ONOMATOPOEIA: THINGS THAT GO BUMP

A. ROSS ECKLER
Morristown, New Jersey

According to the Ninth Collegiate, onomatopoeia is the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it. There are more than one hundred onomatopoeic words in the Collegiate that exhibit this characteristic, identifiable by the use of the words NOISE or SOUND in the definition.

The purpose of this article is twofold: to suggest a taxonomy of onomatopoeia by relating the types of sounds depicted to the choice of vowels and consonants in the word, and to augment the Websterian collection with a large number of words for sounds that have been coined by comic-strip writers and illustrators from March 1988 to the present.

To avoid being overwhelmed by comic-strip material, I have limited the study to those sounds produced by inanimate objects, setting aside the many cries, grunts and other vocalizations emitted by comic-strip characters, both human and animal. However, this line cannot be drawn with as much precision as one would like, for there are many words coined to imitate such vocalizations as snoring, spitting, coughing, gargling, sneezing, sipping through a straw, vomiting, kissing, and the like.

Since comic strips often portray the misadventures of their characters, a large number of onomatopoeic words are required to describe impacts of the human head or body with its environment: falls, blows to the head, and the like. This has suggested a twopart division. This article describes the coinages associated with accidental (or purposeful) bumps, bangs and falls of both human and inanimate objects, including war and sports: things that go bump. The closely-related noises of friction and breakage are also included. A subsequent article will describe the coinages associated with the more-or-less normal noises of everyday life, in particular the technology associated with powered vehicles, appliances and common household objects: the daily grind. At the end of the latter article I give words for symbolic or faint noises that are rarely if ever actually heard.

Comic-strip coinages have been featured in Word Ways once before, in an article by John McClellan in August 1980; his listing of some 500 terms (from AAAA to Z-Z-Z) was alphabetic rather than taxonomic, and included vocalizations. In a related article, Maxey Brooke described how foreigners onomatopoeize one very special sound, the barking of a dog, in February 1975.

Turning now to a possible taxonomy of onomatopoeia, the Ninth
Collegiate words relating to things that go bump or scrape (but not splash) are presented below in a two-dimensional array with the pitch (frequency) of the sound on the vertical axis and the duration of the sound on the horizontal. A third characteristic, the loudness of the sound, appears to be less often recognized by the definitions; sounds characterized as "loud" are indicated by boldface, and faint ones by parentheses. The duration of the sound is often characterized as "sharp", "explosive", or "abrupt" or, if more extended, "resonant", "sonorous", or "ringing".

Solid Objects Colliding or Sliding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitch</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>sudden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beep</td>
<td>(cheep)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peep</td>
<td>(chirp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plink</td>
<td>ting</td>
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<td>(clink)</td>
<td>pong</td>
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<td>plink</td>
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<td>clank</td>
<td>BANG</td>
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<td>(chirp)</td>
<td>CLANG</td>
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<td>(tick)</td>
<td>whang</td>
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<td>(tap)</td>
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<td>(clank)</td>
<td>BANG</td>
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<tr>
<td>snap</td>
<td>CRASH</td>
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<td>clap</td>
<td>CLAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crack</td>
<td>slap</td>
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<tr>
<td>pop</td>
<td>WHACK</td>
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<tr>
<td>tonk W3</td>
<td>WHOMP</td>
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<tr>
<td>cunk W3</td>
<td>whump</td>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>crunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>flump</td>
<td>thump</td>
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</table>

Using the definitions as a general guide, I propose a more specific taxonomy of sound pitch and sound duration based on the choice, respectively, of vowels and consonants. Most of the dictionary words are one-syllable, with an initial consonant (or cluster), a vowel, and a final consonant (or cluster). The vowels carry information about pitch, and, to some extent, loudness: E and I are used for faint high-pitched sounds, A for louder sounds of medium pitch, and O and U for sounds of low pitch that are neither especially loud or soft. The consonants carry duration information, for which I propose the following interpretations:

- initial T B P C CK; final P CK T: abrupt, striking wood, ground, human or animal tissue
- final NK: abrupt, striking metal
- initial W WH Z: object rushing through air prior to impact
- final NG: object striking metal which vibrates or resonates
- initial CH: less abrupt, object striking something yielding impact
- second L (as CL FL): echoic impact (not abrupt, having a brief extent)
- final SH: more extended impact; frictional contact
- initial S SCR SQ; final CH: friction between solids

This taxonomy can be illuminated by turning to the much larger corpus of comic-strip coinages. Some effort has been made to place similar sorts of bumps and falls under the same heading. The comic
strips from which the sounds have been taken are identified by single lower-case letters (see Appendix for codes).

BLOWS TO THE HEAD OR BODY

fist THUMP n POW eh PUNCH c ZOK l CRUNCH e BAP ek CUFF b ZOT t
WHAP h SMASH CRASH RIP k open hand SLAP jan POTNK b WAP f SMACK g
pat by hand PAT e

club WHAM b WAP — rolled newspaper WHAP gl broom WHACK o tennis racket THWANG y chair SMASH BAM CRASH WHAM CRUNCH g frying-pan
WHACK t doll WHAP p canoe paddle BONK f WUMP w board WHAP WHAPP p
thrown objects: rock BAP c ZOK b ball BONK i golf ball BONK i ZOK b
WHONK b basketball WAP s BONK m football BONK p baseball BONK cp
soccer ball WHAK s can BONK t shoe WHAP g caviar tin TINK g alarm clock BONK g BOP g line drive POW p flower-pot [B-flat musical note] g frisbee BONK m mailbox door BONK p magnet CLANK b coffee mug KONK g
head runs into: chandelier CLUNK-K t another head THUD s wall BANG j
tree CHUNK g windshield THONK g ceiling THUNK b stop sign SMACK g
soft objects as weapons: teddy bear WHUMP u WHOP g pillow WHUMP e
powder FLIT h
fingers mashed by window SLAM g by hammer WHACK l WHAM i

FALLS

head on typewriter CLUNK w head on table BONK j SPLAT k WHOP g
THUNK k head on pillow PLOP m
body on ground or floor THUMP n THUNK k THUD gln KLUNK np SPLAT g
FWOOP q from great height BAM ch SSSHHKK j CRASH gh from sofa
THUMP l baby falls WHUMP i weighted bird falls FLUMP b falls be-
tween fence slats SHUNK g other falls THBOOMM THWOK x pillow FOOF g

COLLISIONS

man-to-man (man-to-animal) fast KAPOW KAPOWW POW c CRASH WHAM l
CRUNCH n slow BUMP p body-check BUMP p cat runs into man’s knee
BUMP g
man hits object: football dummy ZOK b skier hits tree WUMP o BWORK q
door SPONKX k WHAM cg wall BONK g CRASH h THWUMP x snowbank
WUMPH c mailbox KLUNK n ringside THWUMP x car hits man WHAM f
man thrown in trash BAM y safe topples on animal WHAM j
dog’s tail hits floor THUMP u dog jumps on man’s head BØINK g

FANCY FOOTWORK

man kicks man BOOT jp BOOM jl WHAM l WAP c BAP h
man kicks dog KTCK g WHOK b PUNT g POOMP g BOOT g BAP c
man kicks door BAP p car wheel KICK b rock BAP c soccer ball BOOT s
football POONT q
jumps on table WHAM g roach WHAMP WAP j bed STOMP k swimsuit STOMP k
leaf pile FOOSH y down steps BONK c through ping-pong table CRASH o
on mole tunnel STAMP o floor BAP k
stamps foot STOMP g taps foot TAP cly hop across floor BOINK d HOP g
tap-dancing TAPITY gm tap foot TAP cly
walking PAD j female shoes KLOP-KLOP-PA KLOP-P t
HANDS AND FISTS
fist hits back of chair BLAM 1 table WHAM ghi j POUND j BANG n chair arm BAMS k television set SMASH k tape cassette BAMS k spider SQUISH g beetle BAMS e wall BANG t
knocks on door KNOCK ghj enotwz BAMS m BAMSMMTY BAMS m NOK NA-NAK NOG q RAT-A-TAT-TAT n WHINING WHAM m knock on wall KNOCK g
slap hands SLAP m high-five SMACK k SLAP 1
clap hands CLAP acdigklsy hit ketchup bottle POONK l
shoe falls into hand CLUNK c
pac hand PAT e stomach PAT g chest PAT g lap PAT - thump chest
THUMP g
tap finger on chair arm TAP m table THUMPA s electric shaver TAP i
tap hammer TAP m table THUMPA s metal shaver TAP i
tap drum TAP m table THUMPA s metal shaver TAP i
leaves finger on chair arm TAP m table THUMPA s electric shaver TAP i
frill spider FLINK g
splat hands SLAP m high-five SMACK k SLAP 1
fingertips on chair arm TAP m table THUMPA s electric shaver TAP i

OBJECTS FALLING TO GROUND
thrown down: food dish PLOP g box POONK h blocks CLUNK i
topped over: privy SPLAT b chair SPLAT k WHAM l table BONK c lamp BAMS CRACK h CRASH hy coat box CLOMP g teddy bear PLOP g blocks CRASH s anvil CLANG s bar stool CRASH h canvas backdrop FWOMPD d
toy airplane BONK s salt block CLUNK b pebble GRUNGE b coin TING g
toy from cereal box CRASH g styrofoam blocks CLUNK s cat dish CLOP g golf ball on stairs CLUNK i cans in grocery sack CLANK CLUNK t pile of dirt PLOP s pile of paper into wastebasket WOMP k pile of paper onto desk FWOMP c one piece of paper into suggestion box SPLUICK b drinking glass BONK j acorns GLICKEY g clam hits rock BONK b bounces to ground BLAP b ice tube TINK g platter of dishes CRASH BOXING CLATTER SLOSH e muffin PLOP k can CLINK m carrot PLUNK b large sheet of wood WHAP g fake "moon" on backdrop CRASH g
COLLIDING OBJECTS
car crash GRUNTCH c at slow speed WAK-K t shopping cart hits car CLUNK t
animal life: bat hits penguin BAT j club hits crockshock WAM l hits
snake WHAM b hits spider WHANG b spray can hits bug KRONG g newspaper hits spider WHAP g newspaper hits bug WHAP g ball hits turtle THUNK b bird hits kite BONK b falls to ground CLUNK b hammer stake in ground WACK h nail to board BANG h BAMS o nail to wall WHAM b to fix leak BANG CLANG y BAMS n geological hammer on rock TINK b general hammering BAMS y POW y gavel on table BAMS d
bat hits doll WHAP y club hits tree WHANG b baton hits coffin WUMP f
spatula hits potatoes WHAP j club of ham hits salad WHAM g spoon hits pan BAMS k CLUNK l drum on pot THOMKA s chair hits table CRASH a
toy banged on floor BAMS e poke umbrella in sand CHRONK g
thrown objects: rock hits wall WHACK e book hits television SPLAKKT x tuning fork hits piano CLUNK b fork hits table CHONK g ball hits wall WAP t ceddy bear hits table WHAP g box into shopping cart CLUNK t slipper hits radio THWUNNK x phone at wall SMASH BASH k pillow hits bed BAMS k hits wall WHOMP g
toboggan hits rock CRASH c sled hits snow mogul POOM l sled hits snowman WUMP c car runs over cow BUMP g unicycle strikes clam BONK b metal bar hits metal bed TWANGGG e metal tray hits table WHANG g cap bed slams into wall WHACK g pots bang together CLANG g slamming doors: slam shut SLAM cgilmony SLAMB q SLAMMM SLAMM x slam
COLLECTIVE AGITATION OF OBJECTS

golf clubs in bag RATTLE CLANK b BB shot spilled RATTLE i coat hangers TLING empty tin cans CLANK u dishes and pots in sink C-CLUNK-K SPLASH CLATTER CLAK t female bracelet and necklace KLUNK JINGLE KLINK KLINK-A t coins fall on table PLINK s empty bottles jostle CLINK n drinking glasses clink CLICK b CLINK w

BREAKAGE
glass: window by baseball CRASH o window CRASH ej window by brick CRASH a break bottle with teeth CRUNCH h bottle breaks in fall to floor CRASH o glasses shatter SMASH CRASH KISHHH TINKLE g arm breaks KRAK t eggshell cracks CRICK g dog cracks bone CERRACKK u battering ram breaks door KRACK d file cabinet broken into SKAKK x plastic toy SNAP c scotch tape dispenser SNAP g dog collar SNAP g pencil CRACK SNAP b table cop jumped on CRASH o CRACK g

SPORT SOUNDS
golf: ball hits tree BONK WHACK ZANG VAP ZORK b hits metal post CLANG SWANG BONG DING DONG KLINK b hit by club SHUNK b WHAP WAK POP WHACK i SLICE b WOK GOLF KRAK b POW p hits puddle SPLAT i hits pond SPLASH b hit by putter JAB b NOX KLIK t puts wrong FLUB e hit bucket of balls simultaneously KARLOOIE b clubs in bag RATTLE CLANK b archery: arrow (rubber tip) hits floor WAP c hits tree THOK h hits target THOK h baseball: ball hit by bat CRACK co WHACK o POW pt WHAP c ball hits ground BONK p hits turtle THUNK b hits man POW p tag base runner NAB b bunted BUNT b dribbled with bat BIPPITY SLAP BAP BOP BONK b hits catcher's mitt PLUNK t wet ball hits mitt SPLORSH SPLORK WHAP b ball hits fielder's glove THOK c PLUNK p PLOP i WAP c pitched ball WHOOSH b man slides into base SLIIIIIDE b basketball: ball in basket PLUNK p bounce on floor THUMP i football: kick ball POONT q referee whistle PHWEET e TWEET b croquet: hit ball with mallet WHACK c horseshoes: shoe hits peg CLANG d soccer: tackle CRUNCH n ball hits earphones PONK s kick ball BOOT s ping pong: hit ball with paddle POCK o bowling: ball nicks pin PLINK t ball in washing machine THUMP BUMP WHUMP o tennis: hit ball with racket BONK s hit cabbage patch doll THONK s frisbee: catch ball with NAB b paddle connected to ball with elastic: BONG DOING j BAP e BOK c

WAR SOUNDS
battering ram breaks door KRAK d spear thrown in tree THUNK o arrow hits tree THOK h stones, arrows rain down ZAP ZING POW BOP h swords clashing CLANG h helmets bump together BONK BUMP CLANK CLUNK BING w
FRICTIONAL SOUNDS

car brakes hard SCREEEECH j SCREEEEEEEEE g SCREECH joth SCREE SCREEE t SKREEEE x SCREEEEEECH c SCREEECH e
unicycle brakes hard SCREECH b
grocery cart wheels SQUEE SQEE-K SQEE SQEEEK SQEEK t SCREE t
door CREAK s CREEEEEEEEEAK j CREEAAKK c lid of mummy box OEEEEEEEEEK g
shoes SQUEAK g baby seat SQUEAK j visor on helmet REEEEK g
pencil on paper SKRITCH b SCRIBBLE gl pen on paper SKRITCH bm carve
letters on rock SKRITCH b window glass cutter SKREEEEEE g
fingernails dug into floor SKRECHCHHH j cat slides down tree SCREEEEE g
dog scratches fleas SCRATCH y scratches door with paw SCRATCH u cat
stomach scratched SCRATCH g
car door drags on sidewalk SCR-R-R-R-APE t drag box on floor SCOOTCH c
slide into base SLIIIIIDE b slide down snow mountain SCHLOOP b
push suitcase under airplane seat SQUISH SMASH STUFF WAD MUSH k
tighten corset SCRIK g operate pepper mill GRIK-K t
dig in ground DIG SCRAPE BRUSH c shinny up pole SHINNY b
rip socks open RIP g rip sofa with claw SWIPE g rip bandages off
R-R-RIP-P-P RIP-P-P t rip airline skin RIP j rip door off refriger­
ator RIP o rip swimsuit RIP k clothing RIP k RIPPP h open envе­
lope RIP j tear paper RIP bkm RIIIPP s book page RRRIP g tear book
apart SHRED k bottom of paper bag RIP g ticket RIP b
cut carrots CHOP k credit cards CHOP k paper CLIP jy SNIP gy CHOP
CUT y cut thread SNIP y
crush aluminum can SCRRNNNCH e crumple paper CRUMPLE l

APPENDIX

a Agatha Krumm b B.C. c Calvin and Hobbes d Doonesbury e BeetleBailey f The Far Side g Garfield h Hagar i Hi and Lois j Bloom Country k Cathy l Blondie m Momma n Andy Capp o Moose p Peanuts q Pogo r Tiger s Safe Havens t They'll Do It Every Time u Marmaduke v Gasoline Alley w Toles (editorial cartoons) x Spiderman y Grammy z Ziggy