

# The Sydney Morning Herald

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## How to sneeze in Japanese

Gary Nunn

Published: September 4, 2015 - 3:30PM

Hatschi! Eichi! Hapsu!

No, we're not at a celebrity baby-naming ceremony for triplets.

Together, we just sneezed in three different tongues – German, Korean and Turkish respectively. Achoo! is the equivalent English sound. Bless you!

On the surface, it sounds like a futile fact. Who needs to know how a doorbell rings in Russian, German or Portuguese? (for posterity, dzyn dzyn, klingeling and tim tom respectively)?

These sounds broaden the bubble whereby we presume our experience to be universal – surely everybody hears ding dong? Well, no. When you consider we're hearing the exact same sound, but producing wildly different interpretations of it, it reveals how marvellously malleable we've made our different tongues.

Illustrator James Chapman has captured the quirkiness of international onomatopoeia through the pictures he posts weekly on his [Tumblr page](#). The positive response has encouraged him to compile them into a book, "How to sneeze in Japanese," if his Kickstarter campaign succeeds.

"It all started with South Korean dogs", Chapman says. "A friend was teaching English there and told me that dogs don't woof woof in Korean. The bark is represented as meong meong. I was amazed. I never realised onomatopoeia differed between languages. So I started drawing, to capture my fascination." It's not just Korean where the animal sounds seem alien; dogs bau bau in Italian and guf guf in Spanish.

You'll see much animal onomatopoeia in Chapman's illustrations. "It's an area of academic neglect", says Adelaide University's Professor Derek Abbott, whose research focuses on the foreign cartoon bubbles we'd write for different creatures. He cites the fact that "formal dictionaries traditionally excluded these types of words" as evidence that they were perhaps seen as too childish or frivolous to be addressed in serious studies.

According to Abbott's study, the two sounds made by the same animal that are most different by country are that of the bumble bee. In every language except one, the bee's famous buzz is represented by a 'z' or an 's'. In Japanese, however, a bee makes the noise boon boon. Similarly, Japanese is one of only two languages where a cat meowing doesn't begin with 'm'. Instead, cats go nyan nyan. The other language is Greek, in which cats niaou niaou.

English onomatopoeia, in context, is equally eccentric. The rooster's cock-a-doodle-doo seems peculiar when compared with the Dutch kukeleku, German kikeriki and Hungarian kukuriku.

What's revealed by some of these sounds says as much about cultural differences as linguistic ones. "In English we have rather more sound words for dogs (woof, yap, bow wow, ruff, growl) than other languages, as English-speaking countries have the highest dog ownership." There are also clear differences when you look at how the same language is used across difference environments. "Here in Australia, camels have been introduced in the outback and so we have grumph. Unsurprisingly I haven't come across any sound for a camel in the US or UK."

There are some similarities, too: pigs oink in English, Italian and Spanish. Yet they boo boo in Japanese, chrum chrum in Polish, groin groin in French and nöff-nöff in Swedish.

The bow-wow theory, attributed by historical linguist Max Müller to German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, proposes that all language started from the perceived parroting of animal grunts, snorts, whines and quacks. We've come a long way from there – to the point that these multilingual differences can fill a whole newspaper article or Tumblr page.

So now, chomp or nom nom (denoting enthusiastic food consumption) to the German ear is mampf and to the Japanese ear is paku paku. Sniffing is schnum schnum in Arabic and schnupper in German, but nuusk nuusk in Estonian

and njuk in Russian. Rain may pitter patter in Australia but in Korea it'll ju-ruk ju-ruk, in Hungarian it'll csipp csepp and in Japanese, of course, there are three different types of rain sound: shitoshito (drizzle); potsuri potsuri (light) and zaa zaa (heavy).

Last year, the Australian Association for Research in Education's report found that Australian students spent half as much time on foreign language learning as students in OECD countries. The Australian curriculum also contains two fewer years on foreign languages than OECD countries. Perhaps time to rebrand their appeal. Chapman himself says: "I wasn't interested in languages in school – but maybe that's because I wasn't taught how to sneeze in French."

Learning how to sneeze in Japanese, (hakushon!), awakens our appetite to learn other tongues and cultures. It forces us to see the familiar and juvenile with renewed, fresh intrigue as adults.

Valiooo! Juhu! Yatta! (Yay! in Lithuanian, German, Japanese).

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/how-to-sneeze-in-japanese-20150903-gje77s.html>*