

The Role of Phonesthemes in Shoegaze Naming Conventions

ZAC SMITH

Cornell University, Department of Linguistics, Ithaca, NY, USA

This article focuses on some observed similarities between band names, album titles, and song titles within the *shoegazing* subgenre of rock music, which is characterized by loud, swirling layers of distorted guitar and droning noise. The onomastic similarities are analyzed in terms of *phonesthemes*, which are submorphemic sound/meaning pairs, wherein a particular phone or cluster of phones is taken to denote some abstract semantic space. As experiments show that native speaker awareness of phonesthemes influences neologistic production and perception, I argue that the preponderance of band names like *Swirl* and *Swoon* within shoegaze is due to an overlap between the genre's aesthetic characteristics and the semantic space described by a specific set of phonesthemes in English.

KEYWORDS phonesthemes, branding, band names, shoegaze, rock music, music genres, identity, onomastics.

1. Introduction

In reviewing the song *Swirl* by shoegazing band Westkust, Cohen (2015) notes that it “is not, in fact, the 1,500th shoegaze-y indie rock song to be named ‘Swirl.’” What does Cohen mean by this exactly? While the number 1,500 might be a bit hyperbolic, Cohen appears to be referencing that, across many shoegaze acts, an odd pattern in naming conventions has emerged. Take, for instance, the shoegaze band names listed in Table 1. While this is not an exhaustive list of bands of the genre, it presents a clear preponderance of similar band names. A similar (although more varied) pattern emerges in shoegaze album and song titles. Take, for instance, *Whirlpool* (a 1993 album by Chapterhouse and 2014 song by Japanese band Kinoko Teikoku), *Swoon* (a 2009 album by Silversun Pickups and a 2013 song by Whirr) and the related *Swooner* (a 2002 Astrobrite song), *Swirl* (a 1993 album by Here and a 2015 song by Westkust) and *Candy Swirl* (a 1994 Astrobrite EP), and *Sway* (a 2014 album by Whirr and a different 2014 album by Tape Deck Mountain). In fact, some like *Swerve* span both band name and

TABLE 1
SHOEGAZE BAND NAMES

Band Name	Years Active	Origin
Whorl	1987–1991	Washington, DC, USA
Swerverdriver	1989–1998	Oxford, England
Swoon	1989–1992	Kumla, Sweden
Curve	1990–1994, 1996–2005	London, England
Swallow	1990–1994	London, England
Swirl	1990–2002	Sydney, Australia
Swirlies	1990–present	Boston, MA, USA
Swoon 23	1994–1997	Portland, Oregon, USA
the Swells	1997–2006	Austin, TX, USA
Sway	1999–2011	Ventura, CA, USA
Swish	2006–present	Tokyo, Japan
Swirling Light	2009–2014	Bangkok, Thailand
Whirr (née <i>Whirl</i>)	2010–present	San Francisco, CA, USA
The Swerve	2011–2013	Oakland, CA, USA
S W O O N	2014–present	Chattanooga, TN, USA

album title, including at least three currently active bands with at least one self-titled EP among them (Plent 2016).

In light of this onomastic commonality, Cohen (2015) declares that “this style of music loves itself some functional names.” This description — of lexical functionality — could in fact be applicable to bands like the droning shoegaze outfit Hum and, more subjectively, the band Lush, both noted in his review. But it is unclear at first sight what could be “functional” about a name like *Swoon* or *Swerve*. In fact, Cohen’s wry remark about the phenomenon forces us to ask two logically related questions: first, how may we actually best describe this pattern at the linguistic level, and second, why should this particular linguistic pattern apply specifically to any particular musical genre? Perhaps more bluntly, why is there any pattern at all, and following that, why shoegaze? It is the goal of this article to answer both questions by appealing to the notion of *phonesthemes* — phones or phone clusters which map to an abstract semantic category, originally discussed by Firth ([1930] 1964). I argue that shoegaze naming conventions are partially explained by the fact that the genre’s general aesthetic happens to overlap with a particular semantic space represented phonesthematically in English. Artists employ this overlap as a means of musical representation and self-identification. Put simply, shoegaze artists are using phonesthemes as a sort of branding strategy intended to reflect, at the linguistic level, their music. I will first provide a brief overview of the shoegaze genre and its defining musical characteristics. These characteristics, I argue, evoke particular semantic spaces. I then discuss the notion of phonesthemes as they have been presented in the literature, emphasizing the particular phonesthemes popular within the shoegazing genre, which are in turn considered in relation to the genre’s sonic and aesthetic qualities. The conclusion is that there exists an overlap between the semantic import of the target phonesthemes and the genre’s overall musical style; as with other examples in the literature on branding at large, shoegaze artists employ phonesthemes as a branding strategy, and do not simply rely on lexically descriptive terms as Cohen (2015) suggests. The appeal to phonesthemes also captures instances of lexically irrelevant but phonetically similar names like *Swoon*.

2. Shoegaze music

First, I discuss the shoegaze genre — its historical development, its current popularity, and its general aesthetic — in order to set the stage for why we should want to pursue a branding-based account of the observed pattern.

2.1. *A brief history of shoegaze*

The term shoegaze came into use during the late 1980s and early 1990s to describe a particular group of independent musicians and bands in the UK. The press originally dubbed this community “The Scene that Celebrates Itself” as a form of disparagement, reflecting the intermingling fluidity of the groups’ memberships and their robust self-promotion (Larkin 1995). The bands’ performances were noted for being loud, introspective, and relatively tame in terms of stage theatrics. The term “shoegazer” (later shortened to “shoegaze”) originates from an observation regarding a performance of the band Moose, whose lead vocalist at the time taped lyrics to the floor of the stage, and eventually took root as the descriptor of the bands within the scene (Larkin 1995). Bands influenced by the scene, or signed to related record labels such as Creation Records, began to play towards a genre proper. The critically acclaimed *Loveless* (1991) by My Bloody Valentine is widely considered the most influential and representative album within the genre (Fisher 2006; Klosterman 2004; Larkin 1995; McGonigal 2007).

A full discussion of the history of the development of this genre is beyond the scope of this article, but a rough sketch of its sonic and aesthetic qualities is quite relevant. Defining and identifying shoegaze music, as with any contemporary genre, can be rather difficult. This is primarily due to the decentralized nature of how members of the community come to use the term in describing personal experience, expectation, and historical context. Nonetheless, the label has thoroughly entered into the lexicon of music genres, and is currently undergoing a bit of a resurgence (Long 2014; McKinstry 2015). BandCamp.com (2016), a social network and virtual storefront for musicians, lists shoegaze as the 54th most frequently used self-selected genre tag among artists, beating *funk*, *folk rock*, *blues*, and *emo*. It also has spawned its own onomastically intriguing subgenres in which *-gaze* appears as a productive root, resulting in the term *metalgaze*, which blends metal and shoegaze (Stannard 2008), and the more opaque *blackgaze*, used to describe shoegaze blended with elements from black metal (Howells 2015).

2.2. *The shoegaze aesthetic*

While the original shoegaze scene involved several bands which would later go on to be considered not cannon shoegaze music, such as Stereolab,¹ a few common sonic characteristics quickly came to identify the general aesthetic. The most obvious and pervasive of these aspects is the presence of washing layers of electric guitar, generally overdriven to the point of a richly textured fuzz, and then paired with reverb, delay, chorus, and/or tremolo effects (Long 2014). Of particular interest is the extensive use of note bending achieved by manipulating a whammy-bar while strumming in a fashion termed “glide guitar,” a technique developed by the heavily influential My Bloody Valentine (Fisher 2006; McGonigal 2007). Since shoegaze artists often play with a large number of guitar

effects pedals, live performances require a constant downward gaze to properly manipulate their sound, leading to a modern folk etymology for the name shoegaze artists due to the need to constantly trigger and manipulate effects pedals, and their appearing to constantly gaze down at their shoes. Sangild (2002, 15) describes the overall approach to the guitar playing rather poetically: “one encounters a diffuse blurred harmonics. The guitar chords are gliding, swimming in a muddy sea of distortion. The guitarists’ strokes are cut off in the mixing process, so that every sound seems to be growing out of nowhere, with no distinct edges.”

Loops, repetition, and offset bending notes and chords caused by delay and other effects are invariably grounded in the notion of cyclicity and movement. In *To Here Knows When* by My Bloody Valentine, for example, Fisher (2006; 43) notes how guitarist Kevin Shields creates “an impressive Doppler-like sound effect with his guitar” layered over the top of “a peculiar hum, almost a low gurgling noise [...] The effect is evocative of the droning noise the wind makes when driving down the highway with the windows down.” Furthermore, vocals are subdued and drowned in reverb, de-emphasizing lyrics and promoting a washed-out tangle of voices somewhere within the music. In interviewing music fans on the role of lyrics in British music, Fu (2015, 35) notes one interviewee’s take on the general shoegaze aesthetic: “The prime ambiance of shoegaze is quite hazy and noisy; lyrics of shoegaze songs have to join this feeling. Sometimes they [lyrics] are so blur[red] and hard to grasp but it might be necessary.” The use of prolonged drones, waves of layered guitar, timed delay, and reverb effects coalesce around the notion of interwoven, blurred movement in the listener’s or performer’s mental space.

This blurring is reflected in other ways within the genre as well, and not just musically. The cover of My Bloody Valentine’s iconic *Loveless*, for instance, consists of layered, overexposed images of electric guitars awash in pink-hued filters. The cover of Ride’s *Nowhere* sports an uncrested dull-gray wave swelling under a muted gray sky. My Bloody Valentine’s *Isn’t Anything*, Medicine’s *Shot Forth Self Living*, and Lovesliescrushing’s *Blowneyelashwish* are all out of focus and color-inverted. This effect has been adopted extensively in Astrobrite’s album covers as well, featuring colorful, impressionistically manipulated digital imagery. This aesthetic is present even in video, such as the music video for My Bloody Valentine’s *Soon*, which Fisher (2006, 49) notes: “is as vague as the sound of the album — attempting to represent visually what the band was aiming for sonically.” What, exactly, is the band aiming for sonically? According to Fisher (2006, 31), the overall production on the album makes it feel “as if the listener is bobbing in a body of water permeated with the hum of airplanes flying in the sky above.” The bobbing, floating movement punctuated with rotating propeller-like drones and swirling clouds of bending, delayed chords pioneered in *Loveless* has become the genre’s internal ideal. In characterizing the notion of music genre at large, Lena (2012, 15) writes: “genres are defined not only by features of the organizational environment and institutional practices that arise within it, but by attributes of the artists and the music they play.” With respect to *Loveless*, Klosterman (2004) notes that “everyone who is wont to mention ‘swirling guitars’ during casual conversation always references this specific album;” the swirling *is* the shoegazing. The music, the art, and the terminology manifest in reviews all evoke this notion of swirling movement. It is my claim that certain band names — as well as album and song titles — also evoke the genre’s sonic qualities as a form of associative branding, in which phonesthemes play an integral part.

3. Language and branding

In this section I discuss the effect that linguistic factors have on branding, with an emphasis on the attested role of phonesthemes. I will first discuss phonesthemes in general and identify the ones I think are particularly relevant in capturing the empirical observations on shoegaze onomastics outlined in the first section. I then provide evidence in support of the notion that phonesthemes are an effective tool for use in branding, with the assumption being that band-name selection functions as an identity-as-branding strategy in general.

3.1. *Phonesthemes in general*

A *phonestheme* — a term first coined by Firth ([1930] 1964) but used to describe a previously well-noted phenomenon — is a phone or set of phones which map to some abstract semantic category. These are a particular manifestation of sound symbolism — a non-arbitrary mapping of sound to meaning, which is in contrast with the more typical and common arbitrary mapping of sound and meaning in language. The idea is that most words, like *dog*, are arbitrary mappings, in that nothing about the phonetic form /dɒg/ objectively signifies the fluffy domesticated animal. However, non-arbitrary sound/meaning pairs do exist to varying degrees. Onomatopoeia, for instance, is taken to be generally symbolic.

While phonesthemes are a crosslinguistic phenomenon, particular phone-meaning mappings are not universal across languages (Bergen 2004) and different languages have different phonesthemes. Phonesthemes are distinct from standard morphemes in that they are generally unproductive and do not contrast with other phonesthemes of separate semantic categories. A commonly cited example in English is the onset cluster /gl/ relating to light, found in the following words: *glow*, *gleam*, *glisten*, *glint*, *glitter*, *glimmer*, and *glare*. Note the lack of compositional meaning between *glow* and *low*, or *glisten* and *listen*, indicating more or less the phonestheme's lack of morphological productivity. This is not to say, however, that phonesthemes are completely unproductive, as evidenced by some nonce-word experiments (Abelin 1999; Magnus 2000).

Here I focus on four separate phonesthemes: *sw-* “move rhythmically,” as in *sway*; *-irl/-url* “twist; intertwine,” as in *whirl*; *tw-* “turn; distort,” as in *twist*; and *wr-* “irregular motion; twist,” as in *wring* (Hutchins 1998). The existence of phonesthemes, and these four in particular, has been confirmed experimentally as well. Analyzing a corpus of texts from Project Gutenberg, Otis and Sagi (2008) use a form of latent semantic analysis (LSA; Landauer et al. 1998) to determine the statistical significance of proposed phonesthemes. LSA determines the semantic similarity between target words based on textual context, the idea being that semantically similar words like *huge* and *giant* will show up in similar contexts, more so than unrelated words. Otis and Sagi use LSA to analyze the correlation of words containing certain orthographic clusters in terms of semantic vector, and define a numerical metric for determining whether a conjectured phonestheme is statistically significant relative to a baseline randomness. This numeric value is effectively a number of attestations in 100 controlled comparisons, leading to the conclusion that 15 attestations out of 100 indicates a statistically valid phonestheme. Clusters with a score lower than 13 are less than marginally significant and thus may not

in fact be true phonesthemes. Using this method, they assigned the following strength scores to the relevant phonesthemes: *sw-*: 18; *-irl/-url*: 68; *tw-*: 23; and *wr-*: 22. These scores are all above 15, confirming Hutchins' (1998) original claim that these clusters do, in fact, correspond to a semantic space and are thus best categorized as phonesthemes. By contrast, the clusters *sl-*, *sp-*, and *gr-* scored 12, 8, and 5, respectively, indicating a lack of statistical significance in relating form to meaning. Abramova et al. (2013) confirm the statistical significance of these phonesthematic clusters by analyzing lemmas from the British National Corpus (BCN; Burnard 2000) using semantic vectoring; Abramova and Fernández (2016) again reach a similar conclusion in analyzing a corpus derived from Wikipedia, controlling for shared morphemic properties. Aside from *tw-*, each of these phonesthemes is represented in the shoegaze names noted in the previous section with multiple instances, with a heavy preference for *sw-*.² Other band names fit partially, like *Curve*, whose lexical meaning still corresponds to the semantic space of *-irl/-url*, and *Whorl*, representative of *-irl/-url* in spite of orthographic convention. Similarly, a few words, such as *swirl*, are representative instances of more than a single phonestheme. The relevance of these phonesthemes to the survey at hand is that each of their semantic spaces is evocative of the sonic characteristics of shoegaze music. As previously discussed, the shoegaze genre is notable for its droning, warbling, swelling, blending approach to guitar and vocal sound — its characteristic sound is that of undulation, of sounds bleeding into one another and cascading along the equalization curve via effect pedal and in-studio manipulation (as in the case of *To Here Knows When* by My Bloody Valentine). My central claim is that shoegaze artists are implementing phonesthemes as a branding strategy. As Harbeck (2016, 18) notes: “phonesthemes seem available for any context where a particular vividness — illustration, demonstration, involvement, expression of emotional attitude — is desired;” these names are selected because of their evocative, descriptive nature. This is not, however, a completely novel proposition — using phonesthemes within branding is well attested outside of music, in that the evocative nature of phonesthemes lends subtle iconicity to a given product name.

3.2. Phonesthemes in branding

Zhang et al. (2003) provide an extensive overview of the role that linguistic structure plays in forming an effective brand identity, noting the effects of syntactic structure, lexical semantics, and phonetic/orthographic information on conveying associative meaning to consumers — a product name triggers information indirectly to a potential consumer, affecting the decision process. All aspects of a name or phrase cause the potential consumer to implicitly compare the target product to other known entities and qualities, and there exists a broad literature on the preponderance of sound symbolism in branding. For instance, Abelin (1999) provides experimental evidence that phonesthemes play a role in producing and interpreting neologisms, while a study by Shrum et al. (2012) suggests that vowel-backness is evocative of product size cross-linguistically. Furthermore, an experimental study by Yorkston and Menon (2004, 50) indicates that consumers of a given product recognize symbolic phonetic meaning — phonesthematicity — as a “source of product information,” concluding that “attending to phonetic meanings and leveraging the attribute associations when creating a brand image is sound advice.” Since phonesthemes have demonstrative attributive associations, a band attempting

to communicate that their music would be a fitting addition to a given shoegaze fan's record collection would benefit from employing a brand name — or in this case, a *band* name — that triggers a shoegazing association. Aside from evoking semantic attributes, phonesthemes also positively correlate with semantic priming effects. Experimental work by Bergen (2004) shows that phonesthemes display a semantic priming effect comparable to compositional morphemes. That is, nonce words containing phonesthemes are able to trigger faster response times in recognizing semantically related concepts than non-phonesthematic nonce words. This suggests a real psychological connection between phonesthemes and abstract semantic categories regardless of a word's particular lexical meaning, and a phonestheme can mentally prepare someone to accurately categorize some type of input that follows. Thus a listener presented with a nonce-word band name followed by a novel shoegaze song would, by this logic, more accurately identify the song appropriately if the band were named something like *Swither* as opposed to *Dwither*.

3.3. *Band branding*

The idea of a band name as a brand is not new. Androutsopoulos (2000) studied naming conventions across four genres of music in the context of associative branding, concluding that band names, like brand names, are carefully planned to appeal to a target group. In this view, a band name indicates an artist's musical style and cultural affiliation. These associations allow a potential listener to identify an artist as belonging to a certain genre without even having to listen to the music, just as a brand name allows a potential customer to identify a product as having certain qualities prior to purchase. As Androutsopoulos (2000) notes: "Record reviewers sometimes comment that a band plays the music style that is suggested by its name, or that the name mistakenly led them to expect a certain style." In such cases the reviewer has been primed to expect one genre over another, and a misused phonestheme could affect their review if their expectations are too drastically challenged. Substitute the music for a physical product or service, and you can see how the consequences of a poor choice of brand name can affect a review just as a poor choice of band name can affect a review.

More recently, Luu (2016, 1) notes that naming a band is one of many onomastic processes which make use of niche semantic spaces to identify a cultural context; in this case, a band name that indexes the appropriate semantic space will aid the consumer in identifying the genre properly. That is, our cultural awareness of onomastic patterning conditions further onomastic patterning and, importantly, we become aware of this conditioning and integrate it back into how we develop semantic associations. Citing a similarity to automobile branding noted by Aronoff (1981), Luu (2016, 1) extends the notion of associative branding to music, and declares that it is "the existence of the other, similarly patterned names in the same semantic field that gives us a truer sense of whether your next band name is a good one." Without the phonestheme-based analysis, we cannot apply this insight to shoegaze, as it is the phonestheme itself that links sound cluster to semantic field, which in turn links band name to genre.

As noted by Lehrer (1992), a common criterion for rock and metal band names is that they are evocative of outrageousness or offensiveness. A common touchstone in this community is death, but this extends also to violence, drugs, religion, and dangerous animals. As in the artists' appearance, ranging from long hair in the 1980s metal community to

corpse face paint in modern-day black metal, band names themselves are attempts at associative branding. In the case of shoegaze, the target socio-semantic associations are not taboo subjects and outrageousness but rather more genre-internal. Androutsopoulos (2000) proposes that cultural naming conventions have emerged in popular music, but their domains are limited to the more specific music genres as opposed to the larger domain of “rock music.” Therefore, as a relatively minor subgenre of rock music as a whole, shoegazers are not tasked with differentiating themselves from larger genres like pop and jazz as much as they are differentiating themselves from other subgenres of rock. Unlike the heavy metal giants Slayer or the punk Sex Pistols, no shoegaze band is a household name.

Instead, shoegazers are trying to be self-selecting — they know that being an identifiable member of the shoegazing community is integral to whatever moderate success such a scene can afford. A shoegaze band named *Swoosher* would be more recognizably iconic than one named *Sloucher*, and easier recognition by the intended audience, as is the case with developing any other brand identity, is an inherently good thing for a musical group trying to reach a wider audience. This will be no different in other subgenres which do not implement phonesthemes onomastically, but rather implement lexical patterns as in heavy metal; a metal band named *Murderer* would be more recognizably iconic than one named *Juggler*, for example. It just so happens that there are no death-oriented phonesthemes in English which metal bands can depend on to achieve onomastic association. In this regard, shoegaze stands out as pretty unique.

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

In this article I have proposed an explanation for an interesting similarity across band names within the shoegaze genre that is not fully explainable via descriptive lexical meaning alone. Various aspects of the genre, including music as well as album art and video direction, pick out a particular semantic space — it is a genre of fuzzy oscillation, motion-blurred imagery, and droning repetition — and this semantic space corresponds to a particular set of English phonesthemes. I propose that these observations regarding naming conventions in the genre are the result of this overlap, in that these artists are applying their implicit linguistic knowledge to identify and produce names evocative of their sound in a neologistic act of self-branding. The reality of phonesthemes has been shown in experimental settings with special emphasis on neologism and brand identity outside of music and, in discussing the relevant phonesthemes, I argue that members within the shoegaze genre, perhaps unconsciously, have applied their innate linguistic knowledge in a similar fashion.

It is important to note here that the names discussed are in no way exhaustive, nor would I predict finding their numbers satisfying for a rigorous statistician. These artists represent a minority of shoegaze acts in pure numbers (although not notoriety), and a given artist may produce hundreds of songs across potentially tens of albums — should we consider a single instance of a phonesthematic song title statistically relevant in a band’s repertoire? This is perhaps a question better answered in a separate study. In terms of the sheer number of artists and recordings today, it may well be impossible to determine just how robust this pattern is. On the other hand, the fact that members of the community — like music reviewer Ian Cohen — feel inclined to remark on a perceived

pattern illustrates at least some level of statistical relevance. This is evidence enough that there exists some phenomenon worth studying, in my opinion.

Importantly, my analysis does not necessarily rule out non-phonesthematic (i.e. lexical) components of the grammar in this or some other genre's onomastics. For instance, we could enumerate a set of words which relate thematically to the notion of rotational movement and check to see if they pop up with any frequency. Oddly enough, names similar to or containing *spin(ning)*, *rotate/rotation/rotating*, *circle/circular*, and *spiral* are absent from the genre's namespace as far as I am aware. This indicates a potential preference for phonesthematicity over lexical reference. Furthermore, the fact that native speakers are sensitive enough to phonesthemes to both interpret them accurately and implement them in neologizing also goes on to explain an interesting quirk within the shoegaze data. If the goal of picking a band name or song title is to capture the semantic notion of rotational movement, lexically associative names would be quite transparently relevant. But what the definition-based approach fails to predict is the common implementation of words like *swoon*, which do not overtly reflect the phonestheme's semantic notion of movement in their true lexical meaning. That is, nothing about the definition of *swooning* necessarily entails rhythmic or curving movement, unlike *swirling*. Nonetheless, it contains the grapheme/phone pair *sw-* which corresponds to rhythmic movement phonesthematically. What seems to be happening is that the implicit knowledge of the *sw-* phonestheme is extended to similar words.

On the other hand, the phonesthematic approach pursued here also over generates to some degree, as *tw-* is absent in the data; names relating to *twist(ing)* or *twirl(ing)* are not really employed onomastically in shoegaze. Why this should be the case is an interesting question, especially in light of Otis and Sagi's (2008) statistical corpus study of phonesthematic significance. Of the four phonesthemes discussed here, *sw-* had the lowest strength score, while of the three word-initial clusters, *tw-* had the highest score. In a related corpus-based study of sound cluster iconicity, Abramova and Fernández (2016) conclude that *sw-* and *tw-* are conventionally iconic, but rule out the iconicity of *wr-* based on a few predetermined thresholds for semantic similarity across tokens. These results could explain why *wr-* is underrepresented in shoegaze names, in that perhaps it simply does not statistically pattern as a meaningful sound/meaning pairing in general and thus is suboptimal for use in branding. On the other hand, if we are to appeal to raw statistical significance as an explanatory factor behind which clusters get implemented, then *tw-* should be much more frequently used in shoegaze branding than the data suggest. It is entirely possible that independent factors are at play here which give rise to a preference for *sw-*, such as a sensitivity to the rhythmic aspect of movement captured by *sw-* being more relevant to the shoegaze aesthetic than simply the twisting aspect of movement identified by *tw-*. This is a question best left to further study.

The work presented here so far has been an attempt at formalizing and generalizing over some particular observations; that is, it makes generalizable predictions about naming conventions in a particular sense. Band names, especially in rock music, are often evocative of particular semantic spaces as an act of self-identity; phonesthemes are simply a rather useful linguistic phenomenon one can employ. For the sake of argument, one could imagine that an overlap between genre and phonesthematic semantic space, while recognizable and available, might not be grounds enough to motivate a naming paradigm, and that some other factor is at play. This alternative hypothesis, however,

is overshadowed by the amount of empirical and experimental evidence illustrating the role of phonesthemes throughout branding in general. Furthermore, no other genre that I am familiar with, to my knowledge, features a comparable use of phonesthemes as found in shoegaze. That is, I am as yet unaware of any other musical genre which features several independent artists who have adopted the *gl-* or *sn-* phonesthemes in an onomastic capacity, although I would be excited to find such a genre.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone at the Cornell Department of Linguistics for their help and support. Specifically, this article would not have been possible without the critical eye and enthusiasm of Cara DiGirolamo. Thanks also to John Bowers, Wayles Brown, Miloje Despic, Carol-Rose Little, Dave Lutz, Nick and Liz Merillat, Todd Snider, Brent Woo, my wonderful wife Jessica, and all of my Introduction to Linguistics students who had to listen to me ramble on about this during class.

Notes

- ¹ Incidentally, Stereolab, on two separate occasions, has been labeled with terms which would later denote sonically unrelated genres. The first, as noted, is shoegaze. The second comes from Lewis's (1996) description of their music as "post-rock," a term now used exclusively to describe mostly instrumental, classically-inspired rock music (Staff 2012).
- ² The phonestheme *tw-* is represented, technically, in the 1992 song *Twisterella* by Ride, although, compared to the other listed phonesthemes, this is more or less insignificant.

Bibliography

- Abelin, Å. 1999. Studies in sound symbolism. Ph. D. thesis, Department of Linguistics, Göteborg University.
- Abramova, E., and R. Fernández. 2016. Questioning arbitrariness in language: A data-driven study of conventional iconicity. In Proceedings of the 2016 Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics: Human Language Technologies, San Diego.
- Abramova, E., R. Fernández, and F. Sangati. 2013. Automatic labeling of phonesthemic senses. In Proceedings of the 35th Annual Cognitive Science Meeting 2013, Berlin.
- Androutsopoulos, J.K. 2000. What names reveal about the music style: A study of naming patterns in popular music. In Pragmatics in 2000: Selected Papers from the 7th International Pragmatics Conference, Budapest, Volume 2. pp. 16–29.
- Aronoff, M. 1981. Automobile semantics. *Linguistic Inquiry* 12, no. 3: 329–347.
- BandCamp.com 2016. All tags – Bandcamp. <https://www.bandcamp.com/tags> (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Bergen, B. 2004. The psychological reality of phonaesthemes. *Language*, 80(2): 290–311.
- Burnard, L. 2007. Reference Guide for the British National Corpus. Oxford University Computing Services.
- Cohen, I. 2015. Tracks. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/17359-westkust-swirl/> (accessed October 8, 2016).
- Firth, J.R. (1930) 1964. *The tongues of men, and speech*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fisher, D.R. 2006. My bloody valentine's loveless. Master's thesis, USA, Florida State University
- Fu, K.-C. 2015. Would you like to come and meet me maybe?" The significance of words in britpop music in a transcultural context. Master's thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London.
- Harbeck, J.C. 2016. Relative use of phonaesthemes in the constitution and development of genres. Ph. D. thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Graduate Program in Linguistics, York University, Toronto.
- Howells, T. 2015. Blackgaze: Meet the bands taking black metal out of the shadows. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/05/blackgaze-bands-fusing-metal-and-shoegaze> (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Hutchins, S.S. 1998. The psychological reality, variability, and compositionality of English phonesthemes. Ph. D. thesis, Emory University.

- Klosterman, C. 2004. Give me centrism or give me death! <http://www.spin.com/2004/12/give-me-centrism-or-give-me-death/> (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Landauer, T.K., P.W. Foltz, and D. Laham. 1998. An introduction to latent semantic analysis. *Discourse Processes* 25, no. 2-3: 259–284.
- Larkin, C. 1995. *The guinness who's who of indie and new wave music*. Middlesex: Guinness.
- Lehrer, A. 1992. Frames, Fields, and Contrasts: New Essays in Semantic and Lexical Organization. *Erlbaum*. 123–142.
- Lena, J.C. 2012. *Banding together: How communities create genres in popular music*. Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rrzb>
- Long, P. 2014. The sound of in-between: Exploring liminality in popular music composition. B.A. Thesis, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney.
- Luu, C. 2016. *The Linguistics of my next band name*. <http://dailyjstor.org/the-linguistics-of-my-next-band-name/> (accessed October 26, 2016).
- Magnus, M. 2000. What's in a word? Evidence for phonosemantics. Ph. D. thesis, Trondheim, Norway, University of Trondheim.
- McGonigal, M. 2007. *My bloody valentine's loveless*. USA: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- McKinstry, L. 2015. Everything you need to know about the impending shoegaze revival. http://www.altpress.com/features/entry/everything_you_need_to_know_about_the_impending_shoegaze_revival (accessed January 30, 2015).
- Otis, K., and E. Sagi 2008. Phonaesthemes: A corpus-based analysis. In Proceedings of the 30th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society, Washington, D.C. pp. 65–70.
- Plent, J. 2016. Listen: Swerve 'Swerve EP'. <https://bittersweetsymphonies.co.uk/2016/03/03/listen-swerve-self-titled-ep/> (accessed October 26, 2016).
- Sangild, T. 2002. *The aesthetics of noise*. Denmark: Datanom Copenhagen.
- Shrum, L., T.M. Lowrey, D. Luna, D. Lerman, and M. Liu. 2012. Sound symbolism effects across languages: Implications for global brand names. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 29, no. 3: 275–279.
- Staff, C. 2012. Dreamlab: The semantics of post-rock. <http://consequenceofsound.net/aux-out/dreamlab-the-semantics-of-post-rock/> (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Stannard, J. 2008. Metal gaze – From my bloody valentine to Nadja via SunnO))). <http://thequietus.com/articles/00376-in-extremis-metal-gaze> (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Yorkston, E., and G. Menon. 2004. A sound idea: Phonetic effects of brand names on consumer judgments. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 1: 43–51.
- Zhang, S., B H. Schmitt, and H. Haley. 2003. Language and culture: Linguistic effects on consumer behavior in international marketing research. *Handbook of research in international marketing*. 228–243.

Notes on contributor

Zac Smith is a PhD candidate in the Department of Linguistics at Cornell University. His primary research interests are rooted in syntax, semantics, and their interface. Specifically, he works on the syntax and semantics of transitivity and adverbial modification as they apply to middle voice and tough constructions. Other research interests include the semantics and pragmatics of negation and anaphora, formal grammars, and the study of music genres.

Correspondence to: Zac Smith, Cornell University, Department of Linguistics, 203 Morrill Hall, 159 Central Avenue, Ithaca, NY 14850-4701, USA. Email: zcs5@cornell.edu