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## Tackling the Problem of Translation of Turkish Phonetically Motivated Units

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*The article is dedicated to the problem of Turkish-English phonosemantic parallels from the point of translation. In past researches were likely to view iconic units as untranslatable ones, which led to a variety of problems in the process of translation. Translation of these language units from Turkish into English may become much more challenging as we face two typologically different languages, which morphology barely has anything in common. Although Turkish onomatopoeic and symbolic words comprise a remarkable part of the language, there are still little efforts made to examine them properly. These units were predominantly examined in connection with the problem of some word-formation ways (mainly reduplication). However, methods applied in phonosemantics provide a translator with efficient tools, which allow preserving these units in a target language.*

*Keywords: phonosemantics, Turkish language, iconic, onomatopoeic words, translatability, translation methods, sound symbolism, reduplication.*

*Research area: philology.*

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### Introduction

Phonetically motivated words have always represented rather a tricky issue for translatology. Although recognised as language universals, these linguistic units still can bear remarkable cultural and phonetic differences and are manifested in different languages in a variety of different ways.

Despite first phonosemantic studies date back to ancient times, phonetically motivated lexis has acquired the status of language universal only in the second part of the XX century. Probably it could have happened earlier if not a strong dedication to F. de Saussure's idea of arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. Since then a lot of efforts have

been made in order to form a clear and consistent classification of the units. One of the most precise and wide universal classification applicable to the majority of currently existing languages belongs to the Russian scientist S.V. Voronin, who divided the phonetically motivated cluster into two large groups: sound imitating and sound symbolic units. He also formulated the main phonosemantic universal – every language possesses three classes and two hyperclasses of sound imitating words (S.V. Voronin; 2006).

So, if sound imitating and sound symbolic units are an integral part of any language, we could assume that in the process of translation the equivalent of phonetically motivated unit can be

easily found in a target language, but we would be wrong. In practice the process of translation can be quite perplexing and not as easy as it seems at a first glance, especially when dealing with Turkish which is very rich with sound imitating and sound symbolic units both in everyday speech and literature works. A lot of Turkish imitations turn out to have no direct dictionary equivalents and are either given a description instead of a clear definition or are not mentioned in bilingual dictionaries at all.

Until nowadays there is some very scarce volume of scientific works dealing with problem of translation of sound motivated units generally. In the Turkish language, these units are basically viewed as the part of the problem of reduplication (Koca E., 2008). But there is still little light thrown onto the problem of translatability. Studies in a field of translatology mainly touch the English language (Voronin S.V., Pago A.D., 1995; Beloglazova Ye.B, Bartashova, O.A., 2011; Bartashova, O.A., 2002; Razumovskaya, V., 2006).

The current paper mainly tackles the issue of translation of Turkish imitations into English. Translation within this language pair can be especially puzzling. As we have mentioned above, being a linguistic universal, imitations are dramatically dependent on syntactical structure and articulation basis of the language. Minding the differences between these typologically different languages, our goal is to show how the question of translation can be reconciled theoretically and in practice.

### **Theoretical framework. Classification of phonetically motivated words**

Many classifications have appeared since strong interest towards iconic units emerged. Although one of the first attempts to describe iconic phenomenon systematically is connected with such names as W. von Humboldt's and M. Flyxe,

finding the most adequate classification is rather challenging. The first universal scientifically grounded classification was made by Russian scientist Voronin S.V., who also was the first to draw clear distinction between the two clusters of the iconic lexis: sound imitative words and sound symbolic words. This universal classification was adapted to the needs of translation and the following classification, though simplified, but suitable for translation was suggested:

1. Sound imitation
2. Sound symbolism
  - a. Synesthetic (transfer sense perception → feeling/emotion)
  - b. Synesthemic (cross-sensory factor) (Bartashova O.A., Beloglazova Ye.V., 2011)

In this classification the researches, following Voronin's ideas, wanted to put an emphasis on the necessity to draw a clear and distinct boundary between the sound imitation and sound symbolism which are phenomena different in the type and degree of connection between the sound and the meaning.

Talking about Turkish iconic elements, it is necessary to highlight that studies dedicated to the subject of iconic elements are few. Despite synthetic and agglutinative languages (which Turkish language exactly is) tend to form a sufficient amount of phonetically motivated lexis due to their morphological structure, scientific papers on problem of iconicity are rare.

In Russian tradition one of the first attempts to classify Turkish iconic elements belongs to Prof. N.I. Asmarin, who gave a theoretical basis and a vast classified material of "mimes" in Turkic languages. The first detailed description of Turkish iconic elements was performed by soviet turcologist N.K. Dmitriev. He divided the whole cluster of Turkish iconic elements into five large groups on the basis of the type of connection between the meaning and sound. These are:

1) Sound imitations. Constitute the most high profile in volume. Figuratively express the sounds made by inanimate objects and elements, as well as living beings.

Ex .: pit pit (eng.: pit-a-pat)

püfleme (eng.: to puff)

dırdır (eng.: chatter)

mırıldamak (eng.: to mumble)

2) Imitation of the phenomena of light and movement. In Turkish are conveyed with special words.

Ex .: pırıldamak (eng.: to sparkle)

pırıl pırıl (eng.: shiny)

parlamak (eng.: to flare)

3) Imitation of natural phenomena within a living organism. Reproduced by different sounds, depending on the organ in which these phenomena occur.

Ex .: sızı (eng.: nagging pain)

sancı (eng.: acute pain)

4) Imitation of baby talk. Baby talk are the words that accompany the movement of a child.

Ex .: ninni (eng.: lullaby)

tototo (eng.: babbling)

This classification was one of the first to describe Turkish iconic units. Although the classification embraces vast layer of iconic lexis, it was still rather puzzling. For instance, there is no division between symbolic and imitative units, so that both phenomena are recognized as one and the same (e.g.: sound symbolic words describing light fit into the category of imitations; symbolic words for different kinds of pain are described as imitations of the sounds within a living organism).

In Turkish linguistic tradition Prof. Dr. Hamza Zülfikar constructed his classification on a morphological ground, as these iconic units as he states (H. Zülfikar, 1995) follow special ways of word-formation, which are not typical for the language in general. It is also very important to point out that he does not differentiate between

the two classes of iconic elements, viewing both as onomatopes (sound imitations). He also provides his study “Türkçede Ses Yansımali Kelimeler” with a considerable dictionary of more than 10 000 iconic units. The classification is the following:

1) Primary sound imitations (birincil biçimler) represent the smallest indivisible sound imitative units, which are always monosyllabic. E.g .: caz – hissing sound of oil droplets that fell on the hot pan, hık – sobbing when crying, yırt – the sound of tearing cod. This type of words is particularly prone to reduplication, for example, civciv – chirping of a chick. Both reduplicated and not they can be used with verbs (main and auxiliary), for example, mit mit etmek – speak very softly.

2) Secondary sound imitations (ikincil biçimler). Formed by affixation of primary sound imitations. Usually adding affixes -ıl, -ır, -ış and their phonetic variants (-il, -ul, -ül; -ir, -ur, -ür; -iş, -uş, -üş). For example, mışıl mışıl – wheezing sound of a sleeping man. Typically in a sentence perform the function of adverbial modifier when added to a verb.

3) Sound imitative derivatives (türevler biçimler). Can be formed from primary and secondary sound imitations in different configurations: with the help of various types of reduplication or affixation. It is divided in its turn into two groups: the first group forms the verbs, and the second group forms the nouns.

The first group includes sound imitative verbs formed from:

a) primary sound imitative roots: ağla- “to cry”, vızla- “to buzz”, haykır- “to exclaim”;

b) primary reduplicated sound imitative roots: hır hır et- “to wheeze”, mız mızlan- “to whine”;

c) secondary sound imitative roots: horulda- “to snore”, cıpıla- “to splash”, mıla- “to sing”, kakıldaş- “to cluck”;

d) secondary reduplicated sound imitative roots: *hopur hopur hopla-* “to jump impatiently”, *zangır zangır titre-* “to shake”, *cırım cırım et-* “to break apart”;

The second group consists of sound imitative words derived from:

a) primary sound imitative roots: *bağırğan* “a crybaby, whiner”, *cılbık* “liquid sloshing mud”, *badrak* “bully”;

b) secondary sound imitative roots: *carılıt* “light noise”, *şapıldak* “chatterbox”, *cakıldak* “gossiper” (H. Zülfikar, 1995).

As we see, iconic elements in Turkish have a dramatically large number of word-formation ways and represent a highly productive word’s cluster (as H. Zülfikar claims) and, thus, require various tactics while converting them into another language.

### Seemingly untranslatable

Until recently researchers have tended to view iconic elements as untranslatable ones. This fact was directly connected with the way the term “untranslatable” was treated at the time – words of a source language having no regular dictionary equivalents in a target language. Though there are numerous works dedicated to this issue, a translator can still find the situation quite a puzzling one.

The situation is getting even worse when we are entitled to deal with iconic elements of the two languages – Turkish/English, which barely have anything in common regarding their morphology and articulation basis. One of the first clear and universal translation strategy belongs to S.V. Voronin, who introduced a method of phonosemantic analysis (S.V. Voronin; 2006). The scientist suggested that the equivalence when translating onomatopoeic units should be established at the level of phonosemantic models (S.V. Voronin, A.D. Pago, 1995), i.e. if finding the equivalent word in target language

is possible, a translator should find a word of the same phonosemantic model that can be identified as a result of phonosemantic analysis. While performing phonosemantic analysis, it would be a mistake to use an old comparative method at the level of separate phonemes, because of huge difference in articulation basis of Turkish and English languages. It’s either a phonostheme, or a phonemotype that are in focus of the analysis, as “significant phonetic differences usually turn out to be minor or completely absent if we manage to see a specific (psycho) acoustic type of each phoneme within sound imitative word” (Bartashova O.A., 1987). In other words, “if one considers the correlated elements of different languages using phonosemantics methodology it becomes evident that they are commonly based on one and the same phonemotype” (Bartashova O.A., 2010). For instance, Turkish verb *tir tir titremek* and the English one *tremble*, at a first glance do not look like equivalents, which they in fact are. They both have vibrant –r conveying vibration movements and plosive –t in the beginning. Though Turkish sound imitation does not contain specific iterative affix, it is compensated by reduplication of the root. To speak about sound imitative words in this light, they are less difficult to translate, as the connection between the sound and the meaning is more obvious than in sound symbolic words. Therefore, “a dictionary equivalent, being the standard form for imitating a certain kind of sound, is the adequate way of translating regular sound imitations” (Bartashova, 2011).

One more translation strategy basing on phonosemantics methodology was proposed by N.M. Yermakova in her work dedicated to phonosemantic parallels in translation. She also followed the strategy of phonosemantic analyses. As it was mentioned in the theoretical part of the study, translation equivalents may be as follows:

sound imitative equivalent of the same phonotype as the original; sound imitative equivalent of other phonotype than the source one and, finally, the equivalent of non-imitative nature (N. M. Yermakova, 1993). This strategy may be applied to sound symbolic elements as well.

In case no sound symbolic equivalent can be found, there are still some ways to render them into another language. The strategy was introduced by M. Flyxe, who considers the following ways of transformation: by an adverb, by paraphrase or by simply omitting the iconic element in the target language.

Although it is preferable to preserve the iconicity, it should be taken into account that the stylistic norms regarding iconicity and imitations vary from language to language. Whereas the usage of iconic elements in standard language in some countries can be a complete norm and is even desirable in literature language, it can be barely acceptable for other languages.

In English reduplicated onomatopoeies can be referred to the sound like a baby talk and, thus, inappropriate to use in literature, while in Turkish such clusters are highly productive, frequently used and even have specific word-formation ways. It is also morphology as well that should be in focus, as there is no need in simply copying reduplicated structure of the original iconic unit if this type of word-formation is not frequent in a target language.

Iconic units can even be omitted without ruining the stylistic features of the original text, if they have undergone the process of demotivisation and, as the result, are no longer seen by native speakers as iconic signs.

To sum up, Turkish iconic elements can be rendered in the following ways:

- can be omitted (if primary phonetic motivation has faded);
- finding a dictionary equivalent (in case it is a frequent sound imitation);

- iconic elements comprised of reduplicated interjection added to an iconic verb (ex.: tir tir titremek) can be compensated with an adverb;
- finding an equivalent of similiar phonosemantic model.

### Translating Turkish literature

The further discussion is to show how the above mentioned strategies can be performed on practice. The following investigation of translation of Ferit Orhan Pamuk's novels "My Name is Red" (Benim Adım Kırmızı) and "The Black Book" (Kara Kitap) demonstrates problems and solutions, which a translator may embrace while translating iconic units. Let us examine closer some of the abstaracts:

1) Şehre giren bir geminin bana **pırır** selam yollayarak indirilen yelkenleri Haliç'in yüzeyiyle aynı kurşuni sis rengindeydi [Benim Adım Kırmızı].

*An approaching ship, whose sails were being lowered, greeted me with a **flutter** of canvas.*

In this sentence we face sound symbolic reduplicated interjection *pırır*, which is a variant of interjection *fırır*, which usually denotes light and fretful movements connected with air. Sevan Nişanyan's online dictionary shows iconic status of this unit: "**pırır** – ▼ <1400 [TTü] pırlamak fırlamak veya uçmak

▼ 1797 [TTü] pırpır/fırır fırladık adı verilen çocuk oyuncağı. : onom • *Fır/fırır/fırıl* yansıma ses grubunun varyant biçimidir. **Benzer sözcükler:** pırpır, pırt, pırtla-, pırtlak, pırtlat- **Bu maddeye gönderenler:** fır (fıldır, fırladık, fırla-, fıttır-); "fır – ▽ <1500 [KTü] fır yel sesi, uçma sesi ▽ 1720 [TTü] fırfır dönerek uçan bir tür havai fişek ▽ 1876 [TTü] fırl fırl telaş sesi, deli ifadesi. : onom → pır • Daha eski biçim *pırır* olmalıdır. **Benzer sözcükler:** fırır, fırdolayı, fırdöndü, fırfır, fırl, fırl fırl, fırt. **Bu maddeye gönderenler:** fıldır, fırladık, fırla-, fıttır-".

Sound symbolic characteristics of *pır* is also acknowledged by H.Zülfikar in his dictionary (H.Zülfikar, 1995) and has the meaning of sound made with bird wings (*pır* – kuş kanatlarının çıkardığı sesi anlattır).

According to online Turkish-English dictionary Tureng, interjection *pır* *pır* has the following meaning: whirr; whiz; flutter.

Sound symbolism of an English verb *flutter*, chosen by the translator, was proved by a number of scientists. Researcher Aza Abelin, who focused her phonosemantic studies on phonaesthemes of Swedish language, noticed that similar phonaesthemes are functioning in English. For instance, the scientist came up to conclusion that a combination of phonemes /fl-/ conveys light movement (Aza Abelin; 1999). The same peculiarity of this phonaestheme was highlighted by Otto Jespersen. In his opinion, this combination marks the meaning of light movement in such words as flow, flake, flutter, flicker, fling (Otto Jespersen; 1958). Margaret Magnus in her dissertation work clarified that /fl-/ phonaestheme in initial position is mainly connected with movements predominantly in air and water environments (M. Magnus; 2001). Speaking about etymology, present iterative verb has the same source as the other sound symbolic units with initial /fl-/: “*flutter* – Old English floterian “to flutter, fly, flicker, float to and fro, be tossed by waves,” frequentative of flotan “to float” (see float (v.)). Related: Flattered; fluttering. As a noun from 1640s; meaning “state of excitement” is 1740s” (<http://www.etymonline.com>).

As the result of conducted analysis we can admit that the translator managed to find equivalent bearing sound symboling nature and perform the translation at the level of psycho-acoustic types.

The next abstract demonstrates equivalence as well.

2) Karanlığın içinde, daha ötede Kayzer Wilhelm’e bağlı bir zırhlının paslı çapası olacak; sedifleşmiş bir televizyon ekranı bana göz **kırpacak** [Kara Kitap].

*In the darkness just beyond, there will be the rusting anchor from a warship that once belonged to Kaiser Wilhelm; there were a pearly white television screen will **blink** at me.*

In this microcontext Turkish sound symbolic verb *kırpmak* was rendered with English sound symbolic verb *blink*. According to online Turkish-English dictionary Tureng (<http://tureng.com>), this verb has the following meaning: wink; blink; twine; twinkle; wink off. Iconicity of both of the verbs is highlighted in etymological studies, as well as in researches of some scientists. Iconic status of the focus unit is mentioned in Sevan Nişanyan’s online dictionary: “*kırpmak* – <? ETü kırkesmek +Ip- <ETü \*k1- kesmek → kır- ● Orijinal biçimin *kıp-*, *kırp-* veya *kırk-* biçimlerinden hangisi olduğunu anlamak zordur. Ancak *kıptı/kıptu* (makas) Türk dillerinde neredeyse evrenseldir”. Presumably derived from symbolic interjection *kıpır* (*kıpır* – ∇ <1500 [KTü] kılıpıda- kısa erimli ve sürekli hareket etmek : onom **Benzer sözcükler:** kıpırda-, kıpırdak, kıpırtı). Iconic status is also shown in Z. Zülfikar’s dictionary: *kırpmak* 1. *Kırkmak* 2. *Kıpmak* – TSöz. *Kırkmak* – bir şeyi uçlarından kesmek, *Kıpmak* – gözü çabucak kapayıp açmak. To sum up, the word has a general meaning of short and frequent movements.

Connection of the english verb with iconic lexis was proved in works of Margaret Magnus, who paid particular attention to the combination of phonemes /bl/ in initial position: often phonaestheme /bl/ conveys the meaning of insufficient light, blinking or complete absence of light.

*Towards etymology of the English unit:* “blink (v.) – 1580s, perhaps from Middle Dutch

blinken “to glitter,” of uncertain origin, possibly, with German blinken “to gleam, sparkle, twinkle,” from a nasalized form of base found in Old English blican “to shine, glitter” (see bleach (v)). Middle English had blynke (c.1300) in the sense “a brief gleam or spark,” perhaps a variant of blench “to move suddenly or sharply; to raise one’s eyelids” (c.1200), perhaps from the rare Old English blencan “deceive.” Related: Blinkered; blinking. The last, as a euphemism for a stronger word, is attested by 1914”.

This translation shows definite equivalence, though the units follow different phonosemantic model and vary in meaning. The English iconic element has more specified meaning of discretion of light, while the Turkish one has the meaning of discretion in general, not necessarily of light. For instance, similar verb kırılmak simply means to cut.

The last example demonstrates how iconic unit can be paraphrased:

3) Gece yarısı karanlıkta uyanıp, göz gözünü görmez odada **tıkırtılar** çıkaran başka birisi olduğunu farketmenin dehşeti! [Benim Adım Kırmızı].

*The horror of waking in the black of night to realize there’s a stranger making faint sounds as he creeps about the blackness of the room!*

In this fragment the translator transforms the focus Turkish onomatopoeic *tıkırtılar* by replacing it with a word combination *faint sounds*. Turkish onomatopoeic noun derived from secondary sound imitative root *tıkır*, which in its turn was formed from interjection *tık* (*tık*: onom → tak<sup>2</sup>

**Benzer sözcükler:** mığır, tık tık, tıkır, tıkır para, tıkır tıkır, tıkırda-, tıkırında, tıkırtı, tıkla-, tıngır, tıngır mığır, tıngır tıngır, tıngırda-, tıngırtı). This noun is also mentioned in Zülfikar’s dictionary (tıkırtı – tıkırdama sesi). Online Turkish-English dictionary offers the following dictionary equivalents: rattle; click; tick; tap; clack.

Although the translator did not preserve iconic component, the translator resorts to paraphrasing by adding to a noun *sounds*, which only conveys the lexical meaning of Turkish onomatopoeic, adjective *faint*, which successfully demonstrates qualitative peculiarities of the focus onomatopoeic.

Thus, translator managed to convey the original meaning fully. However, this paraphrasing does not preserve sound imitative aspect.

### Conclusion

Despite significant differences between Turkish and English, the present paper has shown some possible ways to solve the problem of translatability of iconic elements in this language pair.

As it was shown, translation should not be performed automatically by simply finding a dictionary equivalent. Phonosemantics methodology is to be used when dealing with iconicity.

Although we tried to throw some light on translation of Turkish iconic elements, there is still a strong sense that we have barely scratched the surface and further scientific studies are highly desirable.

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## **Проблема перевода турецкой звукоизобразительной лексики**

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*Данная статья посвящена проблемам перевода турецких звукоподражательных и звукоименных единиц средствами английского языка. Несмотря на то что в прошлом данные единицы языка рассматривались в основном как безэквивалентные, современные методы исследования, предлагаемые фоносемантикой, предоставляют переводчику различные методы перевода данных лексических единиц. Проведение фоносемантического и этимологического анализов позволяет подобрать в языке перевода наиболее близкий по фоносемантической модели эквивалент, который поможет максимально сохранить акустический тип оригинальной звукоизобразительной единицы. В качестве материала для данного исследования были выбраны романы Ферита Орхана Памука ("Kara Kitap", "Benim Adım Kırmızı").*

*Ключевые слова: звукоизобразительность, звукоподражательная лексика, звукоименная лексика, фоносемантика, турецкий язык, фонемотип, фоностема, переводоведение.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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