

Russian onomatopoeic verbal interjections. Why use 'non-words' instead of ordinary ones?

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Abstract. This paper considers such expressive words in Russian as onomatopoeic verbal interjections (*bukh* 'bang', *stuk* 'knock', *bul* 'plop'). First of all, it focuses on the reasons for using those words. This study suggests that native speakers of Russian may deliberately prefer those linguistic units over words from other classes (nouns, verbs or adverbs). It happens when such factors as Zipf's law and the principles of iconicity and economy in grammar come into play. Secondly, the article claims that while morphologically simple, syntactically mobile and with transparent onomatopoeia-based meaning, those words are not that primitive. Onomatopoeic verbal interjections are capable of conveying multiple shades of meaning due to such diachronic processes as lexical shifts and extensions they have undergone. That kind of qualities enable speakers to imply more than they want to explicitly utter under certain conditions. And finally, using corpus data the research distinguishes such pragmatic functions of those linguistic units (*bukh* 'bang', *stuk* 'knock', *bul* 'plop') as quasi-referential, emotive, phatic, poetic and metalinguistic function.

Keywords: Russian, onomatopoeic verbal interjections, pragmatic functions, Zipf's law, iconicity and economy in grammar

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Звукоподражательные глагольные междометия русского языка: зачем использовать «неполноценные» слова вместо обычных?

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются такие экспрессивные языковые единицы, как звукоподражательные глагольные междометия (например, *бух*, *стук*, *буль*). Прежде всего, данное исследование фокусируется на причинах использования этих слов. В нем утверждается, что носители русского языка преднамеренно употребляют их вместо слов из других грам-

матических классов (например, существительных, глаголов или наречий). На это влияют такие факторы, как закон Ципфа, принципы иконичности и экономии в грамматике. Кроме того, звукоподражательные глагольные междометия никак не являются примитивными, несмотря на их простую морфологическую форму, синтаксическую мобильность и прозрачное лексическое значение, основывающееся на звукоподражании. Эти слова способны передавать разнообразные оттенки значений благодаря расширению и смещению их семантики в процессе исторического развития. Подобные качества позволяют говорящему имплицировать больше, чем он хочет открыто сказать. В заключение на основе корпусных данных в исследовании выделяются такие функции слов типа *бух*, *стук* и *буль*, как квазиреферентная, эмотивная, фатическая, поэтическая и метаязыковая.

Ключевые слова: русский язык, звукоподражательные глагольные междометия, прагматические функции, закон Ципфа, принципы иконичности и экономии в грамматике

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Introduction

The object of this study is a class of words in Russian referred to as onomatopoeic verbal interjections (e.g. *bukh* ‘bang’, *stuk* ‘knock’ and *bul’* ‘plop’). They are often assigned to the class of interjections, [see Shvedova 1980; Kartsevskii 1984; Kryk 1992; Wierzbicka 2003; Cuenca 2006]. Moreover, they are viewed as sound imitations [Wierzbicka 2003, p. 290; Oswalt 1994, p. 293]. Additionally, a number of scholars [Kartsevskii 1984, p. 132; Nikitina 2012, p. 165; Kanerva and Viimaranta 2018, p. 94] claim that these words have verbal features, i.e. they can function syntactically as predicates. Although interjections have been referred to as “non-words” [Ameka 1992, p. 101], this study insists on grammatical and contextual complexity of words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul’*.

This research focuses on identifying factors which drive speakers of Russian to use onomatopoeic verbal interjections in the first place. It aims at exploring pragmatic discourse functions of these words. The research questions can be formulated as follows:

- 1) In what contexts are onomatopoeic verbal interjections used?
- 2) What considerations drive native speakers of Russian to use onomatopoeic verbal interjections instead of ordinary words?

3) What pragmatic functions do onomatopoeic verbal interjections carry in discourse?

The material for this study was collected with the help of the New Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language by Efremova [Efremova 2000]. The search was made for all linguistic units marked both as predicates and interjections. This article is mainly going to concentrate on onomatopoeic verbal interjections. In order to distinguish them from verbal interjections, the entries for each word had to be checked separately for the description of the corresponding sound it depicts. This helped retrieve 76 onomatopoeic verbal interjections from Efremova [Efremova 2000]: *apchkhi, akh, akh-akh, bakh, babakh, bats, bom, bryak, bul'tykh, bul', bul'-bul', bum, bukh, vzhik, grokh, din'-din', don, zhzhik, zvyak, ik, kap, paf, paff, pif-paf, plyukh, pykh, skrip, stuk, trakh, trakh-tararakh, tararakh, tik, tik-tak, top, tren'-bren', tuk, tuk-tuk, tyuk, tyu-tyu, tyap, ukh, fu, fuk, f'yu, f'yu-f'yu, khlest, khlest', khlobyst', khlop, khlyst', khlyup, khlyask, khlyast', khryast', khrup, khrust', khryast', chok, chik, chirik, chirk, chikh, chmok, chok, chukh, sharakh, shark, shvark, shlep, shi, shmyg, shmyak, shork, shu-shu, shchelk*.

Two sub-corpora (the Main Corpus and the Corpus of Spoken Russian) of the Russian National Corpus (<http://ruscorpora.ru>) were analysed in this study. The Main Corpus of the Russian National Corpus (RNC) is represented by written texts of different genres and styles. In 2018 its total volume was 283,431,966 words and the search in it offered 4514 tokens featuring onomatopoeic verbal interjections from the list given above (approx. 16 tokens per million). The Corpus of Spoken Russian of the Russian National Corpus contains not only private conversations, but also public speeches and transcripts of films/cartoons, which belong to the prepared speech. In 2018 its total volume was 12,113,491 words and the search in it gave 203 tokens (approx. 17 tokens per million).

Features of onomatopoeic verbal interjections

Words like *bukh, stuk* and *bul'* have been characterized as “invariable linguistic units, which do not contain inflectional or derivational morphemes; aim at depicting acoustic events or indicating kinetic imagery; in some contexts express suddenness in connection with an indicated action; and function syntactically as independent utterances/clauses or become grammatically integrated by taking a predicate” [Kanerva 2018, p. 18]. From this definition it follows that onomatopoeic verbal interjections display interjectional, onomatopoeic and predicative features.

Clark and Gerrig [Clark and Gerrig 1990, pp. 788–789] claim that all sound imitations depict natural sounds and concentrate on the object of representation. There is a consensus among scholars that interjections indicate mental state of the speaker. Meinard [Meinard 2015, p. 167] distinguishes onomatopoeias from interjections and concludes that “isolated onomatopoeias focus on an object of conceptualization and fulfill the referential function of language whereas interjections focus on the modus, the subject of conceptualization, and fulfill the conative, phatic or expressive functions of language”. It means that interjections are capable of fulfilling pragmatic functions in discourse. In order to distinguish onomatopoeias from interjections, the main attention has to be paid to the mode of representation for each of these categories [Meinard, p. 156]. According to Nikitina [Nikitina 2012, p. 165], all verbal interjections or “verboids” (such as *morg* ‘blink’, *chlest* ‘plunge’, *nyrk* ‘lash’), in their turn, indicate kinetic movements. An important conclusion can now be drawn: none of the three word classes mentioned is used for description. They either indicate or depict certain events or states. There is strong typological evidence that onomatopoeias and interjections belong to expressive vocabulary [see Hinton et al. 1994; Foolen 2012; Dingemanse and Akita 2017]. This testifies in favor of regarding onomatopoeic verbal interjections as expressive linguistic units.

Words similar to Russian *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul* are believed to have given rise to a set of inflected nouns and verbs [Oswalt 1994, p. 302; Kor Chahine 2008, p. 157]. Thus, in the course of lexicalization a specific group of noun and verb derivatives has developed from regular onomatopoeias depicting certain natural sounds. As a result of this process, almost every onomatopoeic verbal interjection in Russian has a homonymic form of a masculine noun in the nominative (1) and accusative case (2) with zero ending:

(1) *poslyshalsya stuk v dver'*

‘knocking on the door was heard’,

(2) *on uslyshal stuk v dver'*

‘he heard (somebody) knocking on the door’.

In all other cases there are overt markers for all these nouns in accordance with general rules of Russian inflection: *stuk-a* ‘knock-GEN. SG’, *stuk-om* ‘knock-ISTR.SG’, etc.

It is important to mention that derived words are conventionalized lexical items. The morpheme, as prototypically defined, is a syn-

tagmatic element which combines with other such elements to form words [Waugh 1995, p. 202]. Absence of inflectional and derivational morphemes is one more argument in favor of regarding onomatopoeic verbal interjections as non-conventionalized linguistic units. Simple morphological structure, however, does not deprive Russian words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'* of a predicative function in certain contexts. What is more, it is completely possible to use them as corresponding inflected verbs. Additionally, a number of works have shown that they even possess such verbal features as aspect, tense, sometimes transitivity and voice [Kartsevskii 1984, p. 132; Viimaranta 2015]. As a result, it is possible to conclude that they behave syntactically similarly to verbs: they are not set off punctuationally from the rest of the sentence, can govern nouns denoting participants of the situation. For example:

(3) *chto-to bukhh v steklo*

'something banged into the (window)glass'

(4) *bukhh kulakom po stolu*

'(he/she) banged the table with (his/her) fist'

There are several restrictions to this: words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'* are almost never used in negative clauses or questions [Nikitina 2012, p. 165]. Contrary to homonymic nouns and inflected verbs, which are fully conventionalized and integrated into the language system, onomatopoeic verbal interjections in a predicative function preserve their expressiveness to some extent [Kanerva 2018, p. 22]. Semantic shifts have made it possible for these words to display interjectional, onomatopoeic and predicative features in different contexts.

According to Sharonov [Sharonov 2008, §2.4], there is a conventionality scale within this very class of words. On the one end of this scale there are words conventionally linked to the source of sound. They have highly conventional, language specific spelling and low context dependence (*tik-tak* for a clock, *chukh-chukh* for a train). On the other end of it there are words which iconically depict the sound itself. The connection with the source of this sound is revealed through the context (*bum*, *tram*). In the middle of this scale there is a less conventionalized group of words, which show connection with different types of source objects (*bul'*, *khrust'*). Their morphological expression is still very familiar for native speakers.

*Iconic and economic motivation
for using onomatopoeic verbal interjections*

First of all, the factor which works in favor of using onomatopoeic verbal interjections instead of ordinary words is the “iconicity meta-principle”. It has been formulated by Givón [Givón 1985, p. 189] in the following way: “all other things being equal, a coded experience is easier to store, retrieve, and communicate if the code is maximally isomorphic to the experience”. The basic idea behind it is that iconic instances are easier to process than non-iconic ones. Without a doubt, there is a strong iconic correspondence between form and meaning of words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'* owing to their sound-symbolic nature. Subsequently, speakers can access the meaning of these linguistic units with less effort due to their ability to iconically depict sound or indicate action in relation with this sound. A number of research papers [see Kor Chahine 2008, Nikitina 2012, Kanerva and Viimaranta 2018] as well as the corpus data show that Russian onomatopoeic verbal interjections are commonly used in predicative function instead of ordinary verbs:

- (5) *Dyatel nosom tuk da tuk*. [N.K. Rerikh. Listy dnevnika (1945)]
'The woodpecker was drumming with its beak.'
- (6) [...] *on i bultykh v vodu*. [I.S. Shmelev. Leto Gospodne (1927–1944)]
'He splashed into the water.'
- (7) *ya dver' na zamok shchelk*. [B.V. Savinkov (V. Ropshin).
To, chego ne bylo (1918)]
'I locked the door.'

Haiman's concept [Haiman 1983, p. 801] of “economic motivation” stipulates that “the conceptual simplicity of a notion corresponds to the simplicity of its expression”. Consequently, “reduction of form is economically motivated index of familiarity” [Haiman, p. 802]. This concept explains laconic morphological expression of words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'*, which, by definition, do not host inflectional or derivational morphemes. This principle implies that familiar entities are usually morphologically shorter. Such familiarity is guaranteed by the semantic predictability of these words on the level of sound imitation.

Economic motivation for the usage of onomatopoeic verbal interjections can be seen in Grice's [Grice 1975, p. 45] “maxim of quantity”, which demands from the speaker to make the utterance as informative as it is required by the speech situation. At the same time, this utterance should not convey more information than needed. Concise mor-

phological form in combination with iconic nature of words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'* meets both demands set by the “maxim of quantity”. These two features make it possible to keep the utterances short and maximally informative at the same time. The Russian National Corpus offers conversation strings where speakers use rather short phrases containing words similar to *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'*. It seems to be sufficient to convey meaning in full.

- (8) *Zamerzla! Tuk / tuk / tuk / ona zhiva!* [Dyuimovochka (1964), cartoon]
 ‘It (the swallow) has frozen to death! [Thumbelina is checking the heartbeat] Thump/thump/thump/ it is alive!’
- (9) – *I salatik iz kapusty takoi / nu / takoi...*
 – **Chik-chik-chik-chik!**
 – *Da / i eshche tam mozno vsykie pasty...* [From the collection of the RNC (2006), private conversation]
 ‘– And a cabbage salad, well, like that...
 – Slash-slash-slash!
 – Yes, and also different types of pasta are possible (to make)...’

Zipf’s law [1935], which insists on communicative effectiveness with least effort, also motivates speakers to frequently use onomatopoeic verbal interjections. As far as there is a direct correlation between predictability of meaning and low amount of coding material [Givón 1991, pp. 87–89], less effort is required from the speaker to depict acoustic events or indicate kinetic imagery by resorting to these words.

The research data suggests that onomatopoeic verbal interjections are not rare. The New Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language by Efremova [Efremova 2000] offers 76 conventionalized linguistic units, i.e. the ones which are well established in the language. It is logical to assume that non-conventionalized items (*om* for chewing, *bryn'* for strumming a guitar), which have not yet been added to dictionaries and are not that familiar to all native speakers, may number in hundreds. The dictionary and the Corpus give more evidence in support of the role of Zipf’s law. As it has been mentioned, onomatopoeic verbal interjections tend to have corresponding inflected verbs or even aspectual pairs. For example, *bats*-INTJ has both *batsnut'*-PF and *batsat'*-IPF, but *chlobyst'*-INTJ has only *chlobystnut'*-PF and *shu-shu*-INTJ has only *shushukat'*-IPF. As a matter of fact, many of the onomatopoeic verbal interjections given in the list do not have any verb equivalents (*apch-khi*, *bom*, *don*, *fu*, *zhzhik*, etc.). Moreover, the search in the Main Corpus for some of these linguistic units demonstrates that they are more fre-

quently used than verbs. For example, there are 550 tokens with *bats*, but only 31 tokens with *batsat*' and 23 with *batsnut*'; 165 with *chik*, but 34 with *chiknut*' and 47 with *chikat*'.

In conclusion, onomatopoeic verbal interjections constitute a rare case when Zipf's law and the principles of iconicity and economy in grammar work well together. Sound-symbolic nature of these words makes them easier to process, morphologically simpler, communicatively efficient, effort saving and, as a result, promotes their frequent usage.

Pragmatic motivation for using onomatopoeic verbal interjections

There are other factors that determine the usage of onomatopoeic verbal interjections. These linguistic units are semantically complicated in a way that they can convey various shades of meaning and involve multiple implications. This quality has developed owing to such diachronic processes in language as semantic extensions and lexical shifts [Oswalt 1994, p. 302; Kryk 1992, pp. 199–200]. As a result, Russian onomatopoeic verbal interjections do not only depict natural sounds, they can also indicate actions or their characteristics to such an extent that the suddenness of something happening can express the speaker's attitude towards it. When it comes to using these linguistic units to render occasional semantic implications, pragmatic motivation works in favor of it. Discursively, they serve certain pragmatic functions. In such utterances they are grammatically processed in the same manner as interjections. According to Wilkins [Wilkins 1992, p. 129], "the size of an utterance (i.e. the number of morphemes an utterance contains) is inversely proportional to the amount of information that is recoverable from context". Interjections are sensitive to context and can only be interpreted in relation to it [Cuenca 2006, p. 35]. In order to guess what is implied by the speaker, the pragmatic context has to be resorted to.

In those cases when the speaker wishes to insinuate the contents of an utterance without naming the event or the state of affairs directly, using an onomatopoeic verbal interjection can be quite handy. This effect is achieved with the help of the differences between an object, its meaning, and a mental image of this object as "a part or mode of the single person's mind" [Frege 1949 [1892], p. 88]. While the meaning of a sign is "common property of many", the mental image is subjective. "The image of one person is not that of another. Hence, the various differences between the images connected with one and the same meaning" [Frege 1949 [1892], pp. 87–88].

Even more possible implications can be traced when an onomatopoeic verbal interjection is put in quotation marks in written text. This punctuation mark is often applied to indicate that the word/phrase is used in an unusual way [Valgina 1979]. As it has been experimentally shown by Kanerva and Viimaranta [Kanerva and Viimaranta 2018, p. 89], such expressions allow elicitation of a vast amount of possible scenarios of the speech event.

- (10) *Stop-khlop*, *i vot – klient uzhe daet pokazaniya!*
[A. Rubanov. Sazhaite, i vyrastet (2005)]
‘Stop-slam-INTJ, and here you are – the client is already testifying!’
- (11) *Kak ona, pomnish, pela: “Ta-ta-ta, yyyyyyyyyy... Da-da... yyyyyyyyyy, khop-khir’ep, din’-din’ i tam eshche blin-blin-blin”.*
[E. Pishchikova. Pyatietazhnaya Rossiya (2007)]
‘Do you remember how it was singing: “Ta-ta-ta, uuuuuuuuu... Da-da... uuuuuuuuu, d...mn, ding-ding-INTJ, and then also drat-drat-drat”
- (12) – *S kosoi, v prostyne, kak polozheno... Chrust-chrust, zvyak-zvyak... – Bred!* [S. Lungin. Vidennoe nayavu (1989–1996)]
‘With a scythe, in a sheet, the way it should be... Crack-crack, clink-clink-INTJ... – Delirium!’

These utterances taken from the Russian National Corpus illustrate the variety of semantic implications these units can convey. For instance, they imply arrest and imprisonment (10), point at repair works in a block of flats (11), mimic the sounds produced by Death when he is walking with his bones crunching and chains clinking (12).

Pragmatic functions of onomatopoeic verbal interjections

Boronnikova and Verižnikova [Boronnikova and Verižnikova 2014] on the basis of Jakobson’s [Jakobson 1960, pp. 350–377] classification of language functions put onomatopoeic interjections and verbal interjections into the quasi-referential functional type. This is the first function which can be singled out. These words are primarily used to depict a speech event in connection with sound or action related to this sound. That is why they are quite often accompanied by deictic elements as mentioned before.

Secondly, onomatopoeic verbal interjections are not void of the affective function, either. Like other interjections, they belong to expres-

sive vocabulary and can be used to indicate mental states and emotions. Indeed, in certain contexts they can clearly express shock (13), surprise (14) or excitement (15):

- (13) *Zhili mirno, / sosushchestvovali, / i vdrug – / **bakh!** / – v tyur'mu posadili.* [Obshchestvennoe mnenie (2004), interview]
 ‘They lived peacefully, co-existed, but suddenly – bang!-INTJ – were sent to prison.’
- (14) *Ne uspeli my zamochit' v koryte portyanki i bel'e – **bats!** – gosti k nam.* [V. Astaf'ev. Oberton (1995–1996)]
 ‘We have not even had time to soak our footcloths and underwear in the washtub – bang!-INTJ – guests are coming.’
- (15) *On i razbogatel' hotel, kak mechtali geroi Fedora Mikhailovicha: **trakh** – i razbogatel.* [A. Genis. Dovlatov i okrestnosti (1998)]
 ‘He also wanted to become rich, the way Fedor Mikhailovich’s characters dreamt: bang-INTJ – he has become rich.’

Expressive linguistic units are characterized as “the vocal gestures which are symptoms of the speaker’s mental state” [Ameka 1992, p. 113]. Such words can be identified as performing the affective function if the speaker’s attitude is traceable through the contents of the utterance.

The third function onomatopoeic verbal interjections can perform is to draw listener’s attention. In this article Jakobson’s [Jakobson 1960] term “phatic” refers to attracting attention and involving the listener. As a result, the basic criterion for identifying this function is to discover evidence from the context that these words help establish or maintain communicative contact.

- (16) *Vysokoe privedenie v nee, ya za nim, uzh tam, i – **bryak**, peredo mnoyu na polu uzhasnyi mertvoets.* [I.I. Lazhechnikov. Poslednii Novik (1833)]
 ‘A tall ghost (went) through (the door), I followed it, naturally, and – plop-INTJ, a horrible dead body on the floor in front of me.’
 Further in the text it is mentioned that the narrator, encouraged by the attention of the terrified listeners, continued his story.
- (17) *Ofitser, ne slushaya, skazal: – **Paf! Paf!*** [A. Kuznetsov. Babii zhar (1965–1970)]
 ‘The officer said without listening: – Pow! Pow!-INTJ’

The characters, to whom *paf* was addressed, were not planned to be executed. The intention was to utilize their house for the needs of the army. This objective could be met by intimidating the owners so that they do not show any resistance. And the context explicitly states that this aim was achieved: their attention was captured by the horrendous implications of these words.

- (18) *Potom podoshla voina, i za voinoi – pykh-trakh: vzdybil narod – myatezh, ogon' i burya.* [V.Ya. Shishkov. Vataga (1923)]

‘And then the war came, and after the war – puff-bang-INTJ:
the people rose up – rebellion, fire and storm.’

Although this utterance can be characterized as an internal monologue of the character, he imagined nonetheless how his words would encourage the others to join the mutiny.

- (19) *Voobshche, naskol'ko ya ponimayu, fiziki tol'ko i delayut, chto sledyat za rozhdeniem i raspadom chastits. Stuknuli proton v proton – khlop! – energiya prevratilas' v kvark.* [A. Torgashev and V. Rubakov. Kakie bozony nuzhny narodu // Russkii reporter, 2012]

‘In general, as far as I understand, physicists are mainly busy with watching the creation and decay of particles. They hit a proton against a proton – bang!-INTJ – the energy has been transformed into a quark.’

Example (19) is from an interview taken from an acknowledged physicist. It differs from the previous examples in a sense that this utterance is a side comment made by the journalist. The main purpose of this utterance is to comfort the reader who at times might be unfamiliar with the intricacies of nuclear synthesis. Such simplifications promote a greater involvement by showing that the author and the reader possess similar levels of knowledge.

The usage of verbal interjections in examples (16)–(19) is optional. The phatic function differs from the affective one in the sense that, when aiming at attracting attention, these words do not convey any additional information. Nevertheless, they accentuate the events and make the listener or the reader more involved.

In some cases, even poetic function can be observed, like in examples (20)–(22). In these utterances onomatopoeic verbal interjections are used to make the text more aesthetically appealing.

- (20) *Rachinskii, kogda-to slovesno “porovshii” menya za dekadentskie obrazy, fyrkaet dymom na yurkosti Shpetta: – “Paf, paf!” – vyletayut iz ust ego kluby.* [A. Belyi. Mezhdru dvukh revolyutsii (1934)]

‘Rachinsky, who used to verbally whip me for decadent imagery, is now snorting with smoke to Shpett’s witty remarks: – “Puff, puff!” – Puffs are flying from his mouth.’

- (21) *Komar saditsya na cheloveka, / chelovek udaryayet po nemu ladon'yu, / i oba, / Vashe velichestvo... bakh! trákh! tararákh! vzryváyutsya. A tepér' predstávo'te sebé, / Vashe velichestvo, / chto u nas ne odín takóí komár, / a millión [...]*

– **Tararákh!**

– **Tararákh**, / *Vashe velichestvo!* [Kain XVIII (1963), feature film]

‘A mosquito is landing on a man, the man is slapping it, and both of them, Your Majesty... bang! bang! bang! are exploding. And now imagine it to yourself, Your Majesty, that there is not only one mosquito, but a million [...]

– Bang!

– Bang, Your Majesty!’

- (22) *Chudno: smotrit Matrena na svoego na milogo druga: u Petra telo eshche skvoznoe, vidno, kak purpurnaya v nem perelivaetsya krov', a s levoi storony grudi, gde serdtse, lapchatyi plyashet ogon' – i tuda, i syuda: tuk-tuk-tuk, tuk-tuk-tuk.* [A. Belyi. Serebryanyi golub' (1909)]

‘How odd: Matrena is looking at her dear friend: Petr has such a reach-through body, one can see how purple blood is flowing in it, and on the left side of the chest, where the heart is, palmate flames are dancing – here and there: thump-thump-thump, thump-thump-thump.’

It does not mean, however, that two or even more functions could not be combined in one and the same utterance. One can certainly claim that in examples (21) and (22) the speaker or author does not only aim at making the utterance aesthetically appealing (i.e. poetic), but also wishes to attract attention.

The metalinguistic function is not frequent but can be traced when verbal interjections are used to imitate the original code of language, i.e. when they mimic the onomatopoeia initially employed to depict a certain acoustic event. In this case, instead of poeticizing or being phatic, they convey information on another level (it is a meta-imitation of the original reference to the corresponding sound). As a matter of fact, this information does not deal with signaling emotions, either. For example, the expression *sdelat' tyap-lyap* can be translated into English as ‘to do (something) pell-mell (sloppily, in a slipshod way)’. Both *tyap* and *lyap* exist as onomatopoeias. *Tyap*, for example, can refer to a sound produced by a pickaxe, while *lyap* can stand for plopping of something liquid.

- (23) – *Vzyl i propil: i net tebe – “fuk”; i – voz’mu; i opyat’ zhe – prop’yu.*
[A. Belyi. Moskva, part 1: Moskovskii chudak (1926)]

‘I have just blown it on a booze: and it’s gone – “puff -INTJ”; and then I will do it again.’

Originally, *fuk* was used to imitate the sound of something flying past very fast or burning down. In this context it refers to items or goods disappearing in an instant, like money or valuables being swapped for a drink.

Finally, some of these words can be “ideophonic”, i.e. they may refer to an idea portrayed by a sound. Oswalt [Oswalt 1994, p. 302] offers the following example in English, in which the sound of Cupid’s arrow symbolizes love at first sight:

- (24) *Our eyes met. Zing! Cupid!* [Radio commercial (1985)]

The basic idea behind it is that such words are deemed to evoke vivid sensory imagery. Similar utterances can be found in the Russian National Corpus:

- (25) *Predstavlyaetsya takoi priyatnyi belokuryi obraz: pukhlen’kie shchechki, chulki ne sinie, a s kruzhavchikami, vidnymi v razreze yubki. Cok-cok, dobroe utro, mal’chiki!* [A.A. Matveeva. *Obstoyatel’stvo vremeni* (2012)]

‘Such a pleasant fair-haired image is drawn in mind: plump cheeks, stockings, and not deep blue but with embroidery, visible through the slit. Clank-clank, good morning, boys!’

- (26) *Shchelk – i menya net, mne teper’ èto ne nuzhno videt’, peremalyvat’, toskovat’.* [A. Ilichevskii. *Pers* (2009)]

‘Click-INTJ – and I do not exist anymore, now I do not need to see it, consider, and miss.’

In example (25) the sound of high heels clicking on the floor stands for an attractive young woman. The sound of a switch being turned off symbolizes death, as shown in example (26). When used in this function, these words offer a vivid image of the whole concept. They do not merely depict, but rather give an instantaneous stereographic projection of an idea or situation.

Conclusions

Onomatopoeic verbal interjections are used instead of ordinary words due to a number of factors. Simple morphological structure, transparent onomatopoeia-based meaning and syntactic mobility make them more economical, easy to process and rather frequent. At the same time, words like *bukh*, *stuk* and *bul'* are not that primitive. They tend to be contextually very complex. This paper demonstrates that onomatopoeic verbal interjections perform various pragmatic functions in discourse. With their help it is possible to depict natural sounds or indicate action connected to this sound; express mental or emotional states of the speaker; attract listener's attention; poetically stylize the utterance; imitate the original onomatopoeia in order to generate new meanings; depict an idea symbolized by a certain sound imitation.

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