Onomatopoeia in Comic Discourse: A Descriptive Study of Dead Days by Dey

Andi Mulyani[1], A. Tenrinia Asmanur[2], Rahmat J[3]
[12]Institut Agama Islam YAPNAS Jeneponto, [3]ITBM Balik Diwa Makassar

Corresponding author's email:
andi.mulyani@yapnasjp.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines English onomatopoeia in the comic *Dead Days* by Dey. It aims to identify the types of onomatopoeia and to analyze readers' ability in understanding their meanings. This research used a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected from 45 episodes of the comic and a questionnaire given to 30 students of the English and Literature Department at Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar in the 2017/2018 academic year. The results show that direct onomatopoeia is the most common type, with 20 words identified, followed by 10 associative onomatopoeia words. No exemplary onomatopoeia was found. The analysis of the questionnaire indicates that the students' ability to understand the meaning of onomatopoeia is good, with most students scoring between 66 and 75. This study shows that onomatopoeia helps readers understand the comic story and makes the narrative more interesting. It also demonstrates that familiar sounds in comics can support language learning and improve readers' vocabulary recognition. Furthermore, the findings provide useful information for educators, writers, and linguists about using onomatopoeia in comics and other literary texts. Overall, this research emphasizes the important role of onomatopoeia in comic discourse and its contribution to readers' understanding and engagement.

Keywords: direct onomatopoeia, associative onomatopoeia, readers' ability, comic discourse

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary tool for humans to express ideas, emotions, and experiences. One interesting feature of language is onomatopoeia, which refers to words that imitate, resemble, or suggest the sounds they represent (Dofs, 2008). Onomatopoeia is distinctive because it creates a direct connection between sound and meaning, unlike most words whose meanings are arbitrary. Sugahara (2011) emphasizes that onomatopoeia enhances expressiveness in both spoken and written language, allowing readers or listeners to experience the sounds of actions, objects, or events in their imagination.

Onomatopoeia is widely used in literature, advertisements, poetry, and especially comics. Comics combine visual and verbal elements to convey stories, emotions, and actions in a concise and expressive form

(Bennett, 2014). In comics, onomatopoeia illustrates sounds such as impacts, movements, and environmental effects. Words like *bang*, *crash*, or *wham* help readers imagine auditory aspects of actions, making the narrative more engaging and easier to understand. Hidayat (2016) notes that onomatopoeia in comics improves narrative clarity and captures readers' attention, particularly in action scenes.

Dead Days by Dey is a comic depicting survival during a zombie apocalypse. The comic frequently uses onomatopoeic words to represent actions such as explosions, fights, and other movements. Understanding these words requires readers to recognize them and interpret their meanings within the visual and narrative context. This aligns with Yule's (2006) assertion that comprehension of linguistic signs, including onomatopoeia, depends on both linguistic knowledge and contextual understanding.

Onomatopoeia not only provides auditory imagery but also supports readers in interpreting narrative actions and emotions. According to Crystal (2011), onomatopoeic words create a bridge between language and sensory perception, allowing readers to "hear" the story through text. This is particularly important in comics, where visual representation alone may not fully convey dynamic actions or sound-related events. Similarly, Hague (2014) argues that the strategic placement of onomatopoeia in comic panels can direct readers' attention, emphasize key moments, and enhance the overall pacing of the story. By combining visual cues with sound-symbolic words, comics like *Dead Days* can create a more immersive experience, helping readers understand both literal and figurative aspects of the narrative.

Previous studies have categorized onomatopoeia into direct, associative, and exemplary types (Bredin, 1996). Direct onomatopoeia imitates real-world sounds, associative onomatopoeia conveys socially recognized sound effects, and exemplary onomatopoeia represents sound patterns suggested by articulation. In comics, direct onomatopoeia is often the most frequent type because it is easily recognized and makes action scenes more vivid (Eliza, 2013). Furthermore, Seyyedi and Akhlaghi (2013) explain that exposure to sound-symbolic words can support language learning by providing memorable examples of sound-meaning relationships. Understanding these differences is essential because readers' ability to decode these words influences how they comprehend the story, follow the plot, and engage with the comic.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the types of onomatopoeia used in *Dead Days* and to examine readers' ability to understand their meanings. Specifically, it investigates which types of onomatopoeia appear most frequently and how effectively readers comprehend these sound-symbolic words in the comic's context. Understanding readers' comprehension of onomatopoeia is crucial, as it reflects how well the comic communicates its story and how effectively readers interpret both linguistic and visual information. By addressing these questions, the research contributes to a better understanding of the role of onomatopoeia in comic discourse and its effect on readers' engagement. The findings are also expected to provide practical guidance for educators, comic writers, and linguists regarding the use of onomatopoeia

to enhance both narrative clarity and language learning. These considerations form the basis for the methodology applied in this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, which aims to describe and analyze phenomena systematically and in detail (Creswell, 2017). This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the types of onomatopoeia used in the comic *Dead Days* by Dey and to examine readers' ability to understand their meanings without manipulating any variables, making it suitable for naturalistic observations.

The primary data were obtained from the comic *Dead Days*, which contains various onomatopoeic words representing actions, movements, and sound effects. The comic was selected due to its frequent use of onomatopoeia, providing rich material for analysis. The secondary data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 30 students from the English and Literature Department at Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar in the 2017/2018 academic year. The questionnaire was designed to measure students' ability to understand the meaning of onomatopoeic words in context. This instrument was chosen because it efficiently captures readers' comprehension and provides measurable data on their interpretive ability.

Data collection was conducted through documentary study and questionnaire administration. The documentary study involved identifying and classifying onomatopoeic words according to Bredin's (1996) categories: direct, associative, and exemplary onomatopoeia. The questionnaire included multiple-choice items in which students matched each onomatopoeic word with its correct meaning based on the context in the comic.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The comic data were categorized by type and counted to determine frequency, while questionnaire responses were analyzed to assess students' comprehension. Students' performance was classified into categories such as excellent, good, fair, or poor based on the total correct answers. This approach allows the study to combine textual analysis with empirical evidence, providing a comprehensive understanding of onomatopoeia in comic discourse and its effect on readers' comprehension.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of onomatopoeia in the comic Dead Days by Dey and readers' comprehension of their meanings.
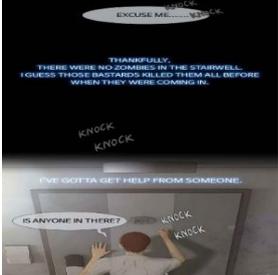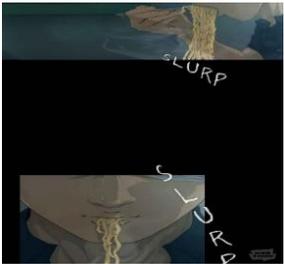
A. Types of Onomatopoeia

The analysis of the comic indicates that the onomatopoeic expressions can be classified into two categories - direct onomatopoeia and associative onomatopoeia based on Bredin's (1996) classification. No
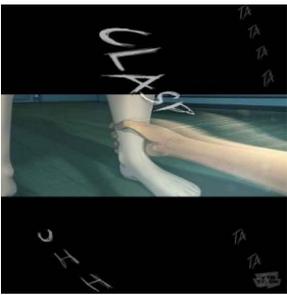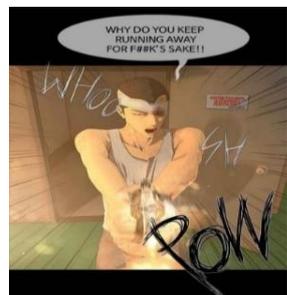
instances of exemplary onomatopoeia were identified in the comic. Direct onomatopoeia refers to words that directly imitate real-world sounds, thereby enhancing the vividness of actions or events depicted in the narrative. The data reveal several examples of direct onomatopoeia, including *click, step, tik-tok, huff, thud, smack, bang, knock, drip, slurp, clank, whoosh, whew, crunch, clasp, whack, pow, tap, gulp, and urgh*. For example, *tik-tok* represents the sound of a clock ticking, while slurp imitates the sound produced when someone drinks noisily. These onomatopoeic words closely resemble their corresponding sounds, enabling readers to aurally perceive the events described and thus enhancing their reading experience.

Types of Direct Onomatopoeia

Episode	No	Direct Onomatopoeia	Meaning
Ep. 01	1		**"Click"** To pick a specific capacity/thing on a PC screen, camera, and so forth by squeezing one of the buttons on mouse or touchpad.
	2		**"Step"** the demonstration of lifting your foot and putting it down to walk or move some place.
Ep.02	3		**"Tik Tok"** Used to describe the sound of a large clock ticking.

Ep.4	4		**"Huff"** To say something or make a noise in a way that shows you are offended or annoyed.
Ep.10	5		**"Thud"** A sound like the one that is made when a heavy object hits something else.
	6		**"Smack"** Smack somebody, to hit somebody with your open hand or an object, especially as a punishment.
	7		**"Bang"** To hit something in a way that makes a loud noise.
Ep.14	8		**"Knock"** To hit a door, etc. in order to attract attention.

Ep.16	9		**"Drip"** (of liquid) to fall in small drops. The rain came down.
Ep.17	10		**"Slurp"** To make a loud noise while you are drinking or eating something; to make a noise like this.
Ep.18	11		**"Clank"** to make a loud sound like pieces of metal hitting each other; to cause something to make this sound.
Ep.19	12		**"Whoosh"** To sudden movement and sound of air or water rushing past.
Ep.23	13		**"Whew"** a sound that people make to show that they are surprised or relieved about something or that they are very hot or tired.

Ep.27	14		**"Crunch"** A noise like the sound of something hard being pressed or crushed.
	15		**"Clasp"** To hold something tightly in your hand.
	16		**"Whack"** To hit a person or thing extremely hard.
Ep.29	17		**"Pow"** used to express the sound of an explosion, a gun firing or somebody hitting somebody else.
Ep.36	18		**"Tap"** To hit somebody/ something quickly and lightly.

Ep.40	19		**"Gulp"** Gulp something (down) to shallow large amounts of food or drink quickly.
Ep.43	20		**"Urgh"** The way of writing the sound that people make they think that something is horrible.

Types of Associative Onomatopoeia

Episode	No	Associative Onomatopoeia	Meaning
Ep.06	1		**"Chomp"** To eat or bite food noisily.
	2		**"Scratch"** Scratch something to make or eliminate an imprint, and so on something purposely, by scouring it with something hard or sharp.
Ep.08	3		**"Thump"** He spun around, his heart thumping against his ribs.
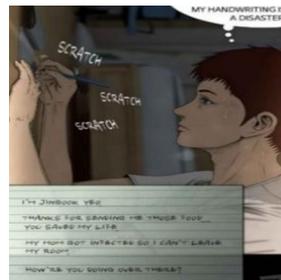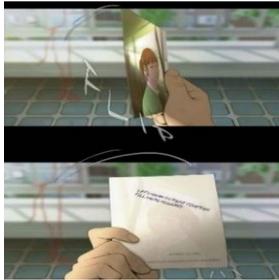
	4		**"Flip"** To turn over into a different position with a sudden quick movement; to make something do this.
Ep.22	**5**		**"Pull"** To grab hold of something and use power to move it or attempt to move it towards yourself.
Ep.23	**6**		**"Grumble"** Grumble at something. Thunder grumble in the distance.
Ep.28	**7**		**"Rattle"** To make a progression of short clearly sounds when shaking or hitting against something hard, to cause something to do this.
Ep.28	**8**		**"Twist"** Twist something (into something) to twist or transform something into a specific shape.

Ep.44	**9**		**"Nod"** assuming that you gesture, gesture your head, you move your head all over to show arrangement, understanding, and so on.
Ep.45	**10**		**"Jump"** To move rapidly off the ground or away from a surface by propelling yourself with your legs and feet.

B. Readers' Ability in Undestanding the Meaning of Onomatopoeia in Comic "Dead Days" by Dey

1. Data Presentation

To support the study, data were collected through a test administered to 30 reader participants who were English and Literature students in the 2017/2018 academic year at Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar. The selection of these participants was based on their adequate English proficiency, which enabled them to accurately perceive the meanings of onomatopoeic expressions. Unlike learners of English as a foreign language, the participants were expected to rely less on basic language difficulties and more on contextual interpretation. Therefore, several aspects were considered relevant in this analysis, particularly vocabulary knowledge and the ability to infer word meanings from context.

2. Test Result

Readers' Correct Responses to Onomatopoeia Words

No	Onomatopoeia Words	Reader's correct answer
1.	*Click*	28
2.	*Tik Tok*	27
3.	*Knock*	23
4.	*Slurp*	27

5.	*Clank*	14
6.	*Whoosh*	16
7.	*Crunch*	17
8.	*Pow*	17
9.	*Tap*	17
10.	*Urgh*	25

Classification of Readers' Ability in Understanding Onomatopoeia

No	Classification	Score	Frequency
1	Excellent	86-100	7
2	Very good	76-85	7
3	Good	66-75	8
4	Average	56-65	5
5	Poor	36-55	2
6	Very poor	0-35	1
Total			**30**

DISCUSSIONS

This section provides an interpretation of the findings by relating the results of the descriptive analysis and questionnaire data to the research objectives and relevant theoretical perspectives.

A. Types of onomatopoeia

This subsection discusses the types of onomatopoeia identified in the comic Dead Days by Dey based on Bredin's (1996) classification, which categorizes onomatopoeia into three types: direct, associative, and exemplary. However, the analysis reveals that only two types - direct onomatopoeia and associative onomatopoeia are found in the comic. Therefore, the discussion in this subsection focuses exclusively on these two types, as no instances of exemplary onomatopoeia were identified.

1. Direct Onomatopoeia

Direct onomatopoeia refers to words that directly imitate the sounds of objects or actions they denote, such as ding-dong, whoosh, and swipe. Based on the analysis, twenty onomatopoeic words in the comic were classified as direct onomatopoeia, making this category the most frequently occurring type compared to other classifications. These words include *click, tik-tok, step, thud, huff, smack, bang, knock, drip, slurp, clank, whoosh, whew, crunch, clasp, whack, pow, tap, gulp, and urgh.*

All of these words are categorized as direct onomatopoeia because they closely replicate or represent the sounds produced by the

objects or actions they describe. This classification aligns with Bredin's (1996) theory, which states that direct onomatopoeia consists of words whose phonetic forms resemble the sounds they signify. Similarly, Dofs (2008) explains that onomatopoeia refers to words that imitate natural sounds produced by objects or actions.

Examples from the data illustrate this characteristic clearly. The word *tik-tok* imitates the ticking sound of a clock, *knock* resembles the sound produced by striking a door, and *slurp* represents the loud noise made while drinking or eating. These words enable readers to associate the lexical form with a familiar sound, allowing them to aurally perceive the events depicted in the comic. Therefore, direct onomatopoeia functions as an effective linguistic device for enhancing vividness and sensory engagement in the narrative.

2. Associative Onomatopoeia

Associative onomatopoeia operates through the principle of association, in which a word evokes a sound that is conventionally related to the action or concept it represents rather than directly imitating the sound itself. According to Bredin (1996), this type of onomatopoeia occurs when a word suggests a sound associated with an action or event based on shared cultural or contextual understanding.

The findings reveal ten words classified as associative onomatopoeia, namely *chomp, scratch, thump, flip, pull, grumble, rattle, twist, nod, and jump*. These words do not phonetically resemble the actual sounds they depict; instead, their meanings are derived from the conventional association between the word and the action or sound it implies.

One example is *scratch*, which is commonly associated with the sound produced when a surface is marked or scraped. In episode 43 of the comic, this word is used to represent the sound of a pen moving across paper while writing, allowing readers to associate the action with its implied acoustic effect. Similarly, *chomp* is associated with the act of biting or chewing noisily, *flip* suggests a sudden and quick movement, and *twist* evokes the action of bending or turning an object.

Although these words do not directly imitate specific sounds, they successfully convey auditory impressions through contextual and conventional associations. As a result, associative onomatopoeia contributes to meaning-making in the narrative by linking actions with sounds that readers can readily imagine based on shared linguistic experience.

B. The Readers' Ability in Understanding the Meaning of Onomatopoeia in Comic "Dead Days" by Dey

The results indicate that most reader participants, who were English and Literature students in the 2017/2018 academic year at Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar, demonstrated a good ability to understand the meanings of onomatopoeic words in the comic Dead Days by Dey. Among the participants, eight students achieved high scores within the range of 66–75.

The analysis of the test responses showed that participants generally tried to interpret onomatopoeia based on the context of the story. Twenty-four out of thirty participants reported prior awareness of onomatopoeia, either through previous exposure or from reading fiction, indicating that contextual familiarity supports comprehension. Sixteen participants completed the test without difficulty, whereas a few made errors by misidentifying words that were not onomatopoeic. The word *clank* posed the most challenges, as reflected both in the test responses and the questionnaire, where it received the highest number of incorrect answers among the nine onomatopoeic words tested.

In contrast, words such as *knock, tik-tok, and click* were the most familiar to participants, suggesting that commonly encountered onomatopoeic words are easier to understand. Overall, the findings indicate that participants were able to comprehend onomatopoeia effectively, and that familiarity and exposure to the words enhanced their understanding.

Furthermore, participants reported that onomatopoeic words helped them better understand the story while reading the comic. This aligns with Dofs (2008), who asserts that onomatopoeia functions as an auditory icon, allowing authors to convey ideas and represent actions or situations through sound-symbolic words. As such, onomatopoeia not only enriches the narrative but also facilitates readers' engagement and comprehension of the story.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the comic Dead Days by Dey and the questionnaire data from English and Literature students at Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar (2017/2018 academic year), several conclusions can be drawn.

First, the study identifies that onomatopoeic words in the comic are classified into two types: direct and associative onomatopoeia. Twenty words were categorized as direct onomatopoeia, making it the most prevalent type in the comic, while ten words were classified as associative onomatopoeia. No instances of exemplary onomatopoeia were found. This pattern aligns with the principle that comics tend to employ simple and easily recognizable language forms, allowing readers to engage with the narrative through familiar auditory cues.

Second, the readers' ability to understand the meanings of onomatopoeic words is generally good. Most participants demonstrated awareness of onomatopoeia and were able to interpret the words based on contextual cues within the story. Words such as *click, tik-tok, and knock* were particularly well understood, whereas *clank* was the most challenging for participants. The findings also indicate that prior exposure to onomatopoeia and the contextual placement of these words in the narrative enhanced comprehension.

Overall, the study shows that direct and associative onomatopoeia play a significant role in enhancing readers' understanding and engagement in comic reading. These sound-symbolic words enrich the

narrative and provide auditory cues that facilitate the interpretation of actions and events.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, future researchers are encouraged to examine onomatopoeia in different literary works or genres to obtain broader insights into its functions and variations. Further studies may also explore other types of onomatopoeia or apply different linguistic approaches to deepen the analysis. In addition, educators may consider integrating comics into language learning to improve students' vocabulary and contextual understanding, while students are encouraged to increase their exposure to various English texts to strengthen their comprehension of sound-symbolic expressions.

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