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SOUND IMITATIVE WORDS IN *BEOWULF*

Introduction*. This article is devoted to the study of imitative (onomatopoeic and mimetic) lexicon of the Anglo-Saxon poem* Beowulf. *The poem is, probably, the most well-known work of Anglo-Saxon literature, characterized by its archaic language as well by its expressivity. The study focuses on quantitative and contextual analysis of the imitative words found in the poem from diachronic perspective.*

Materials and methods. *Methods for the research include the method of continuous sampling, etymological analysis, historical-comparative analysis, elements of quantitative analysis, and the method of phonosemantic analysis. The study is conducted on the material of the full unabridged version of the Anglo-Saxon poem* Beowulf *written in Old English.*

Results. *The results have revealed that all imitative words in the poem can be divided into three major semantic categories: 1) words denoting sounds of battle; 2) words denoting grief; 3) words denoting singing and playing musical instruments. There are altogether 43 imitative words identified in* Beowulf*, used 134 times. The calculations have shown that only 15 (or 35 %) out of them have been preserved since Old English.*

Discussion. *We suggest the following reasons for the possible obsolesce of the Old English imitative words: 1) their replacement by the French loans, 2) their belonging to poetic language and subsequent fall out of use, 3) their replacement by other, newly-coined English imitative words. The last argument we deem as the most probable. The iconic treadmill hypothesis introduced earlier explains that the mass obsolesce of the* Beowulf's *imitative words might have been caused by natural, evolutionary processes – regular sense and meaning development leading to the expressivity loss and overall de-iconization of the language's imitative lexicon.*

Conclusions. *The study of the poem demonstrated the diversity and dynamic nature of the English imitative lexicon as well as revealed the underlying tendency of imitative words' de-iconization and replacement on the later stages of the language's development.*

Key words: Iconicity, Old English, etymology, de-iconization, onomatopoeia, sound symbolism, *Beowulf*, phonosemantics, Anglo-Saxon poetry.

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ЗВУКОИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛЕКСИКА В «БЕОВУЛЬФЕ»

Введение. *Посвящена подробному рассмотрению звукоизобразительной (звукоподражательной и звукосимволической) лексики англо-саксонской поэмы «Беовульф». «Беовульф» является одним из*

наиболее известных произведений, написанных на древнеанглийском языке. Исследование посвящено количественному и контекстуальному рассмотрению звукоизобразительной лексики в тексте поэмы. В ходе исследования также проводится всесторонний диахронический анализ используемых в «Беовульфе» звукоизобразительных лексем.

Материалы и методы. *Исследование проводилось на материале оригинального текста англо-саксонской поэмы «Беовульф», написанной на древнеанглийском языке. Методами исследования являлись метод сплошной выборки, сопоставительный анализ, этимологический анализ. Для установления звукоизобразительного происхождения слов применялся метод фоносемантического анализа.*

Результаты исследования. *Показано, что текст содержит 43 звукоизобразительные лексемы, использованные 143 раза в трех типах контекста: 1) для описания шума битвы; 2) для описания плача и скорби; 3) для описания пения и игры на музыкальных инструментах. Только 15 (и 35 %) древнеанглийских звукоизобразительных слов сохранились в современном английском.*

Обсуждение. *Такое массовое исчезновение древнеанглийских звукоподражаний можно объяснить следующими факторами: 1) их последующей заменой французскими звукоподражаниями; 2) их принадлежностью к поэтическому языку; 3) их позднейшей заменой новыми, английскими звукоподражаниями. Последнее кажется наиболее вероятным. Выдвинутая нами ранее гипотеза звукоизобразительного круговорота объясняет смену звукоизобразительной лексики естественными эволюционными процессами, происходящими в языке, – постепенным размыванием подобия между формой и значением звукоизобразительных слов в результате семантического развития и регулярных фонетических изменений, которые вместе приводят к утрате экспрессивности и последующей необходимости создания новых звукоизобразительных лексем.*

Заключение. *Исследование показало, что звукоизобразительный лексикон английского языка имеет глубокие исторические корни, а также проиллюстрировало его общую тенденцию к изменчивости и развитию.*

Introduction. Imitative (onomatopoeic, mimetic) words form an integral part of the lexicons of the modern languages belonging to different groups and families, as it has been shown by extensive research [1]–[7]. Words denoting natural sounds and vocal gestures can also be found in ancient and reconstructed languages as well as in the course of etymological investigations [8]–[18]. Therefore, it is no surprise that imitative words also appear in Old English, a language spoken more than one thousand years ago on the territory of modern England. Although Old English is a predecessor of Modern English, the languages show little resemblance in terms of morphology, syntax, and also in terms of vocabulary.

The aim of the present study is to detect and analyse the Old English imitative words in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* as well as to compare them to their Modern English equivalents.

Material and methods. The study is conducted on the material of the full unabridged version of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* written in Old English (edited by George Jack [19]). The method of continuous sampling was applied in order to extract and analyse sound imitative words used in the text of the poem.

Other research methods include etymological analysis, historical-comparative analysis, elements of quantitative analysis, and method of phonosemantic analysis.

For verifying the imitative origin of the studied lexemes we used *Altenglishes Etymologishes Wörterbuch* compiled by F. Holthausen [20] as well as a number of other etymological dictionaries, such as *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* by Guus Kroonen [21], Harper's *Online Etymology Dictionary* [22], and other [23]–[30].

The listed methods are well known to the linguistic research with the exception of the last one – phonosemantic analysis, which requires a special commentary.

Method of phonosemantic analysis.

The method of phonosemantic analysis is a method of establishing the iconic origin of a word, designed by Stanislav Voronin [31, p. 90]. We applied it in order to establish the imitative origin of a number of words not directly marked as 'onomatopoeic' in the abovementioned etymological dictionaries. The method includes a number of consecutive steps, or operations.

The first operation is called '***semantics***'. It involves establishing whether a word has a meaning which could be potentially rendered imitatively. It could be a sound (e. g. buzzing or clinging); some bodily actions (e. g. sneezing or coughing); a shape or a movement which could be mimicked (e. g. bobbling, doddering). In most cases, however, it might happen that a word has developed semantically to such extend that the original, 'simple' meaning becomes obscure. Therefore, the search for original semantics might require some additional etymological investigations (see operation three 'etymology').

The second operation is called '***salient iconic traits***'. Many (although not all) imitative words have a number of prominent traits which in combination make them distinctly different from non-imitative ones. Such traits include excessive expressivity, hyper-variability, reduplication, iconic ablaut, metathesis etc. (e. g. *ding-dong* or *cling-clang*). It should be emphasized that taken separately none of these traits indicate the imitative nature of a word (for example, reduplication could be a marker of grammatical plurality), but if viewed together with other characteristics they increase the probability of imitative origin.

The third operation '***etymology***' involves taking into account all regular semantic and phonetic changes which a word has undergone in the course of its history.

The fourth operation is called '***typology***'. It involves comparing the word to imitative words from other (non-related) languages. In case two words sharing the same meaning have similar structure in unrelated languages it is easy to suggest that they were coined imitatively.

The fifth operation of the method is the '***search of nomination motif***'. A word could only be deemed imitative when the motif of nomination is clearly established. It could be acoustic, articulatory or acoustic-articulatory motivation.

The last step is to summaries all the evidence for and against and to draw a conclusion about whether the word in question is imitative in its origin or not [32].

Iconicity, phonosemantics, and classifications of onomatopoeic and sound symbolic words. Imitation in general is a similarity between form and meaning. It is also often synonymously described as 'iconicity'. ***Iconicity*** is a broad semiotic notion first introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce [33], and when applied to linguistics it suggests a relation of resemblance between phonetic form of a word and its meaning.

As it was just mentioned above, linguistic imitation can be acoustic, articulatory or acoustic-articulatory. It means that either acoustic characteristics of the phonemes (once pronounced) render the most salient acoustic traits of the imitated sounds or the phoneme's articulatory characteristics

render the imitated movements. Iconic (or imitative) words are considered to be a language universal [34], [3].

Sound imitation, thus, is a notion stretching to all types of imitation possible within spoken languages, and the branch of linguistics studying imitative lexicons is called ***phonosemantics***. As phonosemantics has imitative lexicon as its primary object of investigation, it is connected to lexicology, phonetics, psycholinguistics, etymology, and language typology.

Saint Petersburg school of phonosemantics distinguishes (after Voronin [35]) two main classes of imitative words – onomatopoeic words (acoustic imitation) and sound symbolic (or mimetic) words (articulatory or acoustic articulatory imitation).

Examples of onomatopoeic words are E. *buzz, click, plop*, *crash* (acoustic imitation).

Examples of sound symbolic are *munch, sneeze, cough* (acoustic articulatory imitation) and *dodder, totter* (articulatory imitation).

Onomatopoeic words. Onomatopoeic words are further subdivided [35] into five large groups according to their relation to their (sound) denotata. These groups are called instants, continuants, frequentatives, instants-continuants and frequentatives-instants-continuants.

Instants necessarily contain plosives in their structure and they designate pulse-like sounds (e. g. E. *click, tap, tick, clack*). The plosive nature of /b/, /p/, /k/ acoustically reflects intense natural sounds of short duration.

Continuants designate either a tone or a noise of some duration. The tonal continuants should contain vowels, reflecting the quality of the denoted sound (E. *hoot, peep*). Noise continuants necessarily contain fricatives or sibilants [E. *sizz(le), hiss*].

Frequentatives designate vibratory dissonance-like sounds; their core element is /r/ of some quality (E. *purr, chirr*, historically /pʊr/, /ʧɪr/).

Instants-continuants designate sounds with a combination of traits characteristic for pulses and tones (E. *clash, clang*).

Frequentatives-instants-continuants designate sounds combining the traits of all three classes of natural sounds – dissonances, pulses and tones. English examples of frequentatives-instants-continuants are *crash, screech, ring*.

Sound symbolic words. Sound symbolic words are, in turn, classified [31] into intrakinesemisms and extrakinesemisms.

Intrakinesemisms are imitative words conveying their meaning both via articulation and acoustic mimicry. Such words simultaneously imitate the sound and the muscle movement accompanying it. One can illustrate such articulatory-acoustic imitation, for example, on the English word *cough*. The process of coughing is represented by the word, which contains a velar sound /k/, articulated closest to the throat and at the same time imitative of the sound we hear when the action in question is performed [4].

Extrakinesemisms are purely articulatory copies; they are mimetic gestures produced by vocal cords, facial muscles, and tongue. For example, denoting small objects or trifling qualities is often done by coining words containing front vowel /i/ (e. g. E. *teeny-weeny, pimple, little*), which is a mimetic imitation of a small object.

Beowulf. *Beowulf* is probably the most well-known and well-researched work among the Anglo-Saxon poems. It was written down in the late tenth or early eleventh century and now survives in a single manuscript, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv. [19, p. 1]. As for the

date of the poem's composition, it is not known 'how large a gap in time separates the actual composition of the poem and making the copy now preserved in the British Library' [19, p. 4]. Linguistic features of *Beowulf*, however, suggest that it was composed no later than the tenth century, probably in the early eighth century [19, p. 5].

Beowulf is 3182-line long and it belongs to the genre of epic poems [36, p. 270]. The narrative of the poem focuses on the adventures of its main protagonist – Beowulf. In Geatland Beowulf hears about a terrible monster named Grendel attacking the royal hall of Hrothgar (who is the king of the Danes). The warrior and comes to the rescue and succeeds in killing Grendel, but the hall is attacked again, this time by the monster's mother. She slays Hrothgar's men, and Beowulf has to fight with her in her underwater cave. The hero is successful again. After taking valuable gifts as a reward for his bravery Beowulf returns home, to Geatland, becomes a king there and eventually dies many years after while defending his kingdom against a terrible dragon.

The poem is written in predominantly West Saxon dialect [36, p. 272] in alliterate verse. The text includes numerous poetic words otherwise not encountered in works belonging to other genres.

The choice of genre (epic poem) for the present research was based on the hypothesis that such texts as *Beowulf* would be more saturated with onomatopoeic words due to expressivity of the narrative in comparison, for example, with the texts of the chronicles, legal documents, or medical recipes.

Contextual use of onomatopoeic and mimetic words in the poem. The research has shown that there are 134 instances of use of imitative words. Thus, they constitute 0,75 % of 17 779 words used in Beowulf (including prepositions and conjunctions). Semantically, most of these imitative words fall into the following three major categories:

1. Words denoting sounds of battle and destruction, cries of horror.

To this category belong such words as, for example, *hringan* 'to ring; to give out a sound' (*Byrnan hringdon* – line 327); *dynian* 'to make a noise, din, resound' (*Dryhtsele dynede* – line 767; *healwudu dynede* – line 1317); *hlemm* 'a sound, noise, crash' (*uhthlem* – line 2007; *Eft þæt geiode ufaran dogrum hildehlæmmum* – 2201; *hildehlemma* – line 2351); *sweng* 'a blow, stroke' (*sweordes swengum* – line 2386) and other.

2. Words denoting grief and lamentation.

To this broad semantic field belong the following sound imitations: *murnan* 'to mourn, be sad, be anxious; to mourn, lament; to care about, regard' (*him wæs geomor sefa, murnende mod* – line 50); *sorg* 'care, anxiety; sorrow, grief, affliction, trouble' (*sorge ne cuðon* – line 119; *þegnsorge dreah* – line 131; *sidra sorga* – line 149); *wa* 'woe, ill' (*wa bið þæm ðe…* – line 183; *wea* 'woe, misery, evil, affliction, trouble; wickedness, malice' (*wean onwendan* – line 191; *weana ne wende* – line 933); *wanian* 'to lament, deplore' (*sigeleasne sang, sar wanigean* – line 787); *wop* 'mostly a cry of grief, wailing, lamentation, weeping' (*wop up ahafen* – line 128); *gnornian* 'to feel grief, regret; express discontent, murmur' (*Ides gnornode* – line 1117) and other.

3. Words denoting singing and playing musical instruments (often in the context of celebrations).

Into this category fall: *sweg* (*þær wæs hearpan sweg* – line 89; *þær wæs sang ond sweg samod ætgædere* – line 1053); *sang* 'song, singing; a singing, chanting; song, poetry; a song, a poem to be sung' (*swutol sang scopes* – line 90; *Scop hwilum sang hador on Heorote* – line 496); *leoð* 'a song, poem, ode, lay, verses' (*Leoð wæs asungen – line 1159*) and other.

Often these semantic fields interfere with each other, as in the following passage (imitative words are highlighted in bold):

783		**Sweg** up astag
	niwe geneahhe;	Norðdenum stod
	atelic egesa,	anra gehwylcum
785	þara þe of wealle	**wop** gehyrdon,
	gryreleoð **galan**	godes ondsacan,
	sigeleasne **sang**,	sar **wanigean**
	helle hæfton.	

The modern translation [37] of these lines is the following:

783	The **sound** mounted upward
	Novel enough; on the North Danes fastened
	A terror of anguish, on all of the men there
785	Who heard from the wall the **weeping** and **plaining**
	The **song** of defeat from the foeman of heaven,
	Heard him hymns of horror **howl**, and his sorrow
	Hell-bound **bewailing**.

The use of imitative words in the poem outside these indicated contexts is rare.

Frequency of use. It should be noted that some of the imitative words appear only once, whereas others are used in recurring contexts, their use resembling poetic formulae (cf. *nis þær hearpan sweg* – line 2458; and *þær wæs hearpan sweg* – line 89; *nalles hearpan sweg wigend weccean* – line 3023).

Whereas there are altogether 134 uses of imitative words in *Beowulf*, there are only 43 imitative words altogether (as it was mentioned above). It happens because they are used more than once in the set of similar contexts.

Below the most frequently used imitative words (both onomatopoeic and mimetic) are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1. The most frequently used imitated words in Beowulf*

Word	Meaning	Number of usages
GRETAN	To speak to, call upon, hail, greet, welcome, salute, take leave of, bid farewell to; to approach, come to, visit, touch, attack, treat	20
SORG SORGIAN	Care, anxiety; sorrow, grief, affliction, trouble; to care, be anxious, feel anxiety / to sorrow, grieve, be sorry	13
WĒA	Woe, misery, evil, affliction, trouble; evil, wickedness, malice	13
YRRE	Anger, wrath	10
BELGAN	To cause oneself to swell with anger, to make oneself angry, irritate oneself, enrage oneself; to swell with anger, to be angry, to be enraged	9
SWĒG	Unregulated, confused sound, noise, din, crash; modulated or articulate sound; sound made by living creatures, voice, cry or note of a bird, song	7
SANG SINGAN	A song, singing; chanting; song, poetry; / to sing, to compose verse, narrate; to narrate in verse, write	7

*Other imitative words appear less than seven times and not included in the table.

Typological classification of imitative words in *Beowulf*. The imitative words found in *Beowulf* can be divided into the categories indicated by S. Voronin [35] and described above.

The most frequently used group of imitatives in *Beowulf* are sound symbolic words *intrakinesemisms*. To this group belong, for example, the following lexemes: *belgan* 'to cause oneself to swell with anger, to make oneself angry, irritate oneself, enrage oneself'; *gnornian* 'to

feel grief, regret; express discontent, murmur'; *hleahtor* 'laughter'; *swelgan* 'to swallow; to swallow, take in, drink, absorb; to take in to the mind, accept, imbibe, to devour'; *wēa* 'woe, misery, evil, affliction, trouble; wickedness, malice' and other.

Onomatopoeic words are represented by four classes indicated in [35]: **instants** (*hnītan* 'to strike, thrust, push, come against with a shock'); **continuants** [*galan* 'to sing, enchant, call'; *swēg* 'unregulated, confused sound, noise, din, crash'; *swynsian* 'to make a (pleasing) sound, make melody or music'; *wōp* 'mostly a cry of grief, wailing, lamentation, weeping']; **instants-continuants** (*hlem* 'a sound, noise, crash'; *hlyn* 'a sound, noise, clamour, din'; *hlynsian* 'to sound, resound'); **frequentatives-instants-continuants** (*hringan* 'to ring; to give out a sound'; *murnan* 'to mourn, be sad, be anxious; lament; to care about, regard').

There are no examples of sound symbolisms-extrakinesemisms and onomatopoeic words frequentatives in the studied material.

Preservation of Old English imitative words used in *Beowulf*. If we take a random passage from the original text and compare it to its modern translation it will immediately become clear that the majority of imitated words used in *Beowulf* are now obsolete. Consider, for example, the following passage:

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ðær wæs hæleþa	**hleahtor**, **hlyn swynsode**,
word wæron wynsume.	Eode Wealhþeow forð,
cwen Hroðgares,	cynna gemyndig
grette goldhroden	guman on healle…

The translation into Modern English is given below:

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There was **laughter** of heroes;	loud was the **clatter**
The words were winsome	Wealhtheow advanced then
Consort of Hrothgar,	of courtesy mindful,
Gold-decked saluted	the men in the building…

It is evident that two of the three imitative words used in the passage are no longer used today [*hlyn* 'a sound, noise, clamour, din' and *swinsian* 'to make a (pleasing) sound, make melody or music'].

The calculations have shown that only 15 (or 35 %) out of 43 imitative words used in *Beowulf* were preserved until today whereas 28 (or 65 %) have gone out of use.

We suggest the following possible reasons for the obsolescence of the imitative vocabulary used in the poem:

• the words in question belonged to poetic language – specific language already in OE period used only in this genre;

• the imitative words were replaced by French loans after the Norman Conquest;

• the imitative words were later replaced by other, newly-coined English imitative words.

As for the first suggestion, we regard it as the least likely. For example, if we take *hlyn* 'a sound, noise, clamour, din' from the previous line, we will see that the word is also widely used in prose – *Hlynn wearþ on ceastrum* (Th. 153, 30) [38]; *Tó ðonðonne hit hát wǽre and mon ða earman men oninnan dón wolde hú se hlynn mǽst wǽre ðonne hie ðæt súsl ðǽron þrowiende wǽron* (Ors. 1, 12) [39].

The second suggestion – the Anglo-Saxon imitative words being replaced by the French ones – is also not likely to be the main reason for the obsolescence of the Old English imitatives. The reason for that is that borrowed imitative words constitute only 19 % of the imitative lexicon in Modern English [40], therefore their number is not great enough to substitute all obsolete Old English iconic words.

Therefore, we regard the inner, linguistic forces to be mostly responsible for the loss of Old English imitative words. In 2017 we introduced [41] the iconic treadmill hypothesis which might account for the phenomenon. It states that 'iconic words overtime lose their iconicity evolving into words with purely arbitrary sound-meaning correlation, and this process predetermines new iconic coinage'.

In order to find proof for this suggestion we analysed the *Beowulf's* imitative lexicon according to the degree of its de-iconization.

De-iconization of imitative words used in *Beowulf*. *De-iconization* is the gradual loss of iconicity caused by parallel acting of regular sound changes and regular sense development of a word [40, p. 120].

We distinguish altogether four stages of de-iconization [Ibid.].

Stages of de-iconization show to what extent iconic words lose their expressivity in the course of language evolution. In other words they show how iconic is the imitative word in question on the synchronous level.

In order to establish the stage of de-iconization of imitative words used in *Beowulf* applied the ***method of diachronic evaluation of imitative lexicon*** [40].

The method includes:

• establishing the regular sound changes a word has undergone and whether these sound changes were phonosemantically significant;

• establishing semantic shifts the word has undergone and whether it still retains its original (sound-related) meaning;

• establishing the word's degree of phonetic, morphological, and syntactic integration

The method is briefly summarized in the Table 2 below:

Table 2. Method of diachronic evaluation of imitative lexicon

	SD-1	SD-2	SD-3a	SD-3b	SD-4
Integration	-	+	+	+	+
Regular sound changes	-	-	+	-	+
Considerable semantic shifts	-	-	-	+	+

As one can see from the table, the most vivid, newly coined imitative words (words on ***SD-1***) are, at the same time, the least conventional, and thus, poorly integrated into the language, both syntactically and morphologically. These are interjections, or in some languages, ideophones (e. g. E. *brr*! *zzz*!*)*.

Words on ***SD-2*** are nouns, verbs, adjectives. They are well-integrated and expressive at the same time (e. g. English *buzz, splash, screech*), as they have not yet undergone any form or meaning changes.

Words on ***SD-3*** have undergone either some form or meaning changes, thus, having their expressivity considerably lessened (e. g. E. *bib* 'a piece of cloth or plastic worn, esp. by babies, to protect their clothes while eating', which has changes its meaning from an imitation of drinking to 'a piece of cloth worn by eating').

Words on **SD-4** can only be named 'iconic' from the historical perspective as both their form and meaning have changed considerably (e. g. E. *gargoyle* – see [41]).

To sum up, words on the SD-1 are the most vivid iconic formations, whereas words on SD-4 have lost their expressivity due to the simultaneous action of regular sound changes and semantic evolution – their iconic origin can only be revealed by etymologists.

In the corpus of *Beowulf*'s imitative words we find words from all de-iconization stages (except for SD-4 which requires a deep-down etymological analysis, impossible for ancient and reconstructed languages):

SD-1 *wā* 'woe, ill; alas';

SD-2 *dynian* 'to speak or moan in grief, mourn, lament'; *galan* 'to sing, enchant, call'; *gnornian* 'to feel grief, regret; express discontent'; *greotan* 'to weep'; *grētan* 'to bewail, deplore, weep'; *gyd* 'a song, lay, poem; speech, tale'; *hleahtor* 'laughter'; *hlem* 'a sound, noise, crash'; *hlyn* 'a sound, noise, clamour, din'; *hlynsian* 'to sound, resound'; *hringan* 'to ring; to give out a sound'; *singan* 'to sing, to compose verse, narrate'; *swēg* 'unregulated, confused sound, noise, din, crash'; *swelgan* 'to swallow, take in, drink, absorb'; *swynsian* 'to make a (pleasing) sound, make melody or music'; *þunian* 'to make a noise, to sound, resound, creak'; *wēa* 'woe, misery, evil, affliction'; *wōp* 'mostly a cry of grief, wailing, lamentation, weeping';

SD-3 *gretan* 'to speak to, call upon, hail, greet, welcome'; *grindan* 'to grind, grind together, rub, rub together'; *gryre* 'horror, terror, dread'; *hearpe* 'a harp'; *hnītan* 'to strike, thrust, push, come against with a shock'; *hreósan* 'to fall [rapidly, headlong], fall down, go to ruin'; *hréran* 'to move, shake, stir'; *hrinan* 'to touch, reach, strike'; *hrisian* 'to shake'; *meornan* 'to care, feel anxiety, trouble one's self'; *sceran* 'to cut, shear'; *tredan* 'to tread, tread down, trample upon, step upon, walk upon'.

To sum up, in the studied sample there are 18 words on SD-2 (42 %), 24 words on SD-3 (56 %) and one word on SD-1 (2 %). Thus, on the periphery of the imitative lexicon (on SD-3) were more than the half of the imitative words used in *Beowulf*.

Curiously, only 5 words (or 11 %) from those on SD-2 in Old English still remain on SD-2 in Modern English.

These words are: *wánian* 'to lament, deplore'; *swelgan* 'to swallow, take in, drink'; *singan* 'to sing, to compose verse, narrate; to narrate in verse'; *hringan* 'to ring; to give out a sound'; *dynian* 'to make a noise, din, resound'.

The rest have changed their de-iconization stage, thus creating lacunae for new iconic coinage. An example of such word is *hleahtor* (Modern English *laughter* /'la:ftə/) which has become considerably less iconic due to a number of regular sound changes it has undergone.

Conclusions. The study of the text of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* revealed that it contained a number of words imitative by their origin. They were obtained by the method of continuous sampling and also by applying the method of phonosemantic analysis.

These imitative words can be divided into three major groups according to their semantic affiliation: 1) words denoting sounds of battle and destruction, cries of horror; 2) words denoting grief and lamentation; 3) words denoting singing and playing musical instruments.

The quantitative analysis has shown that there are altogether 134 instances of use of onomatopoeic and mimetic words in the text of the poem; however, there are only 43 imitative words altogether, as many of them are used repetitively (up to 15–20 times).

The study of the selected imitative words in *Beowulf* reveals that they can be classified into onomatopoeic and sound symbolic words and further sub-divided into groups defined by Stanislav Voronin, thus illustrating the validity of this classification in diachrony.

The method of diachronic evaluation of iconic lexicon can also be applied to the studied material. Its application has shown that more than the half of imitative words indicated in *Beowulf* was already de-iconized at the moment of the poem's composition, which formed the ground for their future obsolescence.

The majority of imitative words used in *Beowulf* did not survive until today, while those who did make their way into Modern English have lost their expressivity considerably.

To conclude, the study of Anglo-Saxon poem demonstrated the diversity and dynamic nature of the language's imitative lexicon as well as revealed the underlying tendency of iconicity loss of imitative words and their replacement on the later stages of the language's development.

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