

Some Notes on Noun Formation by Derivation and Compounding of Mimetics in Japanese and Romanian

This paper aims to discuss some grammatical properties of mimetics taking as a starting point their capacity for forming new nouns through compounding and derivation in different natural languages. The framework of compounding is based on Levi (1978) and Kageyama (1993).

Japanese is a language in which mimetics productively form compound nouns as shown in this scheme:

Mimetic+Noun \Rightarrow Compound noun

example: gara-gara (rattle) + hebi (snake) \Rightarrow gara-gara-hebi (rattlesnake)

Romanian is a language in which onomatopoeia forms may be nominal, or productively form nouns by double suffixation as shown in this scheme:

Onomatopoeia+suffix 1 \Rightarrow verb+suffix 2 \Rightarrow noun

example: mor-mor (the sound of the bear) + ai (verbal suffix) \Rightarrow mormai (about bears - to growl / about people - to mutter) + tura (nominal suffix) \Rightarrow mormaitura (about bears - a growl, about persons- a muttering)

I will classify Japanese compound nouns on the basis of the specific grammatical relationships between the mimetic and the noun, as suggested by these types:

- Mimetics in type 1 classify the type of an artifact or animal or plant. *Min-min-zemi* is a kind of cicada and *chin-chin-densha* is a type of train (a tram).
- Mimetics of type 2 usually denote a concrete object that has some contingent or notional quality predicated of it: *hoka-hoka-bentou* has the meaning ‘piping hot bentou’, or *fuwa-fuwa-keeki* means ‘soft and fluffy cake’.
- Type 3 shows that the noun is in the resulting state of an action. For example *mutto-gao* indicates the face of a person who is upset. And *niko-niko-gao* means ‘beaming face’.
- The compounds of type 4 are not very numerous. Their underlying structure includes the main use/purpose of the noun. For example a *bikkuri-bako* is a box for scaring people, *bikkuri-mizu* is cold water used for cooling down hot water and *pokkuri-dera* is a temple that makes people die suddenly.

This classification shows clearly the capacity of mimetics to determine the nouns, functioning like adjectives or verbs. In the Romanian data I will show that the suffixes added to onomatopoeia are the same as the suffixes added to some abstract nouns. The data lead to the idea that mimetics have noun-like, adjective-like or verb-like grammatical properties.