

REVIEWS — COMPTES-RENDUS

H. WISSEMAN, *Untersuchungen zur Onomatopoeie, I. Teil: Die sprachpsychologischen Versuche*. Heidelberg 1954, C. Winter.

This publication, which is to be followed by a second volume containing the application of the theoretical and methodical consequences of the research described and the principles embodied here, constitutes a new approach to the partial solution of one of the oldest problems of linguistic science. Abstaining from both linguistic theory and an analysis of existing onomatopoeias — since these methods have not led to leading principles in etymological research concerned with the expressive constituents of the vocabulary — the author, following a previous publication of D. Usnadzes ("Ein experimenteller Beitrag zum Problem der psychologischen Grundlagen der Namengebung", *Psychol. Forsch.* 5, 1924) instituted experiments in order closely to ascertain how words denoting sounds (Geräuschbenennungen) come into existence. It is indeed a well-known fact that most onomatopoeias occur in a fixed form which leaves us in the dark as to the circumstances under which they arose as well as the 'psychology' of the speaker or speakers at the moment of the creative act. The chief purpose of the research undertaken by the author is therefore "durch sprachpsychologische Versuche Erkenntnisse über den Vorgang der Entstehung neuer Geräuschbenennungen zu gewinnen" (p. 10), and especially to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of the "Neubenennung von Geräuschen" (p. 11). His aim has been to establish which psychological and non-psychological factors contribute to this 'Neubenennung' of sounds and how far this 'Neubenennung' is determined by each factor.

This volume contains a careful description of the experiments carried out in the 'Sprachwissenschaftliche Seminar' of the university of Münster with the assistance of thirty-one educated test persons, and an elaborate discussion of the material obtained in this way. It may be asked why all fourteen experiments — comprising *inter alia* beating an iron 5 kilo's weight with an iron hammer; rapping at a door; shaking water in a bottle; breaking a stick; throwing down a tower of building-

blocks on wood — should belong to the same category, to wit: pertain to sounds produced by lifeless objects thrown down, broken, moved, struck, shaken, touched, etc. by the leader of the experiment. The author has apparently (p. 22) considered the inclusion of other sounds, for instance those of birds, preferring however to limit the scope of his investigations to a comparatively small domain. It may be a matter of opinion whether it would not have been to his advantage to include at least the sounds of explosions, of escaping gas, one or more rare animals, and one or two instruments. The test persons were provided with detailed written instructions inducing them to self-observation and informing them how to choose from a list of senseless words the one which in their opinion was most suited to indicate a particular sound (experiment A), or to create a new onomatopoeia (experiment B). The number of persons engaged in these experiments seems rather small, to wit 12 and 14 respectively.

Over 200 pages are filled with a discussion of the results: "a) tabellarische Übersicht über sämtliche Neubenennungen; b) vorläufige Übersicht über den Benennungsvorgang; c) der sprachgebundene Wirkungszusammenhang und seine Voraussetzungen; d) der erlebnisgebundene Wirkungszusammenhang; e) die rückläufigen Wirkungszusammenhänge". That is to say: The creation of the so-called onomatopoeias is a very complicated process in which the person who creates the word plays an important rôle. The sounds, being objects of perception, are psychical phenomena (p. 88 f.) which on the one hand presuppose the correspondent stimuli and on the other hand depend on internal conditions. The psychical 'Umfeld' of the sound is of almost the same importance as the sound itself, because it often provides "den sprachlichen Rohstoff" which is modified by the "Benennungsentention", which aims at a 'correct reproduction' of the sound. "Die Neubenennung eines Geräusches wird also grundsätzlich durch einen Sprachgebundenen und durch einen erlebnisgebundenen Wirkungszusammenhang konstituiert" (p. 236).

The other results of this painstaking investigation may here be presented in a brief review: the idea formed by the person who creates the onomatopoeia of the origin of the sound has a considerable influence upon the formation of the Neubenennungen (p. 50 ff.; 205 ff.). The newly created terms are almost without exception interjections (p. 72 ff.). This is in the reviewer's opinion of some interest in connect-

ion with the well-known phenomenon of the co-existence of words indicating sounds and movements on the one hand and interjections which with regard to outward form and meaning 'belong' to these words on the other hand: cf. e.g. A. Leskien, *Schallnachahmungen und Schallverba im Litauischen*, *Ind. Forsch.* 13, p. 165 ff.; and the reviewer's Remarks on onomatopoeia etc., in the *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 80 (1940), p. 133 ff. In giving names to sounds two tendencies may be distinguished: a tendency to interpret the sound as adequately as possible in human speech sounds ("erlebnisgebundene Benennungsentention") and a tendency to adapt the 'Neuschöpfung' to the phonematic and morphological system of the language ("sprachgebundene Benennungsentention"). In the onomatopoeia, the syllable corresponds to a natural part of the sound, but the length of the newly-created word does not correspond to the duration of the sound (p. 97 ff.). The deviations of the newly created terms from the 'phonic structure' of the speaker's mother tongue are not very important. These 'onomatopoeias' are based on the phoneme system of the normal non-expressive language. (It has for obvious reasons been impossible to make experiments with a sufficiently large number of persons of various tongues, but to acquire a sound basis for conclusions of general validity the statements made by Dr. Wissemann should be checked in other countries and speech communities). With regard to onomatopoeias speech sounds have a double function: they are expressive in themselves (i.e. "außerhalb jedes sprachlichen Zusammenhanges nur vermöge ihrer artikulatorisch-akustischen Eigenschaften": "der onomatopoetische Ausdrucksgehalt der Artikulation"); on the other hand are "fertige sprachliche Gebilde in die von ihnen benannten Geräusche hineingehört" (p. 210 ff.). The quality of the vowels correlates to the 'colour' and the 'pitch' of the sounds. The often recorded fact that the vowels i, ü, ö, especially the first of them, are particularly appropriate to reproduce high tones and clear or sonorous 'sound colours', is once again affirmed by fresh evidence. The function of the consonants is threefold: they are to express a particular property of the sound, to indicate a pause, and to characterize the beginning or end of the sound. Generally speaking, there exist fixed relations between the different classes of consonants and the various ways in which sounds begin or cease (p. 152 ff.). The accent of the onomatopoeia corresponds to the centre of the sound.