

An Analysis of English Onomatopoeia in Dog Man: Big Jim Begins Comic by Dav Pilkey

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ABSTRACT

Onomatopoeia is the act of creating or using words that include sounds that are similar to the noises the words refer to. This research explores how onomatopoeia is used in Dog Man: Big Jim Begins, applying Körtvélyessy and Štekauer's (2024) classification from Onomatopoeia in the World's Languages. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, 87 examples were identified and grouped into water (5), air (11), mammals (2), body (26), vehicles (2), instruments of war and destruction (26), and mechanical and electronic equipment and devices (15). Body sounds and instruments of war and destruction were the most common. Results indicate that onomatopoeia significantly enhances the comic's atmosphere, illustrates actions, and conveys character emotions, making the story more engaging and easier to follow. This detailed classification offers deeper insights into how sound effects strengthen storytelling in comics.

INTRODUCTION

Onomatopoeia is the act of creating or using words that include sounds that are similar to the noises the words refer to. Onomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound or action it refers to, helping to convey a situation or event clearly. It also serves to describe a scene or moment in a simple and direct way, allowing the reader to quickly grasp what is happening without the need for a detailed explanation (Prihadi, Jayanti, & Resen, 2021). In comics, it functions as more than a stylistic choice, it becomes a vital storytelling element that enhances mood, portrays actions, and conveys emotions. By blending expressive sound words with visual elements, comics create an immersive narrative where imagery and language work hand in hand. This makes them a valuable medium for studying how onomatopoeia operates within a multimodal framework.

Although previous studies have largely centered on superhero comics or explored translation techniques, lighthearted and exaggerated children's comics have received less attention. These works often use playful, creatively designed sound effects that set them apart from the more serious tone of superhero stories. This research fills that gap by examining *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* by Dav Pilkey, applying Körtvélyessy & Štekauer (2024) updated classification system, which organizes onomatopoeia according to form and meaning. The study aims to identify and categorize these sound expressions, determine which appear most frequently, and analyze how they shape the atmosphere, depict movement, and express character emotions, offering new perspectives on their role in enhancing reader engagement and narrative clarity in visual storytelling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term semantics comes from the Greek word "Semantikos," meaning "to signify," and is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language, symbols, and representation (Purwasari, 2020). Semantics examines the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, focusing on linguistic structure without context, while pragmatics explores meaning shaped by situational use (Kroeger, 2022). Subfields include lexical semantics, which studies individual word meanings, and compositional semantics, which looks at how these meanings combine into larger units (Qizi, 2024).

Onomatopoeia comes from the Greek "onoma" (name) and "poiein" (to make), meaning "the making of a name" (Cove, 2025). It refers to words whose pronunciation imitates the sound they describe Farkhodovna (2025), enriching texts with sensory and emotional impact. English onomatopoeias belong to an open class, allowing speakers to coin new terms, a feature especially prominent in comics (Körtvélyessy & Štekauer, 2024). These words vary across languages and are classified into natural sounds, subdivided into four elements, animals, and human, and artifact sounds, which include five sound types (Körtvélyessy & Štekauer, 2024).

Table 1. Types of Onomatopoeia

Main Categories	Subcategories	Details
Natural Sounds	4 Elements Animals Human	Water, Air, Earth, Fire Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Amphibians, Insects, Fish and Sea Creatures Voice, Body
Artifact Sounds	Musical Instruments Vehicles Mechanical and Electronic Equipment and Devices Instruments of War and Destruction Bells, Gongs, and Other Signaling Equipment	

Comics are a type of print media that present ideas through a sequence of images, often combined with textual elements like speech bubbles, captions, and onomatopoeia to depict dialogue, narration, and actions (Nurmana, 2021). They merge visual storytelling with literary techniques, creating a unique narrative form comparable to novels and poetry (Maheni, Candra, & Juniarta, 2021). This form is built around key elements such as characters, language, time, themes, and graphics (Akcanca, 2020). The use of imagery also expands expressive possibilities in ways similar to film (Guffey, 2020).

Dav Pilkey's *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* (2024), the thirteenth entry in the series, explores Big Jim's past and his alliance with Grampa to face alien threats. The story blends humor, action, and redemption, showing how sound effects can enhance comedic timing and action sequences. Onomatopoeia, a form of sound symbolism, conveys sounds and actions directly (Prihadi, Jayanti, & Resen, 2021). In comics, it plays a key role in visually representing auditory experiences. According to Aliyah (2014), onomatopoeia enriches the narrative and offers vivid environmental detail, it also increases rhythm and boosts reader engagement (Muslima, Kurniawan, & Hermawan, 2024). Examples include natural and artificial sounds such as "boom," "quack-quack," and "pop" (Ardipa, Utami, & Jayantini, 2023). Some also denote artificial sounds like "sizzle" or "crash" (Muslima, Kurniawan, & Hermawan, 2024). By linking visual and auditory cues, onomatopoeia clarifies actions, builds atmosphere, and strengthens story comprehension (Langus, Sulatra, & Utami, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze onomatopoeia in *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* by Dav Pilkey, using Körtvélyessy and Štekauer’s (2024) classification framework. The source of data is the *Dog Man* comic series, with the sample limited to the 13th book, published on December 3, 2024, which contains 17 chapters centered on Big Jim’s origins and his battle against the Space Cuties. Onomatopoeic expressions were collected from narration panels and character dialogues, then classified based on the chosen framework. The analysis focused on identifying their types, frequency, and functions in creating atmosphere, depicting action, and conveying emotion within the story.

RESEARCH RESULT

As the result, the researcher has discovered 87 data applied in *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* comic to find the types of onomatopoeia using Körtvélyessy and Štekauer’s (2024) theory. They are presented in the form of data table as follows:

Table 2. Total Data Found in Dog Man: Big Jim Begins Comic				
No	Categories of Onomatopoeia	Subcategories	Sound Types	Data
1	Natural Sounds	4 Elements	Water	5
			Air	11
			Earth	0
			Fire	0
		Animals	Mammals	2
			Birds	0
			Reptiles and Amphibians	0
			Insects	0
			Fish and Sea Creatures	0
		Human	Voice	0
			Body	26
			Musical Instruments	0
			Vehicles	2
			Mechanical and Electronic Equipment and Devices	15
			Instruments of War and Destruction	26
			Bells, Gongs and Other	0
2	Artifact Sounds			

Signaling
Equipment

Total	87
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Based on the table above, the researcher found 5 data on water, 11 data on air, 2 data on mammals, 26 data on body, 2 data on vehicles, 26 data on instruments of war and destruction, and 15 data on mechanical and electronic equipment and devices. The researcher found 87 data in total, where the most data obtained was from the human subcategory with the sound type is body and instruments of war and destruction subcategory with total of each categories are 26 data. Additionally, the rest of onomatopoeia types such as earth, fire, birds, reptiles and amphibians, insects, fish and sea creatures, voice, musical instruments, and bells, gongs, and other signaling equipment are not found in the Dog Man: Big Jim Begins comic.

Natural Sounds

a. 4 Elements

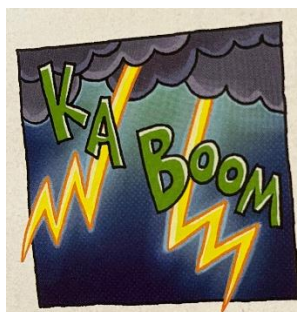


Figure 1. Thunder

The phrase “KA BOOM” shows the loud crash of thunder, which fits the natural category in Körtvélyessy & Štekauer’s typology, specifically the 4 elements cubcategory, air sound types. This group includes sounds made by air related natural events like wind, storms, lightning, and thunder. Thunder is in this group because it’s an atmospheric sound caused by lightning moving through the air. “KA BOOM” matches this perfectly as it copies the deep, explosive noise we hear during a thunderstorm.

The phrase “KA BOOM” creates atmosphere by making readers imagine a thunder-like explosion, shifting the mood from calm to dramatic (Pischedda, 2024). As an action marker, it signals one powerful event, compressed by large jagged letters placed over the lightning bolt, which also indicates it as an environmental sound (Körtvélyessy & Andrej, 2023). For character expression, it cues reactions such as startled faces or panicked dialogue, reflecting Badiozaman et al.’s view that interjections and onomatopoeia express emotions and direct attention (Badiozaman et al., 2024).

Onomatopoeia like “KA BOOM” strongly guides reader focus, boosting scene intensity by triggering both sensory and emotional responses (Pischedda, 2024). Experiments confirm that sound effects alter recognition speed, perceived volume, and mood (Bhatia et al., 2024). Placement and style reinforce meaning, with “KA BOOM” in the panel, rather than a speech bubble, signaling thunder and linking cause and effect (Badiozaman et al., 2024). Overall, “KA BOOM” exemplifies thunder onomatopoeia whose form and context heighten drama and immediacy.

b. Animals

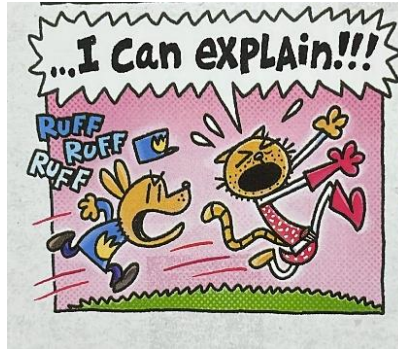


Figure 2. Barking

The phrase “RUFF RUFF RUFF” copies the sound of a dog barking, which fits the natural sounds category in Körtvélyessy & Štekauer’s (2024) category, specifically the animal’s subcategory, mammals sound types. This group includes animal sounds like barking, meowing, or growling, written to imitate the real noise. In the picture, the words are placed near the dog’s open mouth and shown in sharp, jagged letters to make the bark look loud and urgent, matching the action.

In this comic, “RUFF RUFF RUFF” represents a dog’s bark, categorized as animal sound under Körtvélyessy and Štekauer’s (2024) theory. It builds atmosphere and expression by making the scene feel noisy and humorous, while its repetition conveys movement and energy. Such sounds, as Pishedda (2024) notes, express emotions over time. Repetition also mirrors real-life barking and marks timing in action (Körtvélyessy & Andrej, 2023). Additionally, the style, size, and placement of the letters guide readers in judging volume, urgency, and source. Studies on comic sound effects confirm these cues help readers connect sound, action, and mood into a coherent scene.

c. Human



Figure 3. Eating

The phrase “munch munch munch” is the sound of a person eating, it copies the noise of chewing and belongs to the natural sounds category, specifically human sound types. Simply put, it’s the comic’s way of showing the sound of someone eating. In Körtvélyessy & Štekauer’s theory, natural sounds are divided into 4 elements, animals, and humans, and the human group includes examples like munching, crunching, and slurping. According to Körtvélyessy & Štekauer (2024), this is exactly where body noises like gulping, sniffing, sneezing, and munching belong.

The phrase “munch munch munch” serves three functions: it sets mood by making the scene feel relaxed or humorous, marks the action of eating, and conveys character traits such as enjoyment or distraction. This written chewing sound blends auditory and visual cues, reducing the need for extra dialogue. Ardianto, Mataram, Ismail, & Wicaksono (2023) note that this sound-image mix heightens drama and directs reader interpretation. Placement is also crucial, as onomatopoeia near the action draws attention and helps readers imagine timing (Rohan, Sasamoto, & O'Brien, 2021). Cohn, Cardoso, Klomber, and Hacimusaoğlu (2023) further emphasize that such sounds form part of comics’ visual grammar, shaping perception of timing and even off-panel events. For readers, “munch munch munch” guides focus, sets rhythm, and provides context beyond visuals. Altering or removing such human sound effects can shift tone and disrupt reader expectations.

Artifact Sounds

a. Vehicles



Figure 4. Sirens

The phrase “wee-ooo-wee-ooo” in the ambulance panel is a vehicle sound because it copies the siren of an emergency vehicle. According to Körtvélyessy & Štekauer (2024), sounds that imitate engines, horns, sirens, and other vehicle noises are put in the vehicle category. In the picture, the repeated wailing, its color, and its position above the ambulance make it clear where the sound is coming from, where it’s going, and what it means, an emergency vehicle is approaching. This shows how the comic uses onomatopoeia to directly label a sound made by an object.

The phrase “wee-ooo-wee-ooo” illustrates how onomatopoeia builds mood, action, and character expression. It creates urgency and movement, marks timing by signaling the ambulance’s arrival, and conveys intent, such as needing help or being on a mission. As Ardianto, Mataram, Ismail, & Wicaksono (2023) explain, sound-words combine with images to show events and mood without extra dialogue.

For readers, the repeated siren sound guides attention and controls pacing, helping them imagine movement and urgency. Eye-tracking research confirms that sound effects anchor the gaze and affect reading flow (Rohan, Sasamoto, & O'Brien, 2021). Corpus studies further show that onomatopoeia function as part of comics' visual grammar, clarifying timing and even off-panel events (Cohn, Cardoso, Klomber, & Hacimusaoğlu, 2023). Thus, "wee-ooo-wee-ooo" is not decoration but a cue that shapes mood, pacing, and narrative clarity.

b. Instruments of War and Destruction

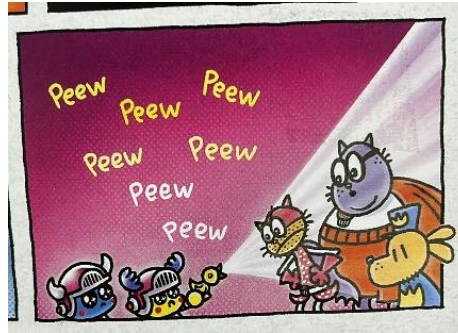


Figure 5. Gunshot

The phrase "Peew Peew" in the panel shows quick, short shooting sounds from the small weapon the little character is holding. Körtvélyessy and Štekauer (2024) put this kind of sound in the instruments of war and destruction category. Because the word is shown many times, in a small and light style, with bright color and spread-out placement, it tells us it's fast, continuous shooting. The look, color, repetition, and position of the sound effect already give clues about how strong it is, where it's coming from, and the mood, even before the story explains it.

Cohn (2021) notes that sound words in comics are part of visual language, helping readers imagine sound and emotion. The repeated "Peew Peew" sets a playful, chaotic mood, shaped by its small size, bright color, and repetition. As Rohan, Sasamoto, & O'Brien (2021) explain, onomatopoeia works as a storytelling beat: repetition signals ongoing action, clarifies timing, and shows cause-effect. Style also matters, small "Peew" suggests light shots, while large, jagged forms would feel threatening. This reflects Körtvélyessy and Štekauer's (2024) view that onomatopoeia quickly conveys mood, action, and character expression.

For readers, sound effects guide gaze and pacing (Rohan, Sasamoto, & O'Brien, 2021) and help visualize timing and off-panel events (Cohn, Cardoso, Klomber, & Hacimusaoğlu, 2023). Style can change clarity and tone (Bhatia et al., 2024; Kim & Hong, 2025). Since war-related sounds carry cultural meanings, altering or removing them can shift tone and timing (Körtvélyessy & Štekauer, 2024).

c. Mechanical and Electronic Equipment and Devices

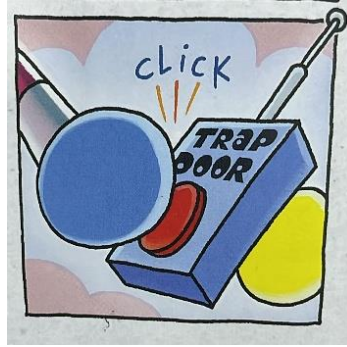


Figure 6. Remote Control

The word “CLICK” in the picture above is a mechanical or electronic sound effect, it copies the sound of a button being pressed. This fits the mechanical and electronic equipment and devices type in onomatopoeia categories. Körtvélyessy & Štekauer (2024) say this group includes words that copy sounds made by machines, switches, and electronic devices. In the picture, the visual context, red button labeled “TRAP DOOR” with the word “CLICK” above it, makes the meaning clear right away.

The mechanical “CLICK” sets mood, marks action, and shows character intent by signaling that “something mechanical just happened.” As part of comics’ visual vocabulary, such sound-words combine meaning and sound, guiding reader interpretation. Eye-tracking studies confirm that onomatopoeia placed near action draws attention and shapes focus (Rohan, Sasamoto, & O’Brien, 2021).

Beyond atmosphere, sound effects influence how readers follow a story. Rohan, Sasamoto, & O’Brien (2021) note they affect pacing, repetition like “Peew” signals ongoing action, while single bursts stop it suddenly. Onomatopoeia also acts as part of comics’ grammar, helping readers imagine timing and unseen events (Cohn, Cardoso, Klomber, & Hacımusaoğlu, 2023). Style further alters perception, making scenes clearer and more expressive (Bhatia et al., 2024; Kim & Hong, 2025). Since weapon sounds carry cultural weight, altering or omitting them can shift tone and timing (Körtvélyessy & Štekauer, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that onomatopoeia in *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* plays a significant role in driving the story, especially in action-packed and comedic moments. By applying Körtvélyessy & Štekauer (2024) classification, four sound types from natural sounds and three sound types from artifact sounds of onomatopoeia were found: water, air, mammals, body, vehicles, instruments of war and destruction, and mechanical or electronic equipment and devices. Among these, the most common were body sounds and instruments of war and destruction. This dominance indicates that the comic emphasizes physical movement, battles, and exaggerated human actions, which align with its humorous and fast-moving narrative style. Meanwhile, the lack of categories like musical instruments or natural sounds such as earth and fire shows that the story

pays less attention to environmental soundscapes, focusing instead on human-centered activities and conflicts.

In addition to categorization, the results underline the narrative and sensory importance of onomatopoeia in comics. Sound expressions like “KA BOOM,” “SPLASH,” and “RUFF RUFF RUFF” act not as mere additions but as essential tools to set the mood, control the pace, and show the characters’ feelings. Pischedda (2024) points out that such sound effects serve as direct cues that guide readers’ focus to important story moments. Körtvélyessy & Andrej (2023) note that the shape of sounds, whether sharp, long, or repetitive, affects the rhythm of scenes. (Rohan, Sasamoto, & O’Brien (2021) also explain that the integration of text and sound deepens immersion, while Cohn, Cardoso, Klomber, & Hacimusaoğlu (2023) highlight that combining visual and auditory signals creates layered storytelling that strengthens interpretation and emotional impact. Together, these perspectives confirm that in *Dog Man*, onomatopoeia is not just for decoration but a central element of the storytelling process.

Overall, this study demonstrates that onomatopoeia in *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* is purposefully used to build atmosphere, illustrate actions, and express emotions in a way that supports the comic’s playful yet energetic tone. Furthermore, it shows how applying an updated classification system can provide more detailed insights into how sound effects, visual elements, and reader engagement work together in modern comics. These findings reinforce the view that onomatopoeia is a key narrative device, blending sound and imagery to create meaning and enhance the reading experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research shows that onomatopoeia in *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins* plays a crucial role in both narrative and visuals, helping to set the mood, depict actions, and express characters’ emotions. Through Körtvélyessy and Štekauer’s (2024) classification, 87 instances were recorded across seven categories, with body sounds and instruments of war and destruction appearing most frequently. These results highlight the comic’s energetic and action-focused nature, where sound effects strongly influence reader perception and engagement.

The findings can be applied in creating and studying comics by offering guidance for artists, writers, and educators to use onomatopoeia more effectively in enhancing clarity, emotion, and pacing. They also serve as a foundation for future research on different genres, cultures, and digital comic formats where sound integration plays a role in storytelling.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research focuses only on one comic, *Dog Man: Big Jim Begins*, so the results may not reflect how onomatopoeia is used in other comics or literary forms. The study applies solely Körtvélyessy and Štekauer’s classification, leaving other possible approaches unexplored. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the analysis involves a level of subjectivity that could influence interpretation. Future research could analyze a wider range of comics or various genres to compare patterns of onomatopoeia use. Combining this framework

with other linguistic or semiotic theories could also provide a more comprehensive view of the role sound effects play in enhancing visual narratives.

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