

**PHONETICAL MOTIVATION**

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***Annotation:*** *This work explores the concept of phonetical motivation in linguistics, focusing on how the sounds of words can be naturally associated with their meanings. Phonetical motivation refers to the phenomenon where there is a non-arbitrary, often iconic, link between the phonetic form of a word and the concept it denotes. The annotation discusses key examples from various languages, highlighting onomatopoeia and sound symbolism, and analyzes their relevance in word formation, language acquisition, and cognitive linguistics. Special attention is given to how phonetical motivation enhances memorability and emotional impact of words, especially in poetry, advertising, and child language.*

***Key words:*** *phonetical motivation, sound symbolism, onomatopoeia, linguistic motivation, word formation, iconicity, phonosemantics, language acquisition, non-arbitrariness, cognitive linguistics.*

### **Phonetic Motivation and Phonology**

Though the field of phonology has long operated more or less separately from that of phonetics, recently many phonologists (and phoneticians) have come to believe that phonological theory can be carried out much more elegantly when principles of phonetic motivation are taken into account, specifically considerations of ease of articulation and ease of perception (e.g., Jun, 1995; Hayes, 1999, 2004; Steriade, 2001a,b; Hayes & Steriade, 2004). Phonological processes motivated by ease of perception would have as their goal a greater perceptual distinction between contrasting elements in a phonological form, to make identification of the form easier for the listener. Processes motivated by ease of articulation would result in outputs that



require less overall effort on the part of the speaker to produce; i.e., they require a smaller degree of change in the position or movement of the articulators from segment to segment, or even within segments.

These two phonetic aims are often in competition with one another: when less effort is spent driving the articulators to distinct positions and locations, the result is a decline in perceptual and physical distinctness between adjacent segments, whereas more exaggerated—and hence distinctive—production of a segment requires greater energy expenditure to move the articulators precisely and quickly (Lindblom, 1983; Saltzman & Kelso, 1987; Saltzman & Munhall, 1989; Ohala, 1997; Kirchner, 2001). Current phonological theory is easily able to deal with this opposition, however, especially the theoretical framework of Optimality Theory, which has as its foundation the idea that different—and often conflicting—constraints are in competition with each other, but ranked or prioritized in such a way so as to pick the output for a particular form that best satisfies these constraints.

### Introduction

Language is not just a random collection of signs. While many words in most languages are considered arbitrary, there is a significant part of the vocabulary that is phonetically motivated. Phonetical motivation is a linguistic phenomenon where there is a natural or iconic link between the sound form of a word and its meaning. It is one of the types of linguistic motivation, alongside morphological and semantic motivation.

### Definition and Nature of Phonetical Motivation

Phonetical motivation refers to the way the sound of a word reflects, imitates, or symbolically represents its meaning. Unlike arbitrary words where the form does not indicate the meaning, phonetically motivated words give some hints about what they denote. This type of motivation is often found in sound-imitation words and words that contain symbolic sound elements.

### Types of Phonetical Motivation

#### 1. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the clearest example of phonetical motivation. These are words that imitate real-world sounds. Examples include:



Buzz (sound of a bee) Click (sound of a small mechanical part)

Bang (sound of an explosion)

Tick-tock (sound of a clock) In many languages, onomatopoeic words are similar because they are based on universal sound patterns recognized by humans.

## 2. Sound Symbolism

Sound symbolism goes beyond direct imitation. It is the idea that certain sounds evoke certain meanings or emotional responses. For example:

Words starting with gl- in English (glow, gleam, glitter) are often associated with light. High front vowels (like /i/) often appear in words that suggest smallness (tiny, little, mini), while back vowels (like /a/, /o/) appear in words related to largeness (large, broad, strong). These symbolic associations are not universal but appear across multiple languages and cultures, indicating a cognitive basis.

### Functions and Importance

Phonetical motivation plays several important roles in language:

Language acquisition: Young children often learn phonetically motivated words faster because the sound helps them guess the meaning.

Memory and recall: Words with natural sound-meaning connections are easier to remember.

Expressiveness: Writers and speakers use phonetically motivated words for stronger emotional and sensory impact.

Word formation: Even in modern languages, new words are sometimes created with phonetical considerations, especially in brand names and slang.

### Examples Across Languages

Phonetical motivation is not unique to English. For instance:

In Japanese, giongo and gitaigo are large classes of sound-symbolic words used in everyday speech.

In Russian, words like шуметь (to make noise) and жужжать (to buzz) show clear sound imitation.

In Uzbek, words such as gʻuvillamoq, shiqildamoq or pishillamoq also show strong phonetic links with meaning.





### **Criticism and Limitations**

While phonetical motivation is an important concept, it has its limitations. Not all words can be phonetically motivated. Most of a language's lexicon is still arbitrary. Moreover, phonetical associations can differ between languages and cultures, which limits their universality. However, within a single language community, such associations can be strong and productive.

### **Conclusion**

Phonetical motivation demonstrates that language is not entirely arbitrary. There are meaningful relationships between sound and meaning that aid in communication, expression, and learning. From onomatopoeia to sound symbolism, phonetically motivated words enrich the vocabulary and add an intuitive, often emotional, layer to language. Understanding this phenomenon helps linguists, educators, and learners appreciate the deeper connections between how we say things and what they mean.

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