Sounding out the text: meaning, expectancies and phonic patterns in non-literary texts

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ABSTRACT

Much work has been devoted to exploring the sound patterns of literary texts, particularly in the domain of poetry. However, there has been a regrettable neglect of the sound structures of non-literary texts. This paper attempts to show that there are perfectly codifiable, systematic sound patterns that form part of our apprehension of Text, and hence play an integral role in intertextuality and reader interpretation.

After a brief Introduction, which examines some of the attitudes to the phonic element in Text, the second part of the paper is devoted to an exploration of the meaningfulness of sounds, both individual and in combination. This leads to a discussion of the type of sound structures that are conventionally created for certain Text-types and textual functions. The third section of the paper illustrates the conclusions drawn by applying them to two very different texts. There has been a deliberate avoidance of using any text that displays a very conspicuous sound structure, such as advertising or the «noisier» tabloids. The two texts chosen to this end are a sample of official language (*The Extradition Act*) and a newspaper report (*The Daily Mail*).

I.   INTRODUCTION

> «Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
> The Sound must seem an Echo to the Sense.»
>
> (Alexander Pope:
> *An Essay on Criticism*)

However hierarchical in its approach this quotation from Pope may be, it nevertheless stakes a claim for the *appropriateness* of a sound structure to the specific communicative function of a given text, Pope's work in general being a model of stylistically practising what one preaches. Yet the subordination of sound to meaning implicit in this quotation also reflects an attitude on the part of both literary critics and linguists that has led to a regrettable neglect of sound structures in any but those poets and creative writers in whose work sound is most immediately noticeable. Outside the realm of the spoken language or the purely literary text, there has been practically no investigation of sound as structure, as an integral, indespensable component of text.

This paper does not endeavour to map out significant sound structures of the literary text, as several critics and linguists have already done[1] in the case of individual poems. Neither does it aim to trace the imitative devices of sound through the various resources of printing conventions, that is, the transcription through orthographical distortion of purely onomatopoeic phenomena or auditive mimicry through the use of capitals, heavy type or deviant punctuation[2]. Its basic aim is to examine to what extent certain auditive expectations in the reader can be systematised according to text-type, and to what extent sound, both individual phonemes, phoneme sequences and overall sound structures of a text, can thus become an integral part of its meaning.

II.   READING ALOUD IN SILENCE

As readers, we approach any printed text with certain sets of prelearned expectations that entail our ingrained knowledge of the syntax, morphology, lexis and semantics of the language in which the text is formulated. This prior knowledge will enable us to discern the suitability or otherwise to both subject-matter and communicative aims of the linguistic sequences we read, and hence facilitate our comprehension of the text's function as such. Expectations in themselves in fact imply some form of conventional systematisation. As Tommola puts it (in Kohonen and Enkvist, 1978: 49):

> Expectancies result from the capacity of our cognitive system to generalise the stimulus cues it receives into predictions about events. Learned inductively, these

generalised predictions become so deeply ingrained in our behaviour that it takes a
special effort to become conscious of them, except possibly when our anticipations
turn out to be wrong... Expectancies are based on the fact that our environment is to
a large extent structured.

Few critics or linguists would disegree up to this point. Expectations or
expectancies have on the whole been promoted from the domain of the merely
subjective or even illusory to that of worthy codifiable denizens of any process
of communication. A good deal of the responsability for this promotion may be
assigned to studies in cognitive psychology, which have pointed to certain modes
of structuring experience. This has been particularly useful to the fields of
semantics and text linguistics, in that it has provided coherent cognitive frameworks
that can effectively be applied to the ways in which we evince meaning and in
which we both approach and structure texts. Expectations, therefore, are grounded
in these common conceptual structures and the constraints of adequacy they give
rise to. As Mark Turner puts it (Turner, 1987: 8):

«... though a text may result in various readings, *all* of these readings are constrained
by our modes of cognition».

It is, however, when sound stealthily intrudes into the tidy grammatical and
semantic patterning of text that linguists, particularly, disagree, in many instances
treating it as a somewhat embarrassing poacher on their private ground. One
could venture that this reluctance to entertain even the idea of sound in written
text is, at least in part, due to the peculiarly anarchic nature of sound-systems in
any natural language, systems that are at all moments subject to individual
modification or distortion by virtue of voice-quality, pitch, the difference in the
dimensions of individual speech-organs, attitude, etc. These features will con-
sequently cause there to be as many different ways of articulating any one of the
acknowledged phonemes of a given system as there are individuals. It is, in fact,
only by means of an abstract standard language that any approximation to
systematicity can be attained. Thus, the sound factor of written texts (which are
normally articulated in this very standard abstract) is usually given somewhat
short shrift in text-analysis as in Phillips' very summary dealing (Phillips,
1985: 30):

«It is... possible to dispense immediately with consideration of the phonological
level of meaning. Since written text is in the focus of attention, it can be taken that
for purposes of text analysis..., phonological meaning does not enter into consi-
deration...»

Chapman (1984: 210) is more cautious, although the following statements
from a book devoted to «sound» in literature are nevertheless surprising:

«Much of that which passes from the printed page to individual comprehension passes only through the sense of sight. The visual signals on the page evoke a response to the meaning which they are commonly accepted to hold within the language used. The response may indeed not be only intellectual; there is often an emotive element, with stronger or weaker degrees of argument or approval, but with no appeal to the sense of hearing. Much of the reading process goes no further than this when the subject is essentially informational or conceptual, as it is in the major part of referential writing. The same is true of literary texts which offer narrative, purely visual description, or comments on situations and characters.»

Now, just as we bring to any text our grammatical, lexical and semantic knowledge, we also furnish our expectations of those phonic patterns, sequences and devices which we have learned from early childhood through schooling, professional training, the world of work or academic study, as fitting to both text and context. We thus lend an «inner» ear to our reading which is inevitably present even in silent, solitary activity, and which will mentally reproduce the sound structure of the text to eventually evince non-specialist appraisal or disapproval in terms of «That doesn't *sound* quite right to me», for example. Deliberate or unwitting deviance in text is thus in many instances to be apprehended in terms of an unexpected or unpredictable sound structure, this type of deviance being particularly effective in the articulation of certain types of irony in literary texts. In non-literary texts, it can reinforce other, more militant attitudes, for example a disruption of the general sonority of much political language or preaching. The «sound of reading», like the «sound of music» is thus pre-codified for us into segments, sequences and patterns that our in-built expectations make identifiable not only as pertaining to certain spoken contexts, but also as being adequate to certain written communicative needs or functions.

Despite extensive research into the subject, theorists of the reading process are still in disagreement as to the actual vocalization of text during reading of same. Some[3] hold that techniques of speed reading will inevitably preclude any possiblity of the reader physically having time to vocalize as well as to cognize at one and the same time, and hence do not consider sound to be relevant to meaning. However, it should be borne in mind that the aims of speed reading differ greatly from those of traditional reading training. Whereas the aims of this latter also include capacitating the reader to grasp precisely factors such as adequacy and style as an essential part of the pleasure of reading, thus considering the time factor as secondary to the broadest possible understanding of the text, speed reading aims at informative accumulation with maximum economy of time spent (wasted?) on the activity itself. In this latter mode, special exercises are designed to eliminate vocalization as far as possible: the learner has to practise with background noises, make noises him or herself, and so forth, in order to

prevent an inward «sounding out» of the text[4], Obviously, if so much trouble has to be taken to dispel the «obstacle» of sound in these methods, then sound must of necessity intervene in «normal» reading techniques. And who can guarantee that even in this type of informative reading there is not a corresponding acceleration of the acoustic interiorization of the text as well as the purely visual and cognitive? To my knowledge, this possibility has as yet been left unanalysed. Speed-reading is not, in any case, a concern of this paper, and would certainly seem very flimsy evidence on which to base any theory of the non-intervention of acoustic factors in the reading process.

If phonic elements do in fact intervene in the reading process, and hence sound expectations, too, a third factor to be borne in mind when considering the phonic structure of text is the kinetic relationship between the physical, muscular processes of articulating certain phonemes, or phoneme clusters, and the meanings that have come to be attached, implicitly or explicitly, to these sounds, reinforcing sound expectations as a result of this. There have been interesting, if few, attempts (cf. below) to analyse this type of phonic iconism or symbolism, although great caution should be taken in drawing general conclusions from such non-generalized, if numerous, iconic uses of human sound. Neither should this kinetic relationship be confused with onomatopoeia, which consists of using the human speech organs to imitate non-human sounds, as in the case of the word devised in most European languages to denote the bird that makes the sound «/kuku:/». The kinetic relationship as understood here may be exemplified in the uses of the vowel-sound /a/ in contexts of largeness, particularly noticeable in linguistic devices such as augmentative suffixes, and so forth. If one considers the position of the speech organs when this vowel is articulated, one observes that there is maximum aperture of the cavity of the mouth and that it is the back of the tongue that is raised. The bucal cavity is therefore at its «largest» and impediment of expelled air minimal, so that there is a corresponding dimensional relationship between the bucal cavity and the phenomena denoted by sound-sequences containing this vowel. Not, of course, that /a/ invariably connotes largeness, but that it uncomfortably does in too many instances to be ignored as totally coincidential, as we shall see below.

It will be in the light of these factors —expectation, the «inner ear» and kinetic relationship— that we shall now examine the implicit significance of individual phonemes, phoneme clusters or sequences, «impressive» or «expressive» uses of same, and, finally, the combination of these devices to produce the expected sound-structures of different text-types. For, as Firth (1944: 173) so rightly stated «No normal man can escape phonetic bondage».

2.   **Are sounds meaningful?**

The answer to this question is that, obviously, any deliberately articulated human (and animal and certain mechanical) sound will be issued with an intention of meaningfulness. Even expletives such as «Ouch!» or «Ay!», despite their apparent spontaneity, will be communicatively effective in being conventionally understood as signalling pain. It would be relevant here to wonder why the Englishman and the Spaniard in pain should automatically make their distress understood by their fellows in totally different sound sequences. Similarly, «Bah!» will in most European languages be understood as a signal of contempt or disgust, although the phonic articulation of these feelings has undergone interesting metamorphoses in English over the centuries. The exclamation of revulsion «Ugh!» phonetically ends with a glottal stop, which exactly enacts the movement of throat and mouth muscles in vomiting. It would be tedious to give further examples of these well-known exclamation signals, but what is to be deduced from the examples given is that they are by no means individual outbursts of arbitrary noise, so that any sound, once it enters into a conventionally constituted system of communication, will of necessity take on significance of some sort. This meaning will not, of course, be the full lexical meaning of the noun, verb, adjective or adverb. Neither will it be the grammatical meaning of items like pronouns, prepositions or conjunctions. The meaning of sounds will be of several types: there will be a kinetically based meaning, in which, as in the case of the vowel /a/ given above, there are certain iconic factors to be taken into consideration, what may in fact be termed for convenience «iconic meaning»; there will next be what could be termed «metaphoric meaning», that is, a conventionally agreed symbolism attached to certain sounds, a pre-learned system of symbolic association common to all speakers/readers of the language in which they are used; and there will be the «meaning of expectation» of sound-patterns within any given text.

2.1. *Iconic meaning*

The associations of meaning of the vowel /a/ have already been touched upon above, details of its usage to be given fully in Wescott (1971: 420 ff.), Jespersen (1922: 406-8), Sapir (1929: 235), Gregerson (1984: 216-219. These authors demonstrate the corresponding magnitude between aperture of the bucal cavity and concept or object denoted. Likewise, if /a/ represents maximum aperture and hence maximum size, the vowel sound /i/ is correspondingly viewed as iconizing littleness through its minimal aperture and maximum tension. There is neverthe-

less, a risk in generalizing in this case on the equation of cavity aperture to physical size, in that the grapheme that represents this phoneme in English can take on a variety of written forms, and that on the other hand, the phoneme itself is not by any means uniform throughout the English-speaking world. To a Northerner, it will be thhis open, back /a/, but to a Cockney, for example, it will be a tighter, front vowel sound /æ/. Similarly, for /i/, there will be a slacker articulation in Northern pronunciation than in the south. The iconic view cannot therefore be considered as quite watertight, despite the frequency of these phonemes in their respective contexts of largeness and smallness. Historical linguistics may also point out that these phonemes have undergone drastic changes over the centuries. Yet withal, if one examines the frequent series of vowel gradations in English, there does seem to be a standard iconic relationship of aperture=bigness/closure=samllness that for synchronic purposes has at least become generally accepted to be expressed by back-open-vowel=bigness/front-tense-vowel=smallness. This relationship is stressed by reduplicating series such as *clink-clank-clunk, ping-pong, chit-chat, tittle-tattle,* etc. An iconic use of this kind of pattern is to be seen in a lyric from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* «the pitter-pitter-patter, and the clitter-clitter-clatter», the chorus from which this is taken called «Dance a Carchucha», the /a/ or /æ/ syllables falling on the heaviest beat of each bar, therefore iconizing a heavier stamp of the dancer's foot. Similarly, Spanish castanets are given the names of «Pi» and «Ta», the former being the smaller, higher one and the latter, the larger, deeper-sounding one, as also in the «bell» iconism of «ding-dong». It may therefore be inferred that in Indo-European languages, these two vowel sounds are in certain contexts invested with the type of iconic meaning discussed here. Hypochoristic /i/ is a further illustration of affective size-reduction through corresponding closure or reduction of the bucal cavity. Most often used in proper nouns, it also occurs in contexts of child's talk (doggy, pussy, etc.) or whenever the aim is to establish some kind of emotional relationship between speaker and object either of affection or of contempt. Either way, the object is conceptualized as reduced in size, to place it on either the same dimensional status as the speaker, or else on an inferior one.

Consonants and consonant clusters can have similar iconic functions, too. Plosives are a particular case in point here, on account of their more readily apprehended articulation. Wescott (1971: 421) even goes as far as to say that the plosive-continuant opposition («hard» and «soft») serves as a gender marker in such pairs as «dad» and «mum» or the obstruent-sonorant one in «father» and «mother». This would suggest that the greater energy released in the articulation of plosives may often be used iconically to denote concepts or phenomena that

either possess or demand an expenditure of energy or in some way display «hardness»: bump, dig, and so forth. The plosives, with their literal interruption of the air-flow, are also often to be encountered in contexts of discontinuous activity: jump, leap, kiss, dig, as against delve, etc.

The voiced-voiceless opposition will likewise be found to mark semantic oppositions of sonority or loudness, as against inaudibility or low volumen. The uses of the English sibilants /s/, /z/, /-iz/ and the affricates /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ in certain poetic contexts have been amply studied, usually functioning in such contexts to «lower the volume» or emulate sleepiness. Outside poetry, they have iconic uses in such forms as «whisper», «hiss», «shhhh...», «snooze», etc. As in the /a/-/i/ opposition of largeness-smallness, voiced-voiceless can also come into play in representing a sense of dimension: «bang», as against «ping» for noises, «bite» as against «peck».

Sounds, therefore, have a physical shape to them, the point of reference for this shape being the most immediate of all, one's own body, a shape which can become iconically transferred to human apprehension of phenomena and subsequently decanted into word-formation, to thus become iconically meaningful.

2.2. *Metaphoric meaning*

As Lakoff and Johnson[5] rightly point out, many of the metaphors in current everyday use in our speech are based on conventional meaning associations between two phenomena or spheres of experience. Correspondences of signification will be transferred through these associations from one sphere or domain («source domain») to another («target domain»), so that the target domain or field will be understood in terms of the source or donor field. Thus metaphor will function to give insight by conventionally accepted analogy into phenomena that may otherwise resist full comprehension.

Within the domain of pure sound, this assumption of the functioning of metaphorical meanings is also true. If we consider certain sound signals, for example, a siren, a certain toll of a bell, a football referee's whistle, it is quite obvious that they all have specific conventional meanings: «get to shelter quick, bombs are about to drop» or «that's it for today, boys!», «someone has died» or «someone is getting married», «you have committed a breach of the rules of football», etc. These same sounds applied to other fields of experience will inevitably evoke the conventionally associated meanings of their respective source domains and there will be corresponding consensus as to the suitability or otherwise of their use in different contexts. Hence, if we hear, say, the noise of a siren or whistle breaking up a funeral speech, we have a conventional awareness

of its incongruity to context and would tend to either meet this discord with outrage or else to take it as a bad joke. However were we to hear the same sounds as background noises to different film sequences, then we would interpret the sequence not only in terms of its visual images, but also in those of the additional associative or metaphoric meanings supplied by these sounds.

Likewise, individual phonemes or human speech and combinations of same can have this type of conventionally accepted metaphoric meaning (or at least «implication»). In some instances, this metaphoric meaning will be very hard to distinguish from the iconic or kinetic attachments to any given sound. The two types of meaning are, in fact, closely interwoven with each other. Hence, plosives will both metaphorically and iconically evoke energy, abruptness, dynamism or strong emotion, Bernabé (1988: 7) notes the frequency of these phonemes in Indo-European languages in certain lexical sets: terms for family relationships, nutrition, parts of the body and physiological functions. In all examples given, he stresses the underlying syllable structure of plosive + vowel and an absence of consonant clusters. This recurrent use of plosives in these fields he assigns to the «expressive function» of language. Other sound combinations will be assigned to the «impressive function», that is, sound sequences which evoke sounds, movements, forms, or dimensions through their very structure. To this end, he gives an interesting account of reduplication for different types of «pin-torescas modalidads articulatorias», such as stammering, chattering, etc., the structure of which he defines as characterized by reduplication associated with voiced plosives and often liquids or nasals. Although his work is basically illustrated by examples from modern Spanish and classical Greek, his analysis of evocative syllabic structure is valid for English, too. One has only to think of the numerous terms in English for stuttering, gargling, cackling, etc., to perceive similar phonemic sequences.

Yet in English, one of the clearest illustrations of metaphoric meanings becoming attached to recurrent sound sequence is what Firth (1964: 184 ff.) whith great felicity termed «phonaesthemes», that is initial, medial and final consonant clusters, or consonant clusters combined with certain vowel phonemes, which conventionally function as pointers to meaning in words from more informal registers. It would be tedious here to offer extensive lists of these clusters and their meaning potential, but it would be useful to briefly go over just one as an illustration. Let us take the phonemic sequence /skw-/ in English in word-initial position: *squint, squeeze, squelch, squirm, squiggle, squash,* etc.

The most obvious clue to attempting interpretation of any of these lexical items is that this initial cluster signals some kind of *reduction* (significantly, it is followed in most of the above examples by a short, often high, vowel = smallness,

Cf. supra). Hence any neologism encountered that begins with this cluster will be apprehended at the outset as signifying some form of compression, diminishing, etc. Similarly, the final phonemes of some of them, for exampe of squelch and squash, will give further insight into the overall meaning of the lexical item. In this case, the final affricate could be signalling something equivalent to «slop-ping of water involved» (*splash, squish, slush,* etc.), although in other instances, it may well evoke «destruction by sudden pressure» (*crush, mash, smash,* etc.). This means that there is nothing arbitrary about the sound structure of these words, but that they are firmly based on conventional phonic expectations of sound-meaning, although of course, their appearance in other types of contexts does not necessarily imply the above kinds of meaning.

Other phonic expectations are roused by different types of consonantal and vowel devices. For consonants, the device of alliteration is one of the commonest in both contemporary and former variants of English, and today forms one of our most basic phonosemantic expectations from, say, newspaper headlines or advertising. If this device has become so common in this type of context, this is obviously on account of the mnemonic efficiency of alliteration, its economic stamping of a «message» or «meaning» on the human brain to thus facilitate retention of same.

With regard to vowel sounds, diverse analyses of the poetic exploitation of their evocative potential have offered fuller accounts than can be given here. However, it should be stressed that in a language such as English, which marks the short/long vowel opposition, the distinction is semantically significant in that long vowels tend to some extent to occur in words whose referents involve some kind of «length» or process, whereas the corresponding short ones are often encountered in contexts of speed or action. Once more, a cautionary remark that this is not always the case, but merely often true. If we are to believe that collective activities such as myth-making, metaphorizing, linguistic conventio-nalizing can only come about through *repetition,* then the very frequency of these phenomena will be what gives rise to collective expectations in this sense. On the strength of these expectations, then, there will be meanings of sonority, slowness, ceremonial, melancholy, «fading away», etc. attached to the long vowels, whereas the short ones will arouse connotations of jerkiness, fast light move-ment, and so forth. Think, for example, why a particular type of modern dance should have been christened precisely «Rock "n" Roll»! (in which, of course, the factor of reduplication is also essential to denote continuity of movement). Think, too, of the contrast in the ways in which we apprehend the duration of action between, say, *sleep, wail, moan,* and *hop, skip and a jump,* even though in actual time, the skipping may take longer than the wailing.

Thus, it would seem that sounds are not quite as arbitrary as Saussure and his

followers would have us believe. At some remote stage in the history of human linguistic communication, they may well have been unsystematic series of formless noises that bore no relation whatsoever to the concepts they were intended to articulate, but certainly from the synchronic point of view, these same noises, through the repeated use of millennia have taken on either iconic or metaphorical meanings such as the above examples illustrate. One might even say that they have, to some extent, taken on together with these meanings, a life of their own.

3. Exemplification from two types of sound-pattern in texts

With all the foregoing features in mind, I have chosen two basic spheres of non-literary language usage, in which fufilled sound expectancy is most readily to be codified, these spheres being those of a) official, or «authoritative» language use, and b) the popular press. Each sphere has its own very distinct acoustic conventions, which, if disrupted, would lead to some form of break in communication, in the case of a) to a certain «disrespect» for the text as an instrument of authority, and, if consistently disrupted, to perhaps an eventual disintegration of authority itself. In the case of b), the popular press, a continued disruption of the expected sound patterns, would inevitably lead to a loss in readers, and, stretching a point, to the newpapers in question going bankrupt. Who knows? Accurate prediction in both instances is marred by the text-creators taking very great pains indeed to meet their respective readers' expectancies of phonic adequacy.

3.1. *The sound of officialdom*

Officialdom in all its manifestations, government reports, parliamentary debates, official papers, laws, legal contracts, etc., in order to be able to perpetuate its structures and ideology must convince through at least offering an image of competence, superior knowledge, weight, reliability and prestige, and by imbuing a certain respectful awe in its readers and listeners. As a result of these prior communicative aims, it will exploit non-acoustic devices in the fields of lexis and syntax that endow the text with a certain opacity - diaphanous meaning can be risky when it comes to justifying unpopular measures or action. These lexical and syntactic devices will include elements like a tendency to latinize vocabulary, and a profuse usage of lengthy subordination. Short precise syntactic structures, plus a favouring of the Germanic elements of English vocabulary will lead to immediate perception of what lies behind the sound structure, and this will

not be to the authors' advantage. Hence, one expects basically two sound features from official language, as a result of this using a sound structure as a sort of barrier to underlying, objective meaning: sonority (official language must ring out loud and clear), and rhythmic cadence (its must also please the senses in offering some simulacrum of social harmony and well-being).

3.1.1.   Sonority

Sonority is defined by Leech (1969: 99) as «associated with the two vowel features of *openness* and *backness*, especially in combination», that is a text with abundant open and/or back vowels will be more sonorous than one with a profusion of tight, front vowels. However, to my mind, this is not a sufficient criterion for overall text sonority. Together with this type of vowel, there must operate a series of voiced or nasal consonants to give the official text its characteristic vibrant sound-patterns.

This is clearly observed in the extract of official language used here as an example. The text chosen is by no means a vibrant haranguing of the masses that one expects, say, of political compaigning, but part of the Extradition Act, in which the omnipresent power of the long arm of the Law makes itself felt through both the sonority and the cadentiality of the language in which it is formulated.

The vowel/consonant patterning of the text creates an alignment of the participants in the text into the «baddies» on the one hand, and the «authorities» on the other. There is consistent choice of lexical items containing short vowels and voiceless or fricative consonants («criminal», etc.) in relation to the offender, which in terms of the sound iconism discussed above, tends to minimize the «power» or rank on the social hierarchy of the referent. Contrarily, whenever the incorporeal «authorities» are mentioned, long vowels and voiced consonants prevail («Her Majesty», «police magistrate», «Secretary of State», etc.). One cannot avoid suspecting that this very conspicuous phonic distinction between offender and offended institution is deliberately deployed to establish the respective values to be inferred for each.

3.1.2.   Rhythmic Cadence

Flowing cadences are very difficult to achieve in any other but a somewhat convoluted syntactic pattern. Obviously, if official language favours the lengthier type of syntactic structures (one wickedly suspects that the intention is to get the reader lost half way through some of the sentences one encounters), then it will have greater freedom to manipulate the cadential rise and fall of same.

Syntactically, what first strikes the reader of this extract is the fact that there is not one simple sentence, which allows for repeated cadential falling tunes at the end of the highly complex syntactic structures of the text. A preference for falling tunes, as in this case, signal a certain confidence in what is being uttered, a certain conceptual definitiveness and of course, phonic «weight», in other words, *power*. In sequences such as «punish him for an offence of a political character», «the extradition crime proved by the facts on which the surrender is grounded», to quote just two examples from the text —for the whole extract reiterates these intonational patterns— the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the way in which the Law throws its phonic weight around.

3.2. *Bellowing at your readers*

If official language «makes itself heard» through a ringing sonority, then the Popular Press in all its variants tends to «deafen» its readers by exploiting the superfluous decibels of English phonemes and their combinations. A corresponding conceptual hyperbole is matched in its characteristic sound patterns by exploiting the strongest sounds of the language to a maximum. Hence, one will encounter plosives —both voiced and voiceless, preferably voiced— tricks of the sound trade such as alliteration, homophony, rhyming, etc., which all contribute to endow the resulting texts with their typical cacophony, as against the rolling cadences of officialdom. However, this type of phonic structure also serves a pragmatic end, Erroneously or otherwise, it is taken for granted that readers of the popular press belong to the lesser educated strata of society and that their reading skills will hence be less developed than that of so-called «quality» press readers. They will therefore not be expected to be able to handle long stretches of text, and in many instances, the phonic structuring of reports in the popular press acts as a kind of signposting of the more meaningful items to be assimilated. Retention of facts or event is thus facilitated by the phonic devices of repetition, alliteration, or sound punning.

I have deliberately chosen a report from one of the more conservative tabloids (*The Daily Mail*), whose sound patterning on the whole tends to be not quite so blatantly conspicuous as some of its «noisier» fellows. Yet under examination, it displays all those features that make it phonically recognisable as an adequate example of the genre. In the first place, the name TESCO of the heading marks the overall phonic patterning of the report. The five phonemes that make up the name are to be reiterated consistently throughout all the paragraphs. Next, the vowel rhyming of the heading («golden oldies») is used throughout, so that there is continual phonic cross-reference for the reader to iconically interiorize as

«positive» or «good» any item containing the /ou/ diphthong: «old», «older», etc., thus lose the negative connotations conventionally associated with them to eventually shine forth as highly desirable concepts. This is aided by the sibilant and affricate patterns marked out by the heading: /s/, /z/ and / /. Throughout the text, they are in marked opposition of the «harder», «tougher» plosive /t/, /g/, /k/, which, as in the case of the Extradition Act, serves to align forces amongst the participants of the text. The sibilants are traditionally assigned the iconic or metaphorical meaning of «serenity», «placidness», «calm», etc. In this case, it is no coincidence that the text should abound in these phonemes, for what is to be inferred from the report is precisely the greater reliability, conscientiousness and willingness to serve of the older employees.

These two brief examples —one could really take any text-genre and work out corresponding patterns of sound adequacy - each in their own way, illustrate how on the one hand, phonic structuring is important to the overall meaning of the text, or at least to how the author wishes the text to be interpreted, and on the other, how text must meet certain phonic requirements, if it is to be acknowledged as adequate by the reader. Imagine reversing the sound structures of the two texts given here: the results, I fear, would be disastrous for both!

NOTES

[1] Cf., for example, Brooks, Cleanth, and Penn Warren, Robert. *Understanding Poetry,* New York, Holt, Rinehart and Wiston, 1960; Nowottny, Winifred. *The Language Poets Use,* London, Athlone Press, 1962.

[2] Cf. Chapman, 1984.

[3] Cf. Cohen, G., 1972. 81 ff.

[4] I am indebted to Prof. Enrique Bernárdez, for his useful account of his own head-splitting experiences of speed-reading courses.

[5] Cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980.

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TEXTS USED

1.   **From the Extradition Act**

«3.   *Restriction on surrender of criminals*
The following restrictions shall be observed with respect to the surrender of fugitive criminals:
(i)   A fugitive criminal shall not be surrendered if the offence in respect of which his surrender is demanded is one of a political character, or if he prove to the satisfaction of the police magistrate or the court before whom he is brought on habeas corpus, or to the Secretary of State, that the requisition for his surrender has in fact been made with a view to try or punish him for an offence of a political character;
(ii) A fugitive criminal shall not be surrendered to a foreign state unless provision is made by the law of that state, or by arrangement that the fugitive criminal shall not, until he has been restored or had an opportunity of returning to Her Majesty's dominions, be detained or tried in that foreign state for any offence committed prior to his surrender other than the extradition crime proved by the facts on which the surrender is grounded:
(iii) A fugitive criminal who has been accused of some offence within English jurisdiction not being the offence for which his surrender is

asked, or is undergoing sentence under any conviction in the United Kingdom, shall not be surrendered until after he has been discharged, whether by acquittal or on expiration of his sentence or otherwise:

(iv)   A fugitive criminal shall not be surrendered until the expiration of fifteen days from the date of his being comitted to prision to await his surrender.»

2.   Tesco takes golden oldies off the shelf

A Supermarket is bringing back old-fashioned service - with the over-55's.

And the scheme has proved so successful, it is being expanded.

The new workforce has proved reliable, experienced and conscientious, says Tesco. It also claims that the mature workers are a good influence on younger colleagues.

It only discovered the benefits of the new recruits by accident. The store was desperate for staff in the South of England, particularly West Sussex, due to low unemployment.

So it launched an advertising compaign in Crawley aimed purely at the over-55's.

Less than two months later, the supermarket chain, which employs 72,000 people in 380 stores, wants to double its golden oldie workforce to 5,000.

They are being taken on in all departaments - from the checkouts to the bakery.

The company's public affairs spokesman, Mr. Alan Tringham, said yesterday: «What we have gained are a number of advantages we never thought of when we decided to go for the more mature workers.

«They seem to be more reliable, conscientious and to have an in-built regard for customer service.

«During the Sixties and Seventies price became more important than service. Now we regard service as a top priority and, because they were brought up in an age where the customer was always right, the older people more readily understand this.

«We have found that in the past a lot of people over 40 or 45 have simply not bothered to apply for jobs because they were given the impression they were out of the job market.

«This is a shame because of our experience which has shown they have a lot to offer.» Tesco is now recommending the idea to other firms following predictions from the National Economic Development Office of a 20 per cent slump in the 16- to 24-year-old labour force by 1995.

Mr. Jeremy Nordgerg, personnel director of Harrods said: «We are aware that there is a degree of social skill and maturity which comes with age».

A spokesman for the Cadbury division of Cadbury Schweppes in Birmingham said: «I feel we will have to take a stance and I applaud the Tesco move.»

Sainsbury's director of personnel, 59-year-old Mr. Owen Thomas, added: «I would agree with the Tesco experience of employing older people. They bring stability and set an example to younger people.»