

## Onomatopoeia, Echoism (James Murray) and Sound Symbolism

Personal Pronouns: *me*, *mine* retains the sound, *you*, *thou*, *thee* throws it out; *they* throws it out obliquely.

—*i* sounds express smallness, lightness or daintiness: bit, child (orig. [i]), chink, chit, kid, little, pigmy, slit, tip, wee, twee, teeny, teeny-weeny and —y and —ie diminutives such as baby, doggy, pussy and other examples of hypocorisma. Also related are doubles such as ding-dong, tick-tock, flip-flop, with the first element suggesting lightness, the second solidity. Think of the difference between creak and crack, squeak and squawk, squeal and squall.

Echoism is more obvious with consonants, especially where repeated. The impression is slow with long vowels, quick with short ones: murmur, bubble. Long vowels reflect drawn-out movements. P, t and k feature in words with quick action, such as clutch, kick, pitch, tap, especially monosyllabic ones. Monosyllables with an explosive ending give the impression of an action brought to a sudden stop—clip, clap, knock, pop, rap, slap, snap, snip, stop—while a fricative ending suggests a slow stop: clash, dash, splash, smash, swish etc. Often where a word doesn't fit the rule it has changed in its history: twitch and itch, which end with a spirant, used to end with a k. A liquid consonant at the end suggests an even more dragged-out ending: murmur, rumble.

A dull and heavy ending is suggested by —mp: bump, slump, etc. Bl- suggests inflation, perhaps because you have to inflate your cheeks to pronounce: bladder, blast, bloated, blow, bubble, balloon. Fl- suggests hurry or quick movement: flash, flee, fling, fly, flee, flicker, flounce, flurry, and has a clumsy variation with flop and flounder. —ump also suggests awkwardness of movement, as in bump, clump, stump, dump, lump, slump, thump. Kw- is associated with shaking: quake, quagmire, quaver, quiver.

St- words suggest stability: stable, stand, staunch, steadfast, steady—but stutter, stammer, stumble. Gr- suggests complaint: grumble, gripe, grouse, growl, grudge, groan, grunt. Words beginning skr- tend to express and loud outcry: scream, screech; shriek originally began this way. Wh- suggests a sound not expressed in words: whisper, whistle. In whisper the voiceless fricative subdues the sound.

The names of birds often suggest the sound they make: cuckoo, kittiwake; crow was originally *crawe*, making the caw sound.