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The Uses of the Russian Onomatopoeic Interjection *bats* ‘bam, bang’

1. Introduction

Both universal and language-specific characteristics of words that attempt to reproduce images of objects or events by imitating various perceptual characteristics of extra-linguistic phenomena have been in the focus of typological research (Akita & Pardeshi, 2019; Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz, 2001). In world languages, words depicting sensory experiences are typically referred to as “imitatives”, “mimetics”, “ideophones”, “descriptive words” or “onomatopoeic expressions” (cf. Akita, 2017; Dingemanse, 2012; Fidler, 2014; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2017; Jääskeläinen, 2013; Katsuki-Pestemer, 2014). Ideophones form a class of marked words that vividly represent not only auditory, but also other types of perceptual imagery, as well as events or even ideas through sound, for

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instance, in Ewe: *kpata kpata* ‘scattered drops’; in Siwu: *dzradzra* ‘heavy person walking fast’ (Dingemanse et al., 2015; Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz, 2001). They are known for their unique capacity to “package multiple aspects of a sensory event into a single word” (Tufvesson, 2011, p. 88). It has been noted that ideophones are characterized by distinct phonological features, intonation, morphology and syntax (Akita & Pardeshi, 2019; Childs, 1994; Dingemanse et al., 2015; Dingemanse & Akita, 2017). Even though ideophones are shaped by language-specific phonological constraints, the principles of form-meaning mapping and the way such words function in language may well be universal (Childs, 2014; Dingemanse et al., 2015; Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz, 2001).

Like other world languages, Russian also has onomatopoeic and interjectional forms depicting various aspects of sensory experiences. The semantics of words such as *bats* (*бац*) ‘bam, bang’ ranges from depicting sounds to indexing action, speaker’s perception of this action and other mental states (Kanerva, 2019). There are certain features that ideophones and Russian onomatopoeic words have in common. First of all, ideophones are often polysemantic, in the sense that they can convey multiple shades of meaning, the hierarchy of which varies from depicting sound, movement, visual and other sensory patterns to indicating inner cognitive states (Dingemanse, 2012). Polysemanticity also applies to Russian words such as *bats* (Kanerva, 2019). Additionally, ideophones and Russian onomatopoeic words are similar in terms of prosodic and morphosyntactic markedness. Ideophones are known to constitute distinct intonation units (Childs, 1994; Dingemanse & Akita, 2017), have reduplicated and repeated morphemes (Fawcett, 2018; Zwicky & Pulum, 1987), appear at clause edges (Dingemanse & Akita, 2017), form collocations resembling quotative constructions (Childs, 1994; Fawcett, 2018). Foregrounded prosody, reduplication of morphemes and syntactic independence are typical features of Russian onomatopoeic interjections (Kanerva, 2018; Серёда, 2005). Morphological and intonational expressiveness of ideophones tends to decrease when they are more integrated into sentence structure (Dingemanse & Akita, 2017). The same is the case of Russian onomatopoeias, since grammatically integrated units tend to be less morphologically and intonationally expressive (Kanerva, 2018). In this way, while the term “ideophone” has not been traditionally used for Russian, words such as *bats* share many of the characteristics attributed to ideophones.

One feature noted about Russian words such as *bats* is their predicative use. The Russian Academy Grammar (Шведова, 1980) states that Russian

onomatopoeic and verbal interjections can be used in the syntactic predicate function, especially when indicating a short, punctual event, and that in this use they replace verb forms. According to this authoritative source, this is the main syntactic function of Russian onomatopoeic and verbal interjections, and it makes them different from other interjections (Шведова, 1980, pp. 733–734). In more recent research, the reasons given for predicate use of these interjections include special narration techniques (Nikitina, 2012; Кор Шаин, 2008), expressing modal meanings (Парамонов, 1999), and the possibility of being instantaneously vague and allowing pragmatic implications (Kanerva, 2020). It has also been reported that interpretation of the intended meaning of these words may depend on punctuation marks used with them (Канерва & Виймаранта, 2018). When used as a predicate instead of a verb, an interjection – although it is a form without inflection – can take the characteristics of a verb, such as being grounded in time. It is also known that other Slavic languages allow onomatopoeic interjections to be used in the predicate function (Viimaranta & Vihervä, 2019).

A closer examination of the semantics of the Russian onomatopoeic interjection *bats*, chosen for analysis in this study, shows that it is related to the sounds of a gunshot, explosion or thunder, as well as of hitting and knocking or even falling, pushing and throwing. More indirectly, this word also depicts quick, intense or unexpected action involving movement (Шляхова, 2004). These types of circumstances are characteristic of sudden, often unexpected, events that may result in a loud sound. Nevertheless, not all of the enumerated situations always involve such a sound; in the case of falling and especially pushing and throwing, *bats* is related to the suddenness of the action. Even more generally, although onomatopoeic interjections supposedly describe sound, they are often used in contexts where no sound is involved. T. Efremova (Ефремова, 2000) mentions a figurative use of *bats* when it refers to a situation when something suddenly appears or becomes known. In sum, the interjection *bats* is especially rich in this respect, since the sound described is so obvious and yet the interjection is often used without real connection to a sound.

For this study, we propose the following interrelated research questions: (1) How is the Russian onomatopoeic interjection *bats* used (on the basis of corpus material)? Is the predicate use as central as previous research assumes? (2) How often is there an actual sound involved in the uses of *bats*? (3) Are the uses grounded in time and as such comparable to Russian verb forms?

2. Materials and methods

A search for *bats* in the main corpus of the Russian National Corpus, available online at www.ruscorpora.ru (22 April 2015), returned 504 hits, out of which 472 were included in the automatically downloadable selection. Of the 472 hits, 470 actually included the onomatopoeic word *bats* (and not the homonymic proper name).

Firstly, we classified the data based on whether each of the uses in context functioned as the predicate or had another syntactic (and simultaneously semantic) function. Secondly, in order to estimate the importance of real and imagined sounds when using *bats*, we classified the examples into three categories: those describing a sound, those describing a possible sound (and an event that can be related to such a sound, e.g. shooting), and those that cannot have a real-life connection to the sound named by the interjection. Thirdly, we decided for each use whether it could be interpreted as not grounded in time. The analysis was based on the information and amount of context provided by the Russian National Corpus.

3. Results

3.1. The predominance of predicate function

Of the 470 hits, in 453 *bats* was used in the predicate function, or at least this was a possible interpretation. This means that in these uses *bats* is not a mere iconic imitation of a sound. Rather, it is used like a verb: it can have a subject and take a direct object. The other kind of predication possible are the uses where the interjection alone stands for a meaning that we would need a full sentence (or more) to describe.

Whether *bats* means ‘x happened’ (broke down, was hit, fell, etc.), ‘the sound *bats* was emitted’, or ‘I/we heard *bats*’ often remains for the hearer to interpret. This can be illustrated by Examples (1) and (2) below. In (1), the predicate function is clearer and refers to something becoming known – an unplanned stop – even though no sound seems to be involved. In contrast, Example (2)

may be interpreted in different ways: either as describing the event, perceived suddenness of this event or merely as describing the sound only.

- (1) *Edesh'* *kuda-nibud'*, *vrode by* *vse* *v*
 drive-IPF.PRES.2P.SG somewhere-ACC as if everything in
poriadke, *i* *vdrug – bats!* – *nezaplanirovannaia* *ostanovka...*
 order-LOC.SG and suddenly bang-INTERJ unexpected-NOM.SG stop-NOM.SG
 “You are driving somewhere, all seems to be fine, and suddenly – bang! – an unexpected stop...”
 (Russian National Corpus, hereafter RNC: O Zueva, *Skazhi chto ia tebe nuzhna...*, in *Dasha*, 2004)

- (2) *I* *vdrug –* *okh* *ty!* – *u* *menia* *pered*
 and suddenly oh you at-PREP I-GEN before-PREP
samym *nosom* *kirpich* *letit.* ***Bats!***
 very-INSTR nose-INSTR brick-NOM fly-IPF.PRES.3P.SG bang-INTERJ
S *kryshi* *svalilsia.*
 from roof-GEN fall.down-PRF.REFL.3P.SG
 “And all of a sudden – oh boy – a brick flies right in front of my nose. Bang! It fell from the roof.”
 (RNC: E. Charushin, *Tiupa, Tomka i soroka*, 1946)

In a particular case it may also be a matter of interpretation whether *bats* refers to a sound, the sensations prototypically caused by actions that can be described through the sound, or both. Some further examples are needed to demonstrate this.

- (3) *I* *vdrug –* ***bats!*** *soglasilsia!* – *vse,*
 and suddenly bang-INTERJ agree-PRF.PAST.3P.SG.MASC all
govorit, *davaite* *v* *etu...* *ia*
 speak-IPF.PRES.3P.SG let-IPF.IMP.2P.PL to this I
potom *sebe* *otdel'nuiu* *voz'mu...*
 then I-REFL separate-ACC.SG take-PRF.1P.SG
 “And all of a sudden – bang! He agreed! That’s it, he says, let’s put it in here... And I will take a separate one for myself.” (RNC: A. Volos, *Nedvizhimost'*, in *Novyi Mir*, 2001)

- (4) – *Èto* *bylo* *kak udar* *molnii,*
 it is-IPF.PAST.SG.N like strike lightning-GEN
ozarivshii *ego* *zhizn'.* ***Bats*** – *i* *ego*
 illuminate-IPF.PARTIC.PRES.MASC his life-ACC bang and he-ACC
podkosilo. – *Vy* *narochno* *tak* *sebia* *vedete?*
 make.fall-PAST.PRF.N you purposely like.this REFL behave-2P.PL
 “It was like a strike of lightning, illuminating his life. Bang – and he was off his feet. Do you behave like this on purpose?” (RNC: M. Petrosian, *Dom, v kotorom...*, 2009)

- (5) *Tat'iana* *èta* *rabotala* *perevodchitseï* *v*
 Tatiana this work-IPF.PAST.SG.3P.FEM translator-INSTR.SG in

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| <i>kakoï-to</i> | | <i>firme</i> | | <i>i</i> | | <i>zarabatyvala</i> | |
| some-LOC.SG | | firm-LOC.SG | | and | | earn-IPF.PAST.SG.3P.FEM | |
| <i>ne</i> | <i>to</i> | <i>chtoby</i> | <i>mnogo,</i> | <i>no</i> | <i>pristoïno.</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>vdrug –</i> |
| NEG | that | that | much | but | decently | and | suddenly |
| <i>bats!</i> – | <i>imenno</i> | <i>ona-to</i> | <i>ukhodit</i> | | | <i>s</i> | <i>raboty.</i> |
| bang | precisely | she.exactly | leave-IPF.PRES.3P.SG | | | from | work-GEN |

“This Tatiana worked as a translator in a firm and made reasonable amounts of money. But one day – bam she was the one that quit her job.” (RNC: V. Belousova, *Zhil na svete rytsar’ bednyi*, 2000)

While in (1) it is quite probable that *bats* refers to something being broken in the car and the loud sound caused by that, in many uses of *bats* we cannot tell without a wider context (or even with it) whether the speaker describes a sound or uses the interjection as a predicate that emphasizes the suddenness of action, or whether the expression refers to the speaker’s mental state which has conceptual connections with the effects of unexpected sounds. It is possible that there is sound involved as the speech situation refers to heavy object falling from the roof, as in (2), or that there is definitely no sound, as in (3) and (5). In (4), the conceptualization is built on a comparison, indicated by the word *kak* ‘like’. In this comparison, a lightning strike (which is related to a certain sound and can have effects on a human being) is equated to something that brings the person to their knees, i.e. makes them resigned. This use of *bats* is not only based on an imagined sound; the event that the imagined sound could be related to is equally imaginary.

Only when the sound is present, the usage of a verb with the same stem (in this case *batsnut’*, *zviaknut’*, *pliukhnut’*) as an option to express the same meaning is justified. Thus, of Examples (1)–(5), only in (1) the same idea can be conveyed with the verb *batsnut’* – although this would force the speaker to indicate what caused the sound, for example *shina batsnula/bakhnula* ‘the tyre made the *bats/bakh* sound (i.e. exploded)’. When *bats* is used in its perfective meaning – the meaning of some kind of hitting that happens swiftly – the interjection does, indeed, replace a perfective aspect verb form which is grounded in time and situated in the chain of events.

3.2. The ways of using *bats* and their relation to naming a sound

The functions where *bats* occurs in our data (in the order of frequency) are the following: (1) indicating a sudden, unexpected event involving possible (imagined or simulated) sound – 213 uses out of 470; (2) indicating a sudden, unexpected event (no sound involved) – 195 uses out of 470; (3) indicating the occurrence of

the sound that can be depicted with *bats* – 62 uses out of 470.¹ The first two typical functions – indicating a sudden, unexpected event involving or not involving a sound – have several things in common. They are uses of *bats* in the predicate function. In these uses, *bats* is often combined with conjunctions that indicate temporal order or causal relation, such as *i* ‘and’ or *a* ‘and, but’; adverbs emphasizing suddenness, such as *neozhidanno* ‘unexpectedly’, *vdrug* ‘suddenly’;² or punctuation marks, such as a dash. While the first two ways of using *bats* involve its syntactic position of a predicate, the third one is different: in this case *bats* (besides functioning as a predicate) may also serve as a subject or object.

3.2.1. Indicating a sudden, unexpected event involving possible (imagined, simulated) sound

Indicating a sudden, unexpected event involving possible (imagined, simulated) sound includes uses where *bats* refers to action that is actually related to such a sound – e.g. falling or shooting. We repeat that there were 213 such uses in our material. Even in these cases, the sound is not always real – it can well be imagined or exaggerated. The suddenness of the action influences our overall perception of the situation, and thus enables the extension of *bats* uses to contexts that may not actually involve the kind of “sound” that would commonly be described with *bats* in Russian. Here are some examples of such uses (besides Examples (1), (2) and (4) above):

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| (6) <i>Skoree</i> | <i>vsego</i> | <i>upala</i> | <i>dama,</i> | <i>kakaia-nibud'</i> | <i>volshbnitsa</i> | <i>iz</i> |
| rather | all-GEN | fell | dame | some.kind.of | witch | from |
| <i>соседнего</i> | | <i>Svetlogo Lesa,</i> | <i>zaputalas'</i> | | | |
| neighbouring-GEN | | PROP.GEN | get.entangled-PRF.PAST.SG.FEM | | | |
| <i>v</i> | <i>soboliakh</i> | <i>i –</i> | <i>bats!</i> – | <i>padenie...</i> | | |
| in | sables-LOC | and | bang | falling | | |

¹ The numbers are not absolute; the line between the second and third group is especially difficult to draw, even in context. They do, however, give some indication of the frequency of different uses.

² The automatic search for n-grams in the Russian National Corpus shows that the most typical trigrams that *bats* is used in are *i vdrug bats* ‘and suddenly *bats*’ (28 occurrences), *a tut bats* ‘and here *bats*’ (7 occurrences), and *a potom bats* ‘and then *bats*’ (7 occurrences). While all these constructions emphasize the suddenness of the unexpected event, they are not the only ones. Because of the free word order in Russian, many recurring constructions are not shown in n-gram analysis, since other words can be placed between the elements of the construction.

“Most probably a lady fell, some kind of enchantress from the neighbouring Svetlyĭ Les, who got entangled in her sable furs and – bang – a tumble...” (RNC: V. Aksenov, *Kruglye sutki non-stop*, in *Novyi Mir*, 1976)

- (7) *Merzkaia zhe sobachonka, pro kotoruii vse uzhe*
 miserable-FEM that dog about who-ACC everybody already
zabyli, tem vremenem tikho pristroilas'
 forget-PRF.PAST.PL that-INSTR time-INSTR quietly settle-PRF.PAST.FEM
za moim stolom u doski i – bats! –
 behind my-INSTR table-INSTR at board and bang
nalozhila tseluii kuchu.
 put-PRF.PAST.FEM whole-ACC heap-ACC

“The miserable dog that everyone had forgotten about settled quietly by my table and – bang! – produced a mass of poop.” (RNC: A. Ivanov, *Geograf globus propil*, 2002)

- (8) *Sam – bats, i snial u*
 himself bang and take.away-PRF.PAST.SG.MASC at
nikh ofitsera.
 they-GEN officer-GEN

“He himself – bang, and picked off one of their officers.” (RNC: L. IUzefovich, *Kostium Arlekina*, 2001)

The constructions indicate the suddenness of sound and/or action. In these uses, if *bats* were to be replaced by a verbal construction, the correct verb would *not* be *batsnut'*. Using an onomatopoeic interjection is an expressive way of talking about an unexpected, sudden, resultative action which is situated in a chain of events. Resultativeness and completeness are regarded as perfective aspect features in Russian. Such action is usually momentary – also a feature related to perfective aspect. At the same time, the perfectiveness of the uses is by no means obligatory in Examples (6)–(8). Besides punctuation, the occurrence of other perfective verbs (*zaputalas'* ‘got entangled’, *pristroilas'* ‘settled’, *snial* ‘picked off’) is the main indicator of perfectiveness. Without them (with imperfective aspect verbs) *bats* could easily be interpreted as having typically imperfective meanings, such as describing simultaneous events or events in general.

Instead of comparing the use of *bats* in these examples (where the sound either really exists or can be imagined to exist) with the use of a verb, we should concentrate on what makes these uses different from verb uses. The expressiveness of *bats* here is related very closely to the fact that it can be used without temporal grounding. In this way, the motivation for using the interjection instead of a verb form is not primarily related to distinctions between the imperfective and perfective aspect, but rather to notions that can be expressed in both aspects. *Bats*

- (11) A *potom* *svadebnoe* *puteshestvie:* *molodaia* *para*
 and then wedding-ADJ.N.NOM trip young couple
v *tuche* *dyma* *i* *para...*
 in cloud-FEM.LOC smoke-GEN and steam-GEN
Tut *pauza* – ***bats!*** – *i* *rebenok* *rodilsia.*
 now pause bang and child born-PRF.PAST.MASC.REFL

“And then the honeymoon: the newly-weds in a cloud of smoke and dust... A pause here – bang! – and a child was born.” (RNC: A. Ivanov, *Geografglobus propil*, 2002)

Although *bats* indicates a certain group of sounds – loud sounds of falling, hitting, and banging – it is very often used in contexts where the sound is merely imagined, as the direct semantics of *bats* allows not only loudness, but also intensity and sharpness. As a result, the perceived sharpness of sound is metaphorically transferred to the unexpectedness of events, like in situations when someone suddenly realizes something, e.g. English “it hit me”.

In Examples (10) and (11), the time sequence of events is presented as quickly changing scenes located on a temporal continuum. Description of a momentary action that can be followed by another momentary action is one of the typical uses of past tense forms of perfective aspect verbs in Russian. In the contexts mentioned, interjections cannot, in fact, be replaced by verb forms of the same stem because these verb forms require the possibility of a sound being produced. Rather, the use of an onomatopoeic interjection in Examples (10) and (11) can be explained only as a form of semantic shift not accounted for by the Academy Grammar (Шведова, 1980). Here, the imagined *bats* sound is related to the equally unreal event of an explosion that would have a causal relation if they were not imagined, but real. The shared knowledge of such causal relations is combined with a comparison of an explosion with suddenness.

3.2.3. Indicating the occurrence of the sound that can be depicted with *bats*

Indication of the occurrence of sounds includes cases in which the sound is merely named, and the use of this interjection means something like ‘a *bats* sound was heard’. There were 62 such uses in our material. These include examples where ‘something making a *bats* sound happened’:

- (12) A *tam* *uzhe* *pervuiu* *setku* *triasli* –
 and there already first-ACC net-ACC shake-PRF.PAST.PL
bats, ***bats,*** ***bats!***
 bang bang bang

“And they were already pulling out the first net – bang, bang, bang!” (RNC, G. Vladimirov, *Tri minuty molchaniia*, 1969)

- (13) – *Znachit, ty u nas geroi. Ladnen'ko... Bats!* –
 so you at we-GEN hero alright bang
A-a-a!!! Bats!
 oh-oh-oh bang

“So you are playing the hero here. Let it be so. Bang! Oh-oh-oh! Bang!” (RNC: O. Divov, *Vybrakovka*, 1999)

- (14) *Bats! Bats! Po kozhanomu chernomu pal'to*
 bang bang against leather-DAT black-DAT coat-DAT
Rodionova zabarabanili snezhki.
 Rodionov-GEN bang-PRF.PAST.PL snowball-NOM.PL

“Bang! Bang! Snowballs started banging against Rodionov’s black leather coat.” (RNC: A. Bek, *Talant: Zhizn' Berezhkova*, parts 4–6, 1940–1956)

- (15) *No shagi upali, i – bats: khlopnula dver'.*
 but step-NOM.PL fall-PRF.PAST.PL and bang bang-PRF.PAST door-NOM
 “But the steps landed, and – bang: the door banged.” (RNC: A. Belyi, *Peterburg*, 1913–1914)

- (16) *Bats! – A-a-a!!! Bats! – U-u-u!!! “Pokhozhe,*
 bang a-a-a bang u-u-u seem-ADJ.TRUNC.N.NOM
b'iut kogo-to”.
 beat-IPF.PRES.3P.PL someone-GEN

“Bang! – A-a-a!!! Bang! – U-u-u!!! ‘It seems that someone is being beaten.’” (RNC: O. Divov, *Vybrakovka*, 1999)

In Examples (12) and (13), the recurring word *bats* indicates an action that causes this sound. The context allows for different interpretations of what the action and the sound are really like. In (12) that can be fish falling to the ground, and in (13) those are probably gunshots. In (14), (15) and (16), the onomatopoeic word is the same and only the context reveals that sounds of different acoustic qualities are referred to: snowballs hitting a leather coat (14), the slamming of a door (15), punches or slaps (16).

3.3. Temporal sequence

Groundedness in time means that the event is portrayed as having a position on the time line in relation to other events. Many of the uses in our data (more than 90%) can be interpreted as not being grounded in time. This means that the action is not fixed in a chain of events. Many examples in our material

contain interjections that are vague about the temporal relations they express or are associated with. We believe that this is not a coincidence, but rather a reason for using these interjections. Not binding the event closely to the temporal continuum not only makes the sentence expressive, but also deliberately leaves room for interpretation. Let us return to some of the examples presented above in order to discuss this feature.

In (1), the unexpected stop – whether or not connected with a banging sound (maybe a bursting tyre) – is grounded in time, which is indicated by the construction *i vdrug* ‘and suddenly’. Yet the whole sentence is generalized, as shown by the generalizing use of *ty* ‘you’, which could refer to anyone, including the speaker her/himself. This means that even the *bats* part can be generalized, and that would eliminate grounding, as the events described can potentially happen to anyone at any time. Even more so, *bats* freezes the moment in which the unpleasant turn of events occurs.

In (2), the event of a brick flying is grounded in time. If we think more closely about an event in which a brick falls from the roof, it should make a sound when hitting the ground. Also, the use of perfective verb *svalilsia* ‘fell’ accentuates the result. Nevertheless, the situation starts from the moment when the brick begins to move, as the observer reports it in real time. The event that could be defined here as ‘making the *bats* sound’ is actually simultaneous with its explanation (*s kryshi svalilsia* ‘it fell from the roof’). If interpreted as a description of the sound and the process of sound-making, the interjection is actually (in terms of Russian grammar) imperfective, describing action that is simultaneous with the other action described with the verb form *svalilsia*. Therefore, the most natural interpretation is that the second sentence explains the first one, referring to the same event. Falling from the roof and hitting the ground both happened within the same slot in a chain of events. In this way, the grounding in time can get different interpretations in this sentence, and this is made possible with the use of an interjection.

In (3), *bats* is used in describing surprise over someone unexpectedly agreeing. The meaning is resultative (something happened that caused something else to happen). The reason for using the interjection in this sentence can be related to the speaker’s desire to comment on a surprising fact. Here, *bats* could not be replaced with any verb forms: is not grounded in time and communicates that the speaker was personally impressed by the outcome and thus witnessed it themselves.

In (4), the temporal frame of the event described by *bats* is provided in the previous sentence, where *éto* ‘it’ is compared to a lightning strike. The grounding in time comes in the sentence with *bats* in the form of two events: the event that is described with the interjection, and something that brought the person to their knees. The context does not indicate what the event was, or whether there were two different factors or just one. The cause-effect relationship is, nevertheless, clear. Someone was struck by something (either an event or a fact) and this had certain consequences.

In (5), where Tatiana quit her job, *bats* indicates an unexpected event, and the speaker’s opinion about it is included, although not clearly stated. It could be, for example, ‘just like that, so they say’, or ‘was I surprised to hear that’. In (6), (7), (8), (9), (10) and (11), where *bats* is used after a dash, this interjection is grounded in time mainly with the use of other words as interjections themselves are neutral in this respect. Therefore, the temporal role of *bats* remains open to interpretation. If *bats* depicts an event in a chain of events, its use can, nevertheless, build on evidentiality in a similar way as described in (5), namely by indicating that the situation touched the communicator personally. The analytic way in which *bats* is placed in the sentence structure makes it possible for the speaker to distance themselves from the narration. Therefore, they may not be involved in the situation directly or not even witness it with their own eyes but, nonetheless, offer their personal account of the events, especially in (6), (10) and (11).

In (12), *bats* refers to the banging of the fishing net or fish falling on the ground, and the context for this situation is given. In (13), not only the sound is present but also the sentence-level context hints at the effects that the concrete actions have. Similarly, *bats* from Examples (14), (15) and (16) is used to depict different sounds. Even from the context of Example (14) it is not clear whether it refers to sharp or dull impact as only the material of the coat is mentioned, but not the physical state of the snow – slushy or frozen. In (15), only the action is mentioned, but not the force with which the door was closed, thus the loudness remains unknown. In (16), the speaker assumes that someone is being beaten, but how the force is applied is not specified. In all of these examples, *bats* does not seem to be used to communicate the exact qualities of sounds. Rather, it has functions similar to direct speech, offering a frozen-in-time image of the acoustic event as experienced by the communicator.

In all, it is not easy to determine from a few sentences whether the use of an interjection fulfils the requirements for verbs when it comes to being grounded in time. A close analysis of the examples shows how ambiguous these contexts can be. The ability of words such as *bats* to carry multiple semantic implications, including pragmatically formed intention of being vague, has been addressed before (cf. Kanerva, 2020). We believe that the choice of *bats* is deliberate, and that the important reason for the use of this interjection is the opportunity of not naming the situation directly, but of freezing the impression it produces, be it sensory or emotional.

4. Discussion

Language use consists of more than merely expressing definite sets of meanings. It has a lot to do with negotiating hidden implications even without direct awareness on the part of the speaker. At the same time, such implications are likely to be successfully decoded by the recipient.

While morphological means in some languages allow the formation of separate onomatopoeic verbs, the inclusion of verbal affixes makes them inherently less expressive. This provides evidence for how important it is for the imitating element to be directly recognizable. Special functions of onomatopoeic interjections in discourse and texts can be achieved as a result of their grammatical flexibility. The freedom that is offered by the absence of explicit morphological marking allows the use of these non-declinable forms in functions similar to those of verbs, nouns, or even adverbs.

Treating the predicative use of onomatopoeic interjections as equivalent to verbs has led to the assumption that they can be interpreted according to the same rules that apply to verbs. Our material shows that this is not the case. While verbs are grounded in time through their form, for onomatopoeic interjections this can be done only through context. While verbs participate in deictic relations through form, for interjections this kind of participation needs to be interpreted by the hearer. As for the relation to verbal aspect, while grammatical aspect is an obligatory category for verbs, interjections are not bound by it.

The indeclinable interjection includes only the stem, the semantic part carrying meaning, but no inflection whatsoever. Since inflection is one of the main characteristics of Russian content words, the use of uninflected fully

semantic forms in syntactic positions that normally require inflected words is an anomaly. Our analysis has shown that the use of these interjections is far more complicated than previously suggested: they do not merely replace verbs or stand for sounds. There are indications that the onomatopoeic interjection *bats* differs in: (1) its relation to the verb with the same stem and the type of information provided by verbal aspect, (2) the centrality of predicate function for it, including groundedness in time, (3) the degree to which sound is involved in the situations where it is used, and (4) the extent to which the speaker is involved in or distanced from the events.

5. Conclusions

This article investigates the use of the Russian onomatopoeic interjection *bats* as a predicate and in other functions on the basis of corpus material. We show that the previous interpretation that interjections are used instead of verb forms is inaccurate. While verb forms are necessarily grounded in time (and in Russian this is done by both using morphology and choosing between an imperfective and perfective verb stem), in the vast majority of uses interjections can be interpreted as devoid of this feature.

This study offers an insight into how onomatopoeias, being free of morphological constraints, enable the speaker to comment on the source and credibility of the information by referring to embodied sensations that are common knowledge of all. This information is heavily dependent on the context and much is left unsaid, but the speaker and hearer still seem to share an understanding of what is meant or hinted at.

To sum up, we believe that onomatopoeic interjections such as *bats* represent a way of introducing another voice into the text and at the same time distancing oneself from the narration, but not necessarily from the situation. Importantly, being devoid of inflections, Russian onomatopoeias in predicative function have the capacity to signal information from another discourse level and stand out from the utterance, unlike other elements that are connected to one another in a string with morphological marking. Onomatopoeic interjections also make it possible to describe things happening and reactions caused by them without using verb forms, which need to be bound in terms of tense and aspectuality. We assume that the unboundedness of interjections may be

especially important for languages such as Russian, in which the obligatory grammatical category of aspectuality is included in every use of a verb form. The notion of action not being grounded in time explains many uses of Russian onomatopoeic interjections as predicates.

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The Uses of the Russian Onomatopoeic Interjection *bats* ‘bam, bang’

Summary

Descriptions of Russian grammar have long acknowledged the possibility of using indeclinable onomatopoeic verbal interjections as predicates instead of verb forms. It has been suggested that this usage primarily replaces perfective (resultative) past tense verb forms of the same stem. We have analysed 470 examples from the Russian National Corpus to show that the interjection *bats* ‘bam, bang’ is not only used as a predicate. It is very often placed in positions where the verbs sharing the same stem (e.g. *batsat* ‘to bang repeatedly’ or ‘to bang once’) cannot be used. Many of the predicate uses are not time-bound. *Bats* can also be used in describing sounds and their potential effects, even when no actual sound is involved.

O użyciach rosyjskiego wykrzyknika onomatopiecznego *bac* ‘bach’

Streszczenie

W opisach gramatyki rosyjskiej od dawna rejestrowano możliwość użycia nieodmiennych onomatopiecznych wykrzykników czasownikowych jako predykatu. Wyjaśniano, że takie użycie zastępuje przede wszystkim formy rezultatywne czasownika dokonanego o tym samym temacie w czasie przeszłym. Autorki artykułu przeanalizowały 470 przykładów zaczerpniętych z Narodowego Korpusu Języka Rosyjskiego, aby wykazać, że wykrzyknik *bac* ‘bach’ jest używany nie tylko w funkcji predykatywnej. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że omawiany wykrzyknik często pojawia się w pozycjach, w których nie można użyć czasowników o tym samym temacie (np. *bacat* ‘uderzać wielokrotnie’ lub ‘uderzyć raz’), a w wielu użyciach predykatywnych nie jest osadzony czasowo. Z przeprowadzonej analizy wynika również, że wykrzyknik *bac* może być używany do opisu dźwięków i ich potencjalnych skutków, nawet jeśli sam efekt dźwiękowy w istocie nie zachodzi.

Keywords: onomatopoeia; interjections; Russian language; predicate

Słowa kluczowe: onomatopeja; wykrzykniki; język rosyjski; predykat

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