

58th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea

- Call for Abstracts –

INSIGHTS INTO LEXICAL ICONICITY: ONOMATOPOEIA,  
IDEOPHONES, AND SOUND SYMBOLISM

**Workshop organisers:** Maria Flaksman (Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg) and Chris Smith (Université Caen Normandie)

**Keywords:** iconicity, onomatopoeia, ideophones, sound symbolism

**Submission of abstracts:** Provisional abstracts (300-word, excluding references) for 20-minute presentations should be submitted by **15 November 2024** to [maria.flaksman@uni-bamberg.de](mailto:maria.flaksman@uni-bamberg.de) and [chris.smith@unicaen.fr](mailto:chris.smith@unicaen.fr). We will inform all presenters of a preliminary acceptance of their abstracts before the workshop proposal is submitted to the SLE (which is 20 November 2024). If the workshop proposal is accepted, presenters will be asked to submit a 500-word abstract in EasyChair by 15 January 2025.

### Workshop description

After Charles Sanders Peirce (1940), *iconicity* is defined as a relationship of similarity between the signifier and the signified. Modern and ancient languages across the globe have a segment of their vocabulary which is distinctly iconic. In different linguistic traditions, words which exhibit some degree of form-meaning similarity are variously termed ‘ideophones’, ‘onomatopoeic words’, ‘mimetic words’, ‘expressives’, ‘sound symbolic words’, ‘phenomimes’, ‘phonomimes’, etc. (see Voronin [1982] 2006; Hinton et al. 1994; Anderson 1998; Voeltz et al. 2001; Moreno-Cabrera 2020; Akita & Pardeshi 2019; Körtvélyessy & Štekauer 2024). All these words are instances of lexical iconicity in the language (as opposed to, e.g., grammatical iconicity, a phenomenon when a natural sequence of events is replicated by order of words in a sentence (see Haiman 1985).

Study of iconic (imitative) words goes beyond lexicology. *Iconicity studies*, is a rapidly developing branch of linguistics. It employs methods of lexicology, phonetics and phonology, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, etymology, language typology, semiotics, semantics and pragmatics, and cognitive sciences.

*Lexical iconicity studies* focus on origin and evolution, typology, and function of imitative lexical elements both in modern (see Akita 2009, Dingemans 2012, Enckell & Rézeau 2003, Kakehi et al. 1998, Van Hoey &

Thompson 2020, and others) and ancient languages (Malkiel 1990; Flaksman 2024, and others). Also, iconicity deals with less evident cases of form-meaning similarity, such as sound symbolism, including phonaesthetic sound symbolism (Abelin 1999, Jespersen 1933, Ohala 1994; Smith 2016).

There is a great variation within the imitative lexicon, including the variation according to the degree of iconicity. There is a juxtaposition between non-lexicalised ideophones and more lexicalised ones. Thus, a non-lexicalised *zzz* is more iconic than a lexicalised *buzz*, a non-lexicalised *grr* is more iconic than the lexicalised *growl* (Anderson 1998: 335). The gradation according to degree of iconicity is revealed by means of psycholinguistics (Winter et al. 2024) and etymology (Flaksman 2024).

## **Workshop focus**

The focus of this workshop is *variation in lexical iconicity*. We welcome proposals on the linguistic description and comparison of different classes of imitative words (ideophones, onomatopoeic, and sound symbolic words) in languages from across the globe. Thus, we welcome a broad range of talks on all aspects of imitative forms including but not limited to the following:

### Word formation and lexical aspects

- borrowing of imitative words
- diachronic changes in imitative words
- onomasiological approaches to iconicity in the lexicon: are there pockets of the lexicon more represented by iconic words?

### Experimental studies

- cross-linguistic and experimental studies in sound symbolism
- experimental research on lexical iconicity
- frequency and exposure to iconic words in language learning
- the role of iconicity in structuring the lexicon of learners
- the crossmodal functions of iconicity from an embodiment perspective

### Corpus and discourse studies

- onomatopoeic or imitative words from a usage-based perspective in corpora
- the pragmatics of imitative words in interaction and in different genres
- the pragmatics of iconicity in mediated communication (CMC corpora, including emojis, memes, emoticons)
- morphosyntax and collocational behaviour of iconic words: phraseological aspects of iconicity

## Typology and theoretical challenges

- onomatopoeic words, their typology and classification
- phonaesthetic sound symbolism
- typology and classification of ideophones
- theoretical aspects of sound symbolism and imitative forms in languages: construction grammar approaches to meaning-form associations
- expressivity and markedness of iconic words; how do frequency, expressivity and innovation coexist alongside iconicity?
- the role of analogy and iconicity in the lexicogrammatical continuum

Thus, the workshop is envisioned as a platform for the discussion on differences and similarities between iconic words and related phenomena in languages from across the globe and on different approaches to their classification and research.

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