

## **Onomatopoeia: When Sound Is Seen**

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Phonogram is a visual element in comics that represents the existence of sound. Together with picture elements, they both create a construction that is governed by a narrative. As a manifestation of sound, phonogram's existence also delivers a message in the form of signs. By using a semiotic approach, this study seeks to identify the nature of the phonogram, its function, and the way it is produced and perceived. Symbolic messages are created to dramatize comics. Because of phonogram's nature that imitates stereotypes in the real world, comic artists lead the reader to agree on the false reality presented in comic works. Phonogram's creation requires two step interpretations, namely interpretation of sound and interpretation of visualization. The form of expression on the phonogram is not universal, because it refers to certain cultural stereotypes.

*Keywords: phonograms, onomatopoeia, comics, signs, meaning production.*

*Received: December 6, 2022; Accepted December 23, 2022; Published December 27, 2022*

*<https://doi.org/10.31091/mudra.v38i1.2220>*

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## INTRODUCTION

According to McCloud (2001: 9), comic is a sequential work in which there are juxtapositions of comic elements that are arranged according to a certain narrative line, so that the message to be conveyed to the reader can be understood. McCloud divides the elements of the visual structure into images and symbols consisting of phonograms, word balloons, and panels. Hikmat Darmawan (2012: 37) complements McCloud's definition that comics are images in the form of picture or non-picture that are arranged in sequences designed to convey information and / or produce aesthetic impact to the readers.

In addition to describing comic elements as those of McCloud's, Hikmat Dharmawan also refers to a two-way communication process that is used as the process of sending and receiving message or information. This is supported by Will Eisner (1985: 8) who proposes that reading comics is an act that combines aesthetic perceptions with intellectual capacity. In comics, there is a synthetic expression process between the picture-story and the reader (Ajidarma, 2011: 37). This means that the reader is actually required to be a genius to understand various signs, elements, structures, aesthetic experiences, and even cross-cultural experiences.

Using the concept of visual language, Primadi Tabrani (2005: 75) proposes an analogy about the relationship of visual elements in the panel as an expression, where one panel will contain a unity of text from its constituent elements in a certain context in accordance with the message contained in the panel.

Comics have a visual structure which is a combination of visual elements in the form of illustrations or pictures as the main elements and various symbols in the form of words (phonograms), word balloons, and panels. Illustration (picture) is an image used by comic artists to represent an object.

Picture is an imagery and mimesis of the real world that is presented in comics. Illustration is an imagery that includes icons, indexes and symbols. Illustration is considered an icon because it resembles or similar with what it represents. It is categorized as an index because it indicates the presence of something else. And it is classified as a symbol because it is a convention (Saraceni, 2003: 15). Picture is one form of illustration. The pictures in comics are mimesis from the real world which the creators then process in such a way with their own speech styles. McCloud states that illustrations in

comics are based on similarities to reality with alternative choices to approach reality or to move away from it. Thus, it can become less similar and more abstract with words (language) as the culmination of the abstraction (2001: 46–47).

Words are the second dominant element in comics. Words can act as a phonogram or a depicted sound, because comic readers only use the sense of sight to capture messages in comics. Phonograms used in comics are grouped based on their function, namely as a symbol of speech (dialogue, monologue, and narrative) and a symbol of sound effects.

Together with pictures, words form picture-word relation (picture [P] -word [W]). Both are the elements that fill comic panel. Therefore, according to Primadi Tabrani, both of them are included in the category of images called *wimba*. *Wimba* in the visual image language can be interpreted as a representative image and not as an abstract or geometric image. *Wimba* consists of *isi wimba* (content) and *cara wimba* (method) (Tabrani, 2012: 135). *Isi wimba* are objects that are displayed in a picture, while *cara wimba* can be interpreted as the various ways used to visualize an object so that the object image can tell a story (Tabrani, 2012: 75).

The relationship between the constituent elements in the comic which is syntactically and grammatically appropriate is the juxtaposition of the panels. A panel is juxtaposed with the previous and following ones according to the story line to convey the story or message in it. Tabrani (2005: 75) also analogizes the coherence in comics as an outer arrangement. This also means that the relationship between panels are the inner layouts. In the outer layout, a closure pattern is created as a pattern of relationships between panels.

Comics are one of the media used to convey message or to communicate through a narrative. Comics are also classified as a visual communication medium because the conveyed messages are captured by the eye as the visual sense. One of the other senses that humans commonly use to capture messages is the ear as the sense of hearing. These senses function to capture communication using audio or sound.

Sound is very important for human interaction and their interaction with the surrounding environment, including the non living things (Setiawan and Miftahudin, 2015: 46). Sound or voice is a longitudinal wave created by a vibration that produces waves due to quick changes in air pressure, in which the number of vibrations in one second is

referred to as frequency (Prasetya, Susanto, and Purwadi, 2008: 11). To measure frequency, the units used are the Hertz (Hz) or cps unit (cycles per second). Sounds that can be heard by humans ranging from 20Hz to 20 KHz are referred to as audiosonics. Sound frequencies less than 20Hz are referred to as infrasonic and more than 20KHz are referred to as ultrasonic. Sound in a room temperature can travel at a speed of 340 m / s (berpendidikan.com).

The voices possessed by humans have different variations. This diversity can be distinguished from human physical perceptions of sounds including formant, type of voice, pitch, timbre, and volume (Bhaskoro and Riendho, 2012: 16). Communication using voice includes verbal communication. It occurs when the use of voice contains words that come from certain languages with certain meanings. In order for the spoken words to be more meaningful, mastery of the paralinguistic aspects is needed, namely the abilities related to the way a speaker conveys verbal messages. This aspect concerns the ability and applicability in regulating voice intonation, as well as the clarity of voice and aspects of interaction when conveying verbal messages (Winoto, Yusup, and Sukaesih, 2017: 64).

Comics are basically a visual assembly of the constituent elements that can act as a medium of communication. However, comic media is limited as a visual medium. Although in its development there are comics that are combined with animation, all the communication media in it are converted into something that is visible, seen, read, and understood through visuals. This article will discuss the role and contribution of words as a manifestation of sound in comic works in the form of phonograms, both in dialogue and narration, as well as sound effects or onomatopoeia. Thus, phonograms as one of the main elements, apart from images, shall receive more attention in comics studies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study using semiotic approach to examine the research problem descriptively. Semiotics is the science of signs, their functions, and the production of meaning (Sumartono, 2017: 152). The object of this research is one of the main elements in comics, namely the phonogram. Denzin and Lincoln (2009: 123) explain that ontology asks basic questions about the basis of reality, while epistemology asks questions about the way people perceive the world, and methodology focuses on the way to obtain knowledge about the world.

In accordance with the definition of semiotics, the essence of the phonogram will be examined in terms of its existence as a sign and its function in comics. The logic of phonogram and the way meaning is produced therein will then be further studied.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In addition to picture elements as the main element in comics, phonograms in the form of dialogue, narrative, and onomatopoeia (1) have a dominant role in the process of interpreting the context of an image; (2) are imitations of the sound, action, or form of language as a concept; and (3) support visualization in the context of the tradition of Indonesian readers, which of course cannot be separated from the roles of translators and voters (Ardianto, Susanto, and Mataram, 2018: 224). These three roles will be elaborated in two discussions, namely phonograms in general in comics as a sound visualization concept and onomatopoeia in particular as a complement for image interpretation.

### Phonogram: Seeing Sound

As discussed earlier that sound is an invisible wave. Sound is basically an invisible matter, a moving vibration that can only be felt using certain tools. When a person approaches a loudspeaker, the vibrations of the sound waves rub against the air and create a touch effect to the skin. With certain measuring instruments, sound can be identified because of the vibrations and waves.

Sound or voice is a communication medium conveyed by a communicant to a receiver to exchange messages and responses. This shows that sound is essentially a sign and when interpreted in such a way will lead to certain interpretations. Sign or *signe* is referred to as the unity between an acoustic image and a concept, or in other words, it is composed of one signified and signifier (Barthes, 2007).

The pattern of these elements is called the signifier, which is a symbol, while the ideas and meanings associated with this pattern is called signified or the form of varying thoughts for each individual or group, because the referents are different (Harisah and Masiming, 2008). This means that if there is a sound, the sound concept and sound material can be seen as an acoustic image. For example, if there is a siren sound, the concept of what the siren looks like and what the sound of the siren looks like, so that the sound of the siren can be interpreted as a siren from an ambulance or fire engine. Likewise with a phonogram, where the concept of the sound that is displayed and its appearance needs to be understood.

For example, if there is a shouting sound, it is necessary to pay attention to the relationship between the concept of a scream that is presented

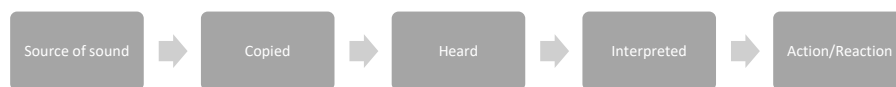
and the meaning contained in the appearance of the image. This scream can be interpreted as a scream because of pain, fear, surprise, and so on.



**Figure 1** Hearing Process

When a sound source makes a sound which is captured by a listener, the listener will process the sign and interpret it so that a reaction in the form of a response or feedback will occur. For example, the sound caused by the fall of an object will cause a variety of reactions, but before the reaction occurs, listeners will sort and interpret the sound information. The reasons for responding to the falling sound can vary, from whether the object falling is made of a certain material, the distance is far or near, whether the falling object has a certain

value or not and so on. Another example can be seen in the sound uttered by a person using different intonations. For example, the word "dog," when pronounced with a flat intonation, will be interpreted that it relates to information about the figure of a dog breed denotatively. However, when it is pronounced with a high intonation, the meaning can turn into a curse to someone with a figurative or connotative meaning, where that person is equated, decorated or insulted by the parable of the animal.



**Figure 2** Process of sound imitation or creation of copy sound

A medium that has the ability or functions as a sound copier or recorder from a sound source will produce sound as produced by the sound source. The recorded voice can be used for certain purposes. Since the sound is a copy sound the receiver needs multiple interpretations to understand what is meant by the sound signifier.

For example, when the word "*Assalamu'alaikum*," which is interpreted as a greeting for Muslims, is

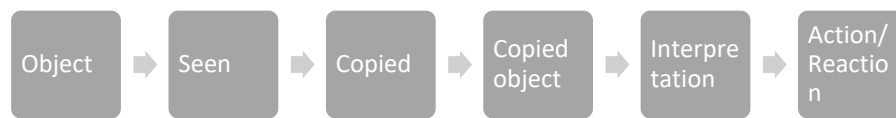
pronounced with the same tone and intonation by a parrot, a receiver will do two sign interpretations. First the receiver will interpret the word as greeting, but in the next meaning, after knowing that the sound source is copied from the original sound source. The second interpretation of the sign is that it is the sound of a Parrot imitating the original sound which shows the ability of the bird. The sound is an icon of the greeting and an index of the parrot's presence.



**Figure 3** Seeing Process

Humans see an object using the sense of sight. Further, humans interpret and categorize the objects they see. In linguistics, there are syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, in which syntagmatics refers to in presentia and paradigmatic refers to in absentia relations or associative relations (Budiman, 2011: 27). For example, when a person sees another human

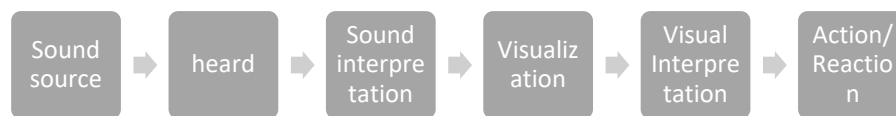
being, he denotatively recognizes that there is human figure around him. Syntagmatically, the figure is human, then paradigmatically the human can be anyone, for example a child, then at the paradigmatic stage, the child is probably his own child.



**Figure 4** Process of image creation

The case in illustration or image is a little different from the case of sound imitation. The objects in the image are adapted from one's visual experience of a reality, both objects and situations. Then, on the basis of that imagination and experience of reality, a new invention is created. For example, someone

observes the reality in the form of a buffalo as an object and then draws the object. The image of the object is an icon of a buffalo, which is created as a pseudo reality, the figure of a buffalo but not the animal, a buffalo image.



**Figure 5** Phonogram Creation Process

The process of creating a phonogram involves two sensory processes, namely the experience of hearing sounds and the creation of a pseudo reality. Through the experience of the sense of hearing, someone interprets the approximate pronunciation of a sound. If the sound is taken from speech based on a certain language structure, the reader will easily trace the alphabet of composing words through morphemes and phonemes.

However, if it does not come from a particular language, then someone will only try to interpret the sound through the image of the sound.

The reader cannot hear the sounds in the comic because the messages are only presented for the sense of sight. According to Peter Ardianto (2014), in a phonogram, there are sound effects that come from verbal sources in the form of speech and sound images, and non-verbal ones in the form of sound events. Speech containing sounds produced by living things, such as humans, can easily be defined, but not for sounds from animals. This is because animal sounds require interpretation of the letters that represent their sounds. Sound events can also come from real sounds but arise from inanimate objects, for example the sound of broken glass, the

shooting of a cannon, the squeak of rusty hinges, and so on. The sound image is a sound that is imagined by a comic artist because the sound is not an actual sound or a sound that does not exist in reality. Through this sound image, animal sounds and sounds from sound events are visualized by interpreting the use of the alphabet that represents the sound.

McCloud (2007: 47) divides phonograms in the form of onomatopoeia into four basic categories, namely based on loudness, timbre, associations with objects (associational), and graphic integration. In the case of loudness and timbre, it is possible to take measurements so that their shape can be approximated. Whereas in terms of association, which is an interpretation where the sound is translated into a series of letters, there will be differences from each different interpreter. For example in Indonesia, the word "*DOR*" is used to describe the sound of a gun popping, while in English the word used is "*BANG*". Meanwhile, in terms of graphic integration, which is a direct form of relationship between images and words, words and images will reinforce each other so that the meaning of the image is captured by the reader.



Figure 6 Phonogram Samples (McCloud, 2007:147)

The existence of a phonogram, especially onomatopoeia, in reading comic can help describe an object, movement, or situation so that it becomes more real and concrete. It helps readers understand the storyline and influences readers to enjoy reading comics (Dewi and Musdolifah, 2018: 48). Problems in phonogram will arise if there are language differences among comic readers. For example, in translated comics, because the displayed phonogram is an interpretation of a sound in a certain language, it will be interpreted differently in other languages. Cultural differences will cause different habits, one of which is regarding to vocabulary and / or sounds. This proves that verbal language is not universal, but these differences can be bridged with the help of visual language.

### Image Sound

Phonogram is one of the comic elements in the form of a sound icon. The icon is a sign that contains a similar "form" (resemblance) which can be recognized by the user (Budiman, 2011: 20). The concept of icon on phonograms in this context is very much influenced by the habits and culture of a comic reading society, especially when the phonogram used is the typical language of the community or the slang language, which of course differs from country to country.

In contrast to images that can be understood universally, the difference in the interpretation of onomatopoeia occurs because language is not something universal. The collaboration between writing that represents language and images makes onomatopoeia easy to understand. The two of them work together in the form of a phonogram so that the language represented in writing is also a part of the image.

Messages can be divided into two levels according to Barthes, namely literal messages and symbolic messages (Budiman, 2011: 43). Literal messages are denotative and natural. This message can be seen in the narrative section and normal dialogue in comics. If the comic is a translated comic, then the solution to understand the literal message is to open a dictionary. This is a different case if the image is a symbolic message that is connotative and based on the familiarity of certain stereotypes.

Stereotypes must be comprehended because not all stereotypes exist or are in the same position in every community. For example, in the case of the comic "*Lagak Jakarta*" by Beny and Mice, if the reader does not understand the characteristics of Jakarta citizens (not only the native Betawi ethnic group), the jokes that are presented will not be understood.

The comic "*Lagak Jakarta*" presents events among people from several social strata, professions and customs that are common in Jakarta. The comic artist intelligently translates the people's conversations through a phonogram-shaped model that seems informal and native-like.

Hjemslev argues that there is a relationship (R) between the expression area (E) and the content area (C) (Barthes, 2012: 47). A phonogram is a relation between expressions in the form of typographic embodiments, both original and vernacular, which serve to represent the desired content in a narrative. For example, a written model that represents a scream will use a typographic model that is rigid and firm, which can be derived from the original alphabetical model or manipulated using a vernacular model. Thus, the reader will be carried away in the narrative content that seems to have a loud sound.

Comic readers are led by comic artists to agree with the phenomena of sound such as screaming, crying, moaning, or laughter, regardless of whether the phonogram is an accurate representation of the emotional outburst in the image. The readers are brought to a pseudo reality which refers to the stereotypes that exist in the real world. And through the phonogram, the reader's senses are being directed, as if they are hearing but actually they are seeing. The reader's imagination is playing the sounds when they are reading.

## CONCLUSION

Phonogram is a comic element that represents sound in comics, either as narration, dialogue or sound effects. Phonogram creation requires two interpretation processes, namely interpretation of the sound and interpretation of the visualized form. The form of expression on the phonogram is not universal because it refers to certain cultural stereotypes. It is a symbolic message created to dramatize a comic. Due to comic's nature that imitates stereotypes in the real world, comic artists lead the readers to agree on the pseudo reality presented in comic works. This means that the apparent reality in the image also occurs in the phonogram or writing (words). The two comic elements support one another even though the domination of the image persists.

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