

A Study of the Changes of Meaning of Onomatopoeia in Literary Works of the Meiji and Taisho Periods, with Special Attention to the Relationship between Words of Japanese Origin and Words of Chinese Origin

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This paper discusses the changes of meaning of onomatopoeia in literary works of the Meiji and Taisho periods, and analyzes these changes and how and why they occurred.

The first chapter deals with previous studies of the Japanese “sound symbolism,” showing the relationship between meanings and the sound of onomatopoeia. Changes in the naming of onomatopoeia are examined in order to identify the viewpoints of previous scholars. How the Chinese-origin onomatopoeic words have been treated in literary works, compared with those of Japanese origin is examined. Lastly the meaning of onomatopoeia, especially words with multiple meanings, is explained in order to clarify the original standpoint of this paper: to consider the changes of meaning of some specific examples of onomatopoeia in connection with other words which are semantically and morphologically related.

The second chapter discusses how and why onomatopoeic words with multiple meanings in the Meiji and Taisho periods have come to bear their present meanings. For example, the multiple meanings of “MAJIMAJI” are divided into the two words. One is the phonologically similar word, “MOJIMOJI” meaning “being restless.” The other is the morphologically related word, “MANJIRI,” meaning “being sleepless.” As a result, the meaning of “MAJIMAJI” has been delimited mean “to stare at something.” A second example, “WAKUWAKU”, originally had a wide range of meanings; however, the word eventually shed all meanings but one. The word, “WAKUWAKU”, had acquired the positive sense of expectation from its connection with the synonyms, “DOKIDOKI”, and “UKIUKI,” and then lost the physical meaning of “trembling” in its connection with “WANAWANA.” A third example takes up the two words, “UTTORI”, and “UKKARI,” which were the synonymous in the Edo period. Although the word, “UTTORI”, had taken on a positive meaning, “UKKARI” had come to have a negative meaning. Both the Chinese, “BOUZEN”, and the Japanese, “BONYARI”, had affected the meanings of “UTTORI” and “UKKARI” because of a semantic resemblance. The morphological influence of “UTOUTO” and UKAUKA” on “UKKARI” is also considered. Finally, that the changes of the meaning of onomatopoeic words had been based upon the rule of eliminating ambiguity, and that the words and expressions in the literary works written in the Meiji and Taisho periods would explain such a phenomenon, is clarified. These examples show that the changes of meaning have solved the problem

of ambiguity of words with multiple meanings.

The third chapter discusses how the onomatopoeic words of Japanese-origin were related with those of Chinese origin in the Meiji period. First, Onomatopoeic words in novels written in the first half of the Meiji period are discussed. *Ukigumo*, one of the most important novels in that age, reveals that numerous onomatopoeic words of Chinese-origin had been used to make up for a lack of the Japanese words which express sentimental feelings. An examination of other novels written in the first half suggests that this tendency was not restricted to *Ukigumo*. Second, novels in the latter half of the Meiji period are examined. They show that the ratio of onomatopoeic words of Japanese-origin had increased while that of Chinese had relatively decreased. This resulted because Japanese onomatopoeic words, once regarded as slang, had been established as legitimate vocabulary for use in novels. Third, in order to examine the relationship between words of Chinese origin and of Japanese, other examples are considered: those are, “SHINTO”, “SHINSHIN” and “HISSORI” which express “stillness”, and “MOKUZEN” and “MUTTURI” which mean “silence.” In the second half of the Meiji period, some onomatopoeic words of Chinese origin were incorporated into Japanese while others were replaced with Japanese words.

The fourth chapter suggests that the modernization of descriptions in the novels is related to changes of meaning. By comparing the onomatopoeic expressions of “crying in tears” and “laughter” used from the Heian through the Taisho periods, with non-onomatopoeic expressions, it is clear that realistic description had developed in the onomatopoeic expressions, while the more precise and minute descriptions had developed in non-onomatopoeic expressions. This means that the development of the onomatopoeic method of expressing crying in tears and laughter showed the same tendency as the development of modern sentences where more precise and more concrete expressions had been highly evaluated. That is why onomatopoeic words need to avoid ambiguity and denote rather than connote.

Two conclusions are reached regarding changes of the meaning of onomatopoeic words in literary works of the Meiji and Taisho periods: one is that ambiguity of meaning was eliminated because words of Japanese origin were preferred to words of Chinese origin; and ambiguity of meaning was eliminated because modern novels preferred more accurate descriptions.