

**University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, Setif2**

**Faculty of Letters and Languages**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**Second Year Classes- Études de. Textes**

# **Textuality, Orality and Iconicity**

## **-PART TWO-**

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## Lesson Two: Oral and Iconic Sequences

Being the first learnt code by humans, sound is one of the oldest systems of communication. It is sometimes described metaphorically as "big", "sweet" or "piercing". The sounds that exist in English language cannot be represented accurately by the Roman alphabet. Consequently, linguists use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to represent sounds produced by a speaker of English with a Received Pronunciation Accent (RP) which is used by British national TV journalists instead of using local accents. English sounds are divided in IPA into 24 consonants and 20 vowels.

### 2.1. Oral Features of a Text:

What we say is important but the way we say it is more important. Some accents are socially regarded as prestigious while others are prejudiced. The exertion of power through accent is known in all parts of the world and it leads some speakers to resort to what linguists term as "hypercorrection" which appears as intentional modifications in one's dialect to resemble a prestigious one and gain social acceptance. For example, during the 1960's, the American

linguist William Labov ("Hypercorrection by the Lower Middle Class as Factor in Linguistic Change", 1966) noticed that lower-middle class speakers were imitating the pronunciation of upper classes by doing hypercorrection practices such as the use of more rhotic pronunciation: (pronounce "r" as /ha:rd/ instead of /ha:d/).

### Time to Think!

Think how IPA differentiates between: through, cough, thorough and ought. -

### Onomatopoeia:

When words are created to imitate the sounds they make, we call it

Onomatopoeia. The child's first language is described as cooing and words such as splash, boom and buzz imitate the sound made. However, the same sound can be formed into different words in different languages as shown in the following figure that illustrates the names of the sound of watch in different languages.

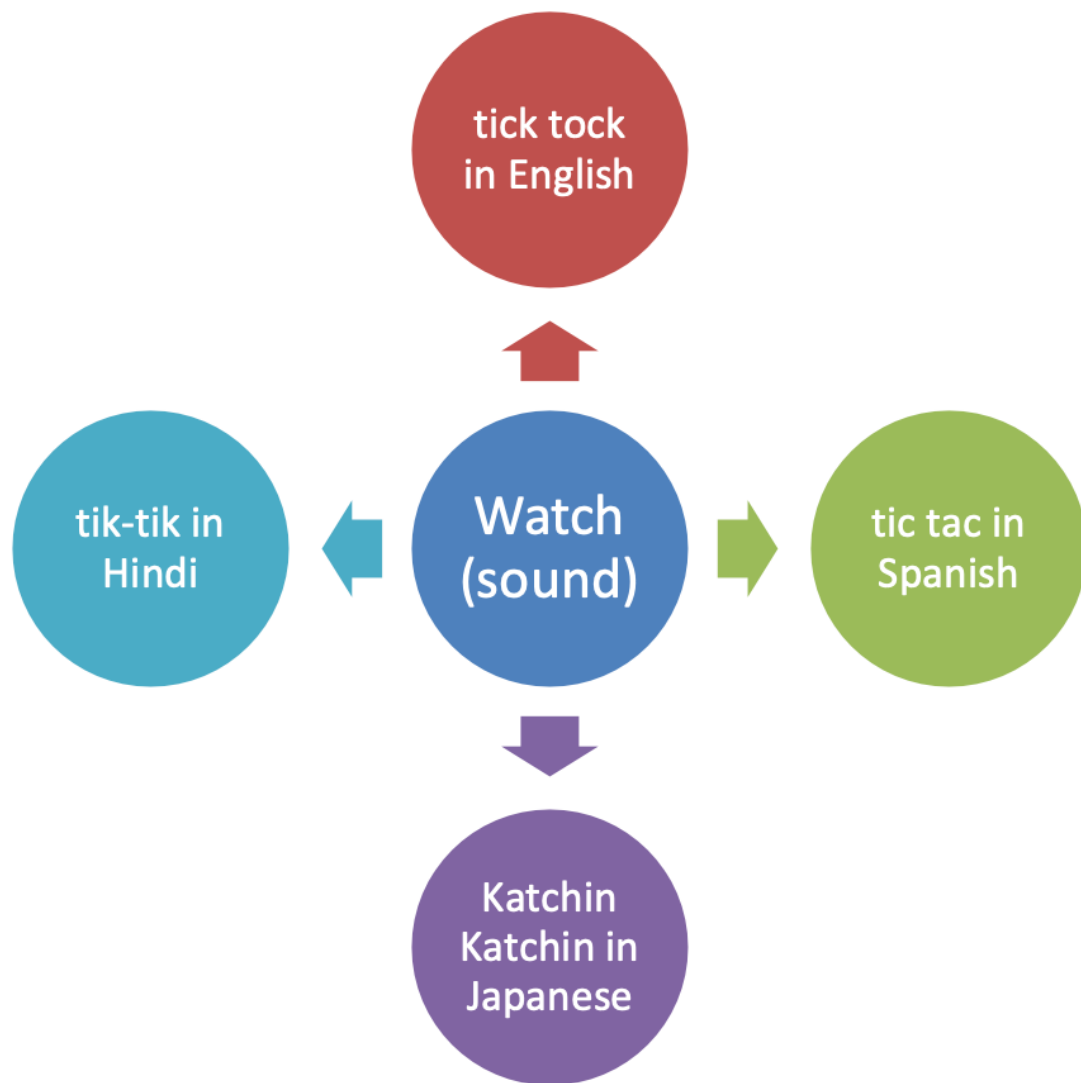


Figure 1: Onomatopoeia of the Watch Sound in Different Languages

Onomatopoeia is widely used in comic books and advertisements and some comic writers invent new words to represent noises. However these words are closely linked to their context, which means they cannot be understood out of context like animal noises.

### -The Sound Effects of Texts:

Texts have sound effects and the choice of words that contain certain sounds creates specific effects on the readers. In *Working with Texts*, Ronald Carter et al provided a categorisation of sound effects in texts which is adapted in figure2.

<b>Voiced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Louder</li> <li>• Heavier</li> </ul>
<b>Voicless</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Softer</li> <li>• Lighter</li> </ul>
<b>Plosives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banging</li> <li>• Striking/ Tapping</li> </ul>
<b>Fricatives and Affricates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friction</li> <li>• Hissing/ Scratching</li> </ul>
<b>Nasals and Approximants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous sound or motion</li> <li>• Flowing/ Rippling/Humming</li> </ul>

### 2.1.1. Prosodic Elements: Intonation and Stress

Spoken interaction involves more than words; it is a combination of eye contact, gestures and pronunciation. The use of some features including intonation, stress and rhythm among others contribute to a great extent to the change in meaning or the transmission of the message.

#### -Intonation:

Intonation is the melody of speech or utterance. It is the change in pitch (highness or lowness of voice). In English, the use of stress and rhythm plays a

role in intonation. For example, when a content word is given prominence in an utterance, it is either stressed, pronounced louder or the vowel is pronounced longer.

### Examples:

A: What colour is your car?

B: It's blue// dark blue.

(Blue is prominent in the first part of the answer, so, it will be pronounced

louder and stressed. Dark in the second part is new information for the listener, thus, it will be loud, stressed and /a:/ is pronounced longer than usual).

Intonation plays a role in communicating different meanings: emphasis, surprise, irony, requests, question asking and informing. We have four types of intonation that are used for different purposes; two of them are explained in the following:

Falling ( ): It adds information not known by the hearer

A: See you on Saturday. B: But I will be in London Rising ( ): It is used in questions

A: Do you like living in Paris? A: Can we go now?

### -Stress:

It is the prominence given to a syllable in a word or a word in a sentence. English language has flexible stress which means that the meaning of the sentence changes when stress is placed on different words.

### Examples:

-There are seven white houses in our neighbourhood. (Emphasis on the number of houses)

- The White House is where the American president lives. (Emphasis on the place)

## 2.2. Iconic Aspects of a Text:

The founder of Semiotics De Saussure suggested that there are two types of signs such as iconic and symbolic.

### 2.2.1. Iconic Sign/ Icon:

It is the direct picture of what it refers to. Icons always bear resemblance to their referent.

#### Examples:

- - A photograph is an iconic sign.
- - A silhouette of a female or a male on a restroom door.

### 2.2.2. Indexical Sign/ Index:

It is a partial representative sample of its referent. It is not arbitrary because the referent is the cause of its index.

#### Examples:

- Smoke is an index of fire
- The track of an animal is an index of the existence of an animal.

### 2.2.3. Symbolic Sign:

It is not a picture of what is being referred to (referent), but a picture of something that we associate with the referent.

#### Examples:

- Traffic lights are symbolic signs.
- - The dove is a symbol of peace.
- - The olive branch used to be a symbol of peace and victory in ancient Greece and has become associated with peace in the Mediterranean basin in modern world.
- - The raven symbolises death and doom in Western culture.

Symbolic icons are culture-bound because their meaning depends on the culture they belong to. For example, the colour white is associated with celebrations in the Arab world while it is a colour of mourning in India. Some of the symbolic signs become universal with time.

## 2.2.4. "A Picture Paints a Thousand Words" 2.2.4.1. Logos:

Some symbols have strong associations in the minds of the receivers which make them become logos for brands or appear in the language of advertisement which is known to be very manipulative.

## 2.2.4.2. Images:

Every image is constructed because image makers produce representations of reality. In a time of technological development, a photograph is no longer regarded as a faithful representation of reality. The change in light effects, the distance of the subject, the angle and the position (centre or off- centre) play a prominent role in the design of an image being a photograph or an illustration.

As receivers of images, we need to think of three criteria for visual criticism:

### 1. The Visual Content: What/Who? :

- Who/what is in the image?
- What do I see?
- What is not seen?

### 2. Representation How? :

- How is the content represented?
- Shots/ Eye contact/ Angle/ Light/ Colour

### 3. Context: Where?

- In which context is the image used (textual, political, and social)?
- What is the text's purpose?

(Adapted from Doing Critical Literacy, 2014)

## Conclusion:

Developing conscious literacy requires raising our awareness, as receivers, of the embedded messages in everyday texts, we become aware of the intentions behind sounds, signs and images.