

Japanese Onomatopoeia: Cosmetics and Skincare Products in Fashion Magazines

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【要旨】

日本語のオノマトペ

—ファッション雑誌のコスメおよびスキンケア商品の広告を中心に—
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本稿の目的は、エル・ジャポンというファッション雑誌のコスメとスキンケア広告や広告文におけるオノマトペの種類や特徴を明らかにすることである。今回、4冊のエル・ジャポンを調査した結果、「AっBり」型のオノマトペが多く使用されていることが分かった。一つの広告文の中に複数の「AっBり」型が見られた。商品の特徴を強調するために、使用されていた「AっBり」型は読者や消費者により強い印象を残すと言える。そして、今回の調査により三つのオノマトペの特徴が判明した。一つ目は、メイクに関するのせ方と塗り方の動作はさまざまなオノマトペで説明されていることである。二つ目は、商品の良さをさらにアピールするために、複数のオノマトペが並べて使用されることである。三つ目は、オノマトペとエクスクラメーションマークを一緒に使用して、さらなる強調の効果を読者に与えることである。このようにメイクやコスメ商品に多く使用されるオノマトペは、様々な感覚を直接消費者に伝えられるのである。

1. Introduction

In Japan, onomatopoeia or onomatopoeic words are frequently used in advertisements and products such as foods and drinks. Onomatopoeias are mostly printed on the packages of foods and drinks. For example, on a bread package, three onomatopoeias, *mochifuwa*, *mocchiri* and *funwari*, were used to refer to the texture of the bread as soft and doughy.

Apart from food and drink, onomatopoeias are also used in skincare products. From lip gloss to hair removal products, onomatopoeias can be seen printed on the packages of these items. Ayako SUZUKI

2. Purpose of study

This study aims to uncover the forms of onomatopoeias appearing in cosmetic and skincare product advertisements and descriptions in fashion magazines. The second aim is to look at the characteristics of the onomatopoeias found

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in those materials. The assumption is that the use of onomatopoeias is more appealing in cosmetics and skincare products as the onomatopoeias describe and deliver the sensation of the products to readers and consumers.

3. Literature Review

In Japanese, onomatopoeia is the generic term for *giongo* (擬音語), *giseigo* (擬声語) and *gitaigo* (擬態語). These three terms are the mimetic words." *Giongo* refer to words that mimic sounds. For example, *ton-ton* refers to the sound of light knocking on the door while *dondon* refers to the sound of a hard beating drum. *Giseigo* refer to words that mimic animal and human voices. For example, *wanwan* describes the barking of dogs. Apart from animals, crying human voices also fall into this category of onomatopoeia. *Gitaigo* refer to words that mimic states or manners. For example, *nikoniko* refers to someone smiling happily while *niyaniya* refers to someone grinning.

According to Hasada (1998), by using onomatopoeia one can convey various expressions and sensations. Japanese is also used in advertisements to convey the type of feeling that the product will bring to the consumers. Shiroshita (2010) points out that Japanese has more onomatopoeias as compared with the number onomatopoeias in English. Because Japanese onomatopoeias are used in various situations, they can be difficult to categorize precisely. However, using onomatopoeias helps consumers easily imagine or understand something.

4. Methodology

Four issues (February, April, August and November 2011) of the Japanese *Elle* were chosen for this study. For the method, sentences containing onomatopoeias were selected from the magazine, and are followed by discussion on the forms and characteristics of onomatopoeias found in the four magazines.

5. Result and discussion

The total number of pages of cosmetics and skincare products was 130 pages. These 130 pages had 87 onomatopoeias found with a total frequency of 262. In Japanese onomatopoeia, the five common forms are the CVCVCVCV form, CVCVQ form, CVCVri form, CVQCVri form and CVCVN form. The CVCVCVCV form refers to repetition of sound or movement, for example *kira kira* (radiant) and *fuwa fuwa* (soft). The CVCVQ form refers to instantaneous, speed or suddenness, for example *gurutto* (spin). The CVCVri form refers to completion or perfection, for example *sarari* (smooth) and *torori* (thick liquid). The CVQCVri form refers to emphasis or insistence, for example *sukkiri* (feel refreshed) and *shittori* (dampish). The CVCVN form refers to a reaction or reverberation after the initial movement, for example *tsurun* (smooth or glossy). According to Inose (2008), "C" shows a consonant and "V" a vowel, and the combination of "CV" is a syllable, or a mora. /N/ and /Q/ are phonemes and often used in onomatopoeic and mimetic expressions. /Q/ is not really a sound but the absence of it, which appears after a vowel and before consonants /p/, /t/, /s/ and /k/, for example the pause between [o] and [ki] in a word *pokkiri*. Although without a sound, it is considered as a mora, or a syllable, because it has the duration.

5.1. The onomatopoeia forms

Forms of onomatopoeias and their frequency in the four issues of the Japanese *Elle* can be seen in Diagram I.

Diagram I

Form	Number of forms	Frequency
CVCVCVCV	23	35
CVQCVri	15	99
CVCVQ	9	21
CVCVri	8	12
CVCVN	2	5

As seen in Diagram I, although the CVCVCVCV form has the highest number, the frequency of CVQCVri (a double consonant B + ri) form is greater than the CVCVCVCV form. In this study, my focus is the CVQCVri form. Some examples of the CVQCVri form found in the four issues of *Elle* are *shikkari* (firmly), *shittori* (dampish), *tappuri* (plenty), *sukkiri* (feel refreshed), *pittari* (just right), *mocchiri* (sticky), and *jikkuri* (thoroughly). In a single product description, the use of more than one onomatopoeia in this form can be seen.

5.2. Three characteristics of the onomatopoeias

Three characteristics of the onomatopoeias are found in the four issues of *Elle*. The first characteristic is the various forms of onomatopoeias used for describing the same action. The second characteristic is the use of two onomatopoeias joined together. The third is the use of onomatopoeias and the exclamation mark.

Regarding the first characteristic, different onomatopoeias used in the same action refer to different levels for how to apply the product. For example, in *nose kata* (のせ方) or way of applying the products, there are *shikkari nose* (しっかりとのせ) and *funwari to noseru* (ふんわりとのせる). These two phrases refer to foundation powder and how it should be applied. In contrast, in *nuri kata* (塗り方) or way of applying the products, four ways (i) *zakkuri to nutte* (ざっくりと塗って), (ii) *sasat to jika nuri* (ササッと直塗り), (iii) *sasat to nutte* (ささっと塗って), and (iv) *ponpon to hiyake dome wo nuri naoseru* (ポンポンと日焼け止めを塗り直せる) were found. The use of these onomatopoeias show different levels for how to apply and use the products. *Funwari* means to gently apply the product and *zakkuri* means to apply more aggressively. *Sasat to* refers to quickly applying the product. *Pon pon* can be interpreted as applying the product lightly onto the surface of the skin. From the examples, it is clear that using various forms of onomatopoeias in describing the same action shows different levels of product applications.

For the second characteristic, the use of two onomatopoeias joined together is found in the following examples: *sarasara funwari hada ni* (さらさらふんわり肌に) and *odoroku hodo mocchiri purupuru ni!* (驚くほどもっちりふるふるに!). In general, *mocchiri* is used to describe food texture and *purupuru* refers to elasticity or flexibility of jelly. Here both refer to the skin texture as being healthy and fresh-looking. The joining of two onomatopoeias creates new value for the products. The joined onomatopoeias also add to the merit of the products as the use of

two onomatopoeic words show and leave a better impression with consumers. Apart from that, the use of two onomatopoeias joined together delivers the sensation of a product directly to readers and consumers.

For the third characteristic, the use of onomatopoeias and an exclamation mark can be seen in the following examples: (i) *Eijingu kea mo bihaku kea mo bacchiri!* (エイジングケアも美白ケアもばっちり!), (ii) *Fuyu no kansou taisaku wa bacchiri!* (冬の乾燥対策はばっちり!), (iii) *Hada no koromo gae ni pittari!* (肌の衣替えにぴったり!), and (iv) *Shikku na aki no fasshon ni mo pittari!* (シックな秋のファッションにもぴったり!). *Bacchiri* in sentences (i) and (ii) means fit or sufficient. While *pittari* in sentences (iii) and (iv) means perfect, the use of the onomatopoeic words, *bacchiri* and *pittari*, with exclamation marks show reverberation as the exclamation mark stresses and emphasizes the products. This way of using onomatopoeic words with an exclamation mark is also seen as an abbreviation from having to elaborate further on the products. It gives the image of perfectness and the urge for getting the products.

5.3. Comparison between the Japanese *Elle* and the American *Elle*

Lastly, a comparison between the Japanese *Elle* and the American *Elle* was carried out. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary and The Thesaurus (p.718), onomatopoeia is defined as “the formation of names or words from sounds that resemble those associated with the object or action (e.g. cuckoo, sizzle).”

Diagram II

	Japan	U.S.
Number of pages	130	199
Number of onomatopoeias	87	1
Frequency of onomatopoeias	262	1

As indicated in Diagram II, the allocation of pages for cosmetics and skincare products is higher in the American *Elle*. However, only one onomatopoeia, which is the word *twinkle*, was found in one of the cosmetic product descriptions.

Although there was only one onomatopoeic word found in the American *Elle*, commonly used words and phrases were found. Some of these words carry the same meaning as that of the Japanese onomatopoeic words. For example, sentences that contain the word *rich* are as follows:

(1) Our most luxuriously *rich* color. (Italics here and below inserted for emphasis)

Our most intensely *rich* hydration. (lipstick advertisement)

(2) *Rich* in shea butter and jojoba seed oil. (lip gloss advertisement)

(3) It's a *perfect* collision of color and moisture.

How *perfect*! (lipstick advertisement)

(4) Effortlessly even, *perfectly* bright. (eye-shadow advertisement)

As appeared in examples 1 and 2, the word rich here carries the same meaning as *tappuri*, which means plenty. The word perfect in 3 and 4 has the same meaning as *pittari* (perfect) and *bacchiri* (fit, sufficient).

Apart from these examples, there are also examples in which the phrases carry the meaning of the Japanese onomatopoeic words such as below.

(5) Try the lightweight Clean Formula that's just *right for you*. (cleansing cream advertisement)

(6) Foundation-phobes, *this one's for you*. (moisturizer advertisement)

The phrase 'right for you' in 5 and 'this one's for you' in 6 are similar to the Japanese onomatopoeic words *bacchiri* and *pittari*, which mean perfect.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, from an advertisement perspective, the function of an ad is to leave a positive impression with consumers. That is why an appropriate selection of words is considered necessary. Japanese onomatopoeias are able to deliver the sensation of products to readers and consumers. Apart from delivering a positive impression and identifying the best features of various products, Japanese onomatopoeias also show a different kind of product application directly to readers and consumers.

Thus, the use of onomatopoeias in cosmetic products is necessary to deliver various different feelings and sensations to consumers.

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