

## **IS THE ROLE OF ONOMATOPOEIA IN CHILDREN'S EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT TIME-SENSITIVE?**

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Onomatopoeia, which depicts sounds in nature and follows phonological rules, is a specific linguistic phenomenon. It plays a crucial role in children's early language development, as they acquire the ability to recognize sound segments. Onomatopoeia engages both visual and auditory modes, helping children establish connections between referents and the phonological system. This, in turn, promotes vocabulary learning and enhances listening comprehension, as suggested by the Sound Symbolism Bootstrapping Hypothesis (Imai et al., 2004). However, as children grow older and become more familiar with conventional words, the significance of onomatopoeia in language development may diminish. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of onomatopoeia processing in children's language development, it is essential to compare different age groups separately. In light of this, our study focused on examining the role of onomatopoeia recognition in Chinese vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension among 119 Chinese children, divided into younger (average age: 47.41 months) and older cohorts (average age: 73.88 months), with the age cutoff set at five years (60 months). The participants were asked to complete a researcher-developed onomatopoeia recognition test, where they had to judge whether the onomatopoeia representation matched the corresponding image. Both accuracy and response time were recorded using E-prime 2.0. Given that Chinese onomatopoeia often appears in the reduplicated bi-syllabic form, its recognition may require meta-linguistic awareness. Additionally, this study included tests for Chinese morphological and phonological awareness, as well as vocabulary knowledge (conventional words) and listening comprehension. After controlling for age, non-verbal intelligence, and metalinguistic awareness, the hierarchical regression analysis yielded that onomatopoeia recognition emerged as a significant predictor of vocabulary knowledge solely in the younger cohort. However, in the older cohort, a surprising negative relationship was observed between onomatopoeia recognition and listening comprehension. Furthermore, the correlation between onomatopoeia and meta-linguistic awareness exhibited an interesting shift. In the younger cohort, this correlation was limited to morphological awareness, whereas in the older cohort, it extended to both phonological and morphological awareness. These results suggest that as children mature, the role of onomatopoeia in their language development may diminish. However, it is worth noting that onomatopoeia continues to play a crucial role in fostering the comprehensive development of meta-linguistic awareness.