reduplication (*huwahuwaQ*, *quack quack*)	triplication (*huwahuwahuwaQ*)
J	11.98% (242,950,932)	n/a	9.36% (21,363,098)	2.74% (2,447,949)
E	99.37% (420,617,710)	59.83% (1,019)	43.63% (22,119)	n/a

The results reinforce the grammatical relevance of expressive morphology. They allow us to modify Akita's (2009) iconicity-based generalization of mimetic syntax, in which mimetics with high lexical iconicity tend to be kept out of the clause core: for example, Japanese voice mimetics cannot be verbalized (e.g., **piyopiyo-su-* 'tweet'). Assuming the extra-lexical nature of expressive morphology, the type of iconicity that is relevant to mimetic syntax should not just be lexical. We also have to consider discourse-pragmatic motivations for different syntactic realizations of mimetics. This conclusion is consistent with the usage basis stressed in the current studies of mimetics (Dingemanse 2011). (482 words)

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