

An examination of words starting <sn> with the view to deciding whether it offers any evidence for phonesthesia.

This paper intends to examine the words starting with <sn> given in the Oxford English Dictionary, and if possible categorise them, according to shared meaning. It will examine briefly the academic background to Sound symbolism along with contemporary attitudes towards the study of the relationship between sound and meaning. It aims to draw conclusions from the results of the categorisation of the <sn> words with the view to deciding whether it provides any evidence for phonesthesia.

Saussure is considered to be the founder of modern scientific linguistics. In relation to Sound symbolism, he had said that “the entire linguistic system is founded upon the irrational principle that the sign is arbitrary” (Saussure, 1983: 131). By this he means that the words used to denote concepts could be any words at all. He believed that there was no identifiable pattern or relationship between the word and its referent (<http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Sound%20Symbolism>). He furthers this by explaining that because he considers the word to be arbitrary it can only hold meaning in relation to other words. These ideas are the basis on which much of the current literary thought stems from.

Phonesthesia is a linguistic term relating to the idea that phonesthemes can contain inherent meaning. It is a branch of linguistics that stems from Sound symbolism. Sound symbolism is the study of the relationship between of an utterance and its meaning and consists mainly of three types of sound meaning which were originally formed by Von Humboldt in the 18th Century; these are onomatopoeia, clustering and iconism. Onomatopoeia refers to the use of the letters of the alphabet to imitate a sound in the real world. It can therefore only apply to sounds or to words which denote sound. Clustering is concerned with words which share sounds that have meaning at vowel and consonant level; Magnus (1997) refers to this as the Semantic Association. An example of Semantic Association given by Magnus is that if in any language the given word for house begins with an <h> or a <t> or even an <i> then by the process of clustering it would be expected that a disproportionately large number of words concerning housing would also begin with that letter, <h> or <t> or <i>. So therefore in English we have house with the other house words including hut, home, An examination of words starting <sn>.

hacienda, and hovel. It is important to recognise that in a language where the house set or words is not denoted by a <h> and by a <t> for example, that the clustering will occur around a different letter. Therefore the meaning of both the <h> and <t> clusters will be different in the non English language. Iconism is exhibited by words which have the same referent but only differ in their sound.

The theory of Iconism presumes that each vowel and consonant sound has its own inherent meaning. Furthermore it states that the meaning of these sounds is universal; therefore the consonant sound will hold the same inherent meaning in all languages where it is spoken (Magnus, 1997). This is challenged by Shisler (1997) who says that most sound symbols are found to language specific. He does, however, give generalised statements regarding the universality of sound symbolism. He gives examples as not being specific to the phonestheme such as <sn> but as being specific to the generalised phonetic sound type. For example he says that abrupt sounds are often represented by plosives. This view is in line with the view of Hans Marchand (1969) who provided the first extensive list of English phonesthemes. He states that certain sounds are connected with certain areas of meaning. He calls this the “imitative principle” (Marchand: 1969: 398). Universality of the inherent meaning in phonesthemes is shown to be incorrect by Diffloth (1994: 112). In this paper it can be seen that in the language of Bahnar, the vowels used in words denoting things that are big and small are high and low vowels respectively. This is entirely opposite to the system in English where a high vowel denotes something small and a low vowel denotes something big. Therefore it is not possible that Iconism is a language universal. The analysis of the group of words with an <sn> phonestheme does not concern the onomatopoeic section of thought on sound symbolism. It is mainly concerned with the other two branches of sound symbolism: Clustering and Iconism.

In the analysis of words beginning with the <sn> phonestheme, it was found that it was possible to categorise the words into several groups of related meaning. Also, it was found that it was possible to further subcategorise the groups. The dataset for the <sn> phonestheme was taken from the pages of the O.E.D. online (<http://dictionary.oed.com>). The dataset consisted of a total of around one thousand words which all started with the phonestheme <sn>. It was found that it was possible to group the words into six categories of meaning. These categories do not include all of the words given in the initial dataset and at most they represent only a fraction of

the words considered. With this in mind it offers little evidence for phonesthesia. How can a phonestheme which by definition, is a sound cluster which is directly associated with a specific meaning be associated with more than one meaning? Moreover if, in relation to Iconism, a phonestheme possesses an inherent meaning the expectation would be that it would be apparent in all manifestations of the phonestheme. Of the sample taken, only a comparably small number of words could be categorised. For the theory of Iconism to be correct it should be possible to categorise the entire sample. Also the categories created would have to be of related meaning so the overall meaning of the phonestheme was still preserved. The six categories were: words which expressed something to do with the face, words which expressed deviousness, words which evoked the emotions of being warm and cosseted, words which expressed anger or annoyance, words expressing snobbery, the qualities of a person who is “highly strung” and lastly words that expressed things to do with snow.

The category called face words includes 145 words relating to things to do with the face. This can then be further sub-categorised into things concerning the mouth and teeth and things concerning the nose. None of the words included in the face category contain anything to do with the eyes. The words within this category are taken from throughout the original dataset and do not just stem from one root word. Mainly the words in the category exhibit negative connotations they include: snaggletooth, snarl, sneke, snuffle, snigger, snivel and snot. Notable exceptions from the list of negative connotations include: snogging included in the category because you use the mouth in kissing, this would be considered a positive connotation because it is a pleasurable experience; snorkel was thought to also hold positive connotations because again it is related to a pleasurable leisure activity.

None of the words contained in the category named deviousness words have positive connotations, they are all negative. The words in this category mainly stem from two root words; snake and sneak. Therefore words such as snakishly and sneakingness have been included in the category. It is worthy of note that not all of the words come from the two main root words: snoop, snitch and snide are included in the category independently of the snake/sneak roots.

Another category which held negative connotations was the category called annoyed words. Again in this category all of the words were found to have negative connotations with the possible exception of snappily. It was felt that the <ily>

phonestheme at the end of the word held a positive connotation. This can be seen in words such as happily, merrily, silly. The words in this category came from more than one root source but the main ones are derived from snap; giving rise to among other snappishly, snappiness and snapper. Words in this category are very similar to words found in the next category snobbish, uppity words.

The words in this category relate to snobbish acts or behaviour and often relate to people who are presumptuous or critical. This is the second largest category, second to the category of face words with only 57 words. This again is a tiny proportion of the words in the initial dataset. It also shows that the largest category, face words, has by far the over-riding meaning of the phonestheme with more than double the number of examples in that category than in this. The words in this category come from many root words but the two main ones are snob and snub.

The other two categories snow words and snug words are tenuous. Both sets of words seem to derive from only one common root word: snow and snug. This suggests that the original word was formed and that the connected words developed from there. It is not an example of phonesthesia. This is supported further by the fact that both of these categories have quite positive connotations which directly contradicts what has been shown in the other four categories.

It can be seen that the meanings embedded within the four categories that are considered to be related to phonesthesia are deviousness, anger, snobbism and things to do with the nose and mouth. In the first three of these a shared area of meaning is clear, it is a general feeling of anger and superiority, but in the last category of face it is hard to see where this fits in with the others. What has been suggested by Firth (1964: 185) is that the phonestheme <sn> is used pejoratively so that the overriding meaning within a <sn> word will be negative. Therefore it can be seen that there is one main category of meaning which can be assigned to the <sn> phonestheme this is that the words will generally have negative connotations. Having said this, within this category of negative connotation the two subcategories of face words and the large group of anger words can exist. These categories give a more definite meaning to the <sn> phonestheme.

This paper has seen that there is a link between sound and meaning to some extent. It has been possible to categorise words according to their meaning but the two categories that were eventually assigned did not agree in meaning. This therefore

suggested that there were two possible meanings for the phonestheme, which would not be supportive of phonesthesia. It was seen, however, that both categories of meaning held negative connotations. This could be taken as evidence for phonesthesia if a negative connotation is considered to be a meaning. The academic background to phonesthesia was examined and it was considered in relation to the data set provided.

Words 1895

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Appendices

Key: Face words
 Angry words
 Deviousness words
 Snobbery words
 Snug words
 Snow words

snaast	snad(e	snag, n.4	snailery
snab	snade	snag, v.1	snail-horn
snab	snade	snag, v.2	snailing, n.
snabble, v.	snaffe	snagged, ppl. a.	snailing, ppl. a.
snack, n.1	snaffle, n.1	snagger	snailish, a.
snack, n.2	snaffle, n.2	snaggle, n.	snail-like, a. and adv.
snack, n.3	snaffle, v.1	snaggle, v.	snail-paced, a.
snack, a. and adv.	snaffle, v.2	snaggled, a.	'Snails, int.
snack, v.	snaffle, v.3	snaggle-tooth	snail-shell
snack	snaffle, v.4	snaggle- toothed, a.	snail-slow, a. (and adv.)
snack bar	snaffler1	snaggly, a.	snailly, a. (and n.)
snackery	snaffler2	snag-greet	snail, a.
snacket	snaffles	snaggy, a.1	snair, snair
snackette	snaffling, ppl. a.	snaggy, a.2	snake, n.
snackle, a.	snaffling-lay	snag-tooth	snake, v.1
snackle, v.	snafu, phr., a., and n.	snail, n.1	snake, v.2
snackly, adv.	snag, n.1	snail, n.2	snake-bark
snacky, a.	snag, n.2	snail, n.3	snake-bird
snacot-fish	snag, n.3	snail, v.	

snake-bite, n.	snakily, adv.	snap head	snaps
snakeboard, n.	snakiness	snap-hook	snapsack
snaked, ppl. a.	snaking, vbl. n.	snaply, a.	snapsauce
snake dance	snaking, ppl. a.	snappable, a.	snapshare
snake-fence	snakish, a.	snappage	snap-shooter
snake-fish	snakishly, adv.	snapped, ppl. a.	snap-shooting, vbl. n.
snake-head	snaky, a.	snapper, n.1	snap-shot, n.
snakeless, a.	snallygaster	snapper, n.2	snap-shot, v.
snakelet	snam, v.	snapper, a.	snap snorum
snake-like, a.	snap, n.	snapper, v.1	snap-work
snakeling	snap, a.	snapper, v.2	snapy, a.
snakeology	snap, v.	snapping, vbl. n.1	snar, n.
snake-pit	snap, int.	snapping, vbl. n.2	snar, v.
snaker, v.	snap-	snappery	snarche, v.
snake-root	snap-back		snare, n.
snakery	snapdragon	snappily, adv.	snare, v.
Snakes and Ladders	snape, n.1	snapping, vbl. n.	snare
snake's head	snape, n.2	snapping, ppl. a.	snareful, a.
snakeship	snape, n.3	snappingly, adv.	snareless, a.
snakesman	snape, v.1	snappish, a.	snarer
snake-stone	snape, v.2	snappishly, adv.	snarf, v.
snake-weed	snaper	snappishness	snarfle, v.
snakewise, adv.	snaphance, snaphaunce	snappy, a.	snark, n.
snake-wood			snark, v.

snarky, a.	snart, adv. and a.	snatted, a.	sneaking, vbl. n.
snarl, n.1	snary, a.	snatter, v.	sneaking, ppl. a.
snarl, n.2	snash, n.	snattines	sneakingly, adv.
snarl, v.1	snash, v.	snattock	sneakingness
snarl, v.2	snaste, n.	snatty	sneakish, a.
snarl, v.3	snaste, v.	snavel, v.1	sneakishly, adv.
snarled, ppl. a.	snat	snavel, v.2	sneaks, n.
snarler1	snatch, n.	snaw(e, snawy	'Sneaks, int.
snarler2	snatch, v.	snawith	sneaksbill
snarler3	snatch-	snax	sneaksby
snarley-yow	snatchable, a.	snayballe	sneaksman
snarling, vbl. n.1	snatch-block	snaype	sneak-up, n.
snarling, vbl. n.2	snatched, ppl. a.	snazzy, a.	sneak-up, v.
snarling, vbl. n.3	snatcher	sneak, n.	sneaky, a. (and n.)
snarling, ppl. a.	snatchery	sneak, v.	sneap, n.
snarlish, a.	snatchily, adv.	sneak-	sneap, v.
snarl-up	snatching, vbl. n.	sneakaway	sneaping, ppl. a.
snarly, a.1	snatchingly, adv.	sneakbill	sneap-nose
snarly, a.2	snatchy, a.	sneak-cup	sneath
snar-noise	snater, v.	sneakernet, n.	sneb, v.
snarp, a.	snath, n.	sneaker-snee	sneck, n.1
snarring	snath(e, v.	sneakiness	sneck, n.2
snarry, a.	snat-nosed, a.		

sneck, n.3	sneeshing	snelskrif	snick, n.3
sneck, v.1	sneevel	snepe, a.	snick, n.4
sneck, v.2	sneeze, n.	snercte	Snick, n.5
sneck, v.3	sneeze, v.	snese, v.	snick, v.1
sneck-drawer	sneezer	snet(te	snick, v.2
snecke	sneezeweed	snetched, a.	snick, v.3
snecked, ppl. a.	sneezewood	sneuel, -ill	snick
snecket	sneezewort	sneve, v.	snick and snee
sned, n.	sneezing, vbl. n.	snevel(l	snick-a-snee
sned, v.	sneezy, a.	snever, a.	snicker, n.1
snede	sneg, n.	snevyll, snevylysshe	snicker, n.2
snee	sneg, v.	snew, v.	snicker, n.3
snee	sneg-stone	snew	snicker, v.
sneeker-snee	sneipe, v.	snew	snicker-snack, adv. and n.
sneer, n.	sneir, v.	snib, n.1	snickersnee, n.
sneer, v.	sneith, a.	snib, n.2	snickersnee, v.
sneerer	sneke	snib, n.3	snicket
sneerful, a.	snekkja	snib, v.1	snicket
sneering, vbl. n.	snell, n.	snib, v.2	snickety, a.
sneering, ppl. a.	snell, a. and adv.	snibbing, vbl. n.	snickey, a.
sneeringly, adv.	snell, v.	snibble, n.	snicking, vbl. n.
sneerless, a.	Snellen	snibel	snickle, n.
sneery, a.	Snell's law	snichel	snickle, v.
sneesh	snelly, adv.	snick, n.1	snick or snee, v. and n.
		snick, n.2	

snick-snack, adv. and n.	sniffing, ppl. a.	'Sniggers, int.	snip, v.
snick-snarl	sniffly, a.	snigger snee	snipe, n.
snick-up, n.1	sniffy, a.	sniggery, a.	snipe, v.
snick-up, n.2	snift, n.	snigging, vbl. n.1	snipe-bill
snick-up, v.	snift, v.	snigging, vbl. n.2	snipe-fish
snid	snifter, n.	sniggle, n.1	sniper
sniddle	snifter, v.	sniggle, n.2	sniperscope
sniddy	snifting, vbl. n.	sniggle, n.3	snipey
snide, a. and n.	snifting, ppl. a.	sniggle, v.1	snipiness
Snider	snifty, n.	sniggle, v.2	sniping, vbl. n.
snidey, a.	snifty, a.	sniggle, v.3	sniping, ppl. a.
snidge	snig, n.1	sniggler1	snipish, a.
snie	snig, n.2	sniggler2	snipocracy
sniff, n.	snig, n.3	sniggler3	snipped, ppl. a.
sniff, v.	snig, v.1	sniggling, vbl. n.	snipper
sniffable, a.	snig, v.2	snight	snippering, vbl. n.
sniffer	snig, v.3	'Snigs, int.	snipper-snapper
sniffing, vbl. n.	snigger, n.1	snigsnarl	snippery
sniffing, ppl. a.	snigger, n.2	snik-a-snee	snippet
sniffle, n.1	snigger, v.1	snike, v.	snippetiness
sniffle, n.2	snigger, v.2	snikker-snee	snippety, a.
sniffle, v.	sniggerer	snilch, v.	snipping, vbl. n.
sniffler	sniggering, vbl. n.	snip, n.	snipping, ppl. a.
sniffing, vbl. n.	sniggering, ppl. a.		

snippy, a.	snithe, a.	snivellish, a.	snobling
snip-snap, n.	snithe, v.	snivelly, a.	snobocracy
snip-snap, a.	snithe	snoach, v.	snobographer
snip-snap, v.	snithing, ppl. a.	snoak	SNOBOL
snip-snap, adv. (and int.)	sniting, vbl. n.	snoar	Sno-cat
snip-snapper	snitling, ppl. a.	snob, n.1	snochyng
snip-snap- snorum	snitter, v.1	snob, n.2	snock
snipy, a.	snitter, v.2	snob, v.1	snockered, ppl. a.
snirt, n.	snitting, vbl. n.	snob, v.2	snod, a.
snirt, v.	snittle, n.	snobber	snod, v.
snirtle, v.	snitty, a.	snobberly, adv.	snode
snish, snishing	snive	snobbery	snodger, a., (adv., and n.)
snit1	snivel, n.	snobbess	snodly, adv.
snit2	snivel, v.	snobbiness	snoek, n.
snitch, n.	snivelard	snobbing, vbl. n.1	snoek, v.
snitch, v.	sniveldom	snobbing, vbl. n.2	snoff
snitchel, n.	snivelization	snobbish, a.	snoffe
snitch'ems	snivelled, ppl. a.	snobbishness	snog, a.
snitcher	sniveller	snobbism	snog, v.1
snite, n.1	snivelliness	snobbite	snogging, vbl. n.
snite, n.2	snivelling, vbl. n.	snobby, a.	snoggy
snite, v.	snivelling, ppl. a.	snobdom	snogly, adv.
snitel(s)	snivellingly, adv.	snobisme	Snohomish, a. and n.
sniter		snoblet	

snoif	snooperscope	Snopes	snorting, ppl. a.
snoir(e)	snooper	snore, n.	snortle, v.
snoke, v.	snoopy, a.	snore, v.	snorty, a. and adv.
snoke-horn	snoore	snore-	snory, a.
snokey, a.	snoose	snoreless, a.	snot, n.
snollygoster	snoot, n.	snorer	snot, v.
snomobile	snoot, v.	snoring, vbl. n.	snoter, a.
snood, n.	snooter, v.	snoring, ppl. a.	snotter, n.1
snood, v.	snootful	snork, n.	snotter, n.2
snooded, ppl. a.	snootily, adv.	snork, v.	snotter, v.
snooding	snootiness	snorkel, schnorkel	snottery
snoodle, v.	snooty, a.	snorkle	snottily, adv.
snook, n.1	snoove, v.	snorl, v.	snottiness
snook, n.2	snooze, n.	snort, n.1	snottinger
snook, n.3	snooze, v.	snort, n.2	snottish, a.
snook	snoozer	snort, v.1	snotty, n.
snooker, n.1	snooziness	snort v.2	snotty, a.
snooker, n.2	snoozing, vbl. n.	snorter1	snotty-nose
Snooks	snoozing, ppl. a.	snorter2	snotty-nosed, a.
snookums	a.	snorter3	snouch, n.
snool, n.	snoozle, v.	snorter4	snouch, v.
snool, v.	snoozy, n.	snorting, vbl. n.1	snouk
snoop, n.	snoozy, a.	snorting, vbl. n.2	snous
snoop, v.	snop, n.		snout, n.1
snooper	snop, v.		

snout, n.2	snowboarder, n.	snowiness	snub, n.1
snout, v.	snowboarding, n.	snowing, vbl. n.	snub, n.2
snouted, ppl. a.		snowish, a.	snub, n.3 and a.
snouter	snow-broth	snowk	snub, v.1
snout-fair, a.	snow-bunting	snowless, a.	snub, v.2
snouting1	snowcat	snow-like, a. and adv.	snub-
snouting2	Snowcem	snow-line	snubbed, ppl. a.
snoutish, a.	snow-clad, a.	snow-man	snubbee
snoutless, a.	snow-cold, a.	snowmanship	snubber
snouty, a.	snowcrie	snowmobile	snubbiness
Snovian, a.	Snowdon	'Snowns	snubbing, vbl. n.
snow, n.1	Snowdonian, a.	snow-on-the-mountain	snubbing, ppl. a.
snow, n.2	snow-drift	snow-plough, n.	snubbish, a.
snow, v.	snowdrop	snowre, v.	snubby, n.
snowball, n.	snowdrop tree	snow-shoe, n.	snubby, a.1
snowball, v.	snowed, ppl. a.	snow-storm	snubby, a.2
snowberry	snowfall	snow-water	snubby, a.3
snow-bird	snow-field	snow-white, a. and n.	snubnerlik
snowblade, n.	snow-finch	snow-wreath	snub nose
snowblader, n.	snowflake	snowy, a. and n.	snub-nosed, a.
snowblading, n.	snow-fleck		snuch
snow-blind, a.	snow-flower		snuck
snow-blindness	snowge		snuddle, v.
snowboard, n.	snow-geese	snozzle, n.	snudge, n.
snowboard, v.	snowily, adv.	snozzle, v.	

snudge, v.1	snuffish, a.	snug, n.1	snurge, n.
snudge, v.2	snuffkin	snug, n.2	snurl, n.
snudgery	snuffle, n.	snug, a.1 and adv.	snurl, v.
snuff, n.1	snuffle, v.	snug, a.2	snurp, v.
snuff, n.2	snuffle	snug, v.	snurt, v.
snuff, n.3	snuffler	snugger	snush, n.
snuff, v.1	snuffless, a.	snuggery	snush, v.
snuff, v.2	snuffliness	snugging, vbl. n.	snute
snuff, v.3	snuffling, vbl. n.	snugging, ppl. a.	snut-nose
snuff, v.4	snuffling, ppl. a.	snuggish, a.	snuttering, vbl. n.
snuff, int.	snuffly, a.	snuggle, n.	snuve, v.
snuff-box	snuff-mill	snuggle, v.	snuzzle, v.
snuff-coloured, a.	snuff-mull	snuggle-pup	sny, n.
snuff-dish	snuffy, a.1	snuggler	sny, v.1
snuffer1	snuffy, a.2	snuggly, a.	sny, v.2
snuffer2	snuft, n.	snugify, v.	snye
snuffiness	snuft, v.	snugly, adv.	snye
snuffing, vbl. n.1	snufter, n.	snugness	snying, vbl. n.
snuffing, vbl. n.2	snufter, v.	snum, v.	snythe
snuffing, ppl. a.	snuftkin	snur, v.	snyth-hill