

How to say 'OUCH' in French (and ten other sounds)

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Onomatopoeia is the written version of a sound - think 'ssh', 'ouch' or 'bang'. And like everything else, they're a little bit different in French, writes French language expert Camille Chevalier-Karfis.

Smack: The sound of a kiss

The French don't make a kissing noise or say "mwa" - they say "smack" (or even smack smack) for the sound of a soft kiss in French.

It's even the common name for a peck on the lips. "Il m'a fait un smack" – he gave me a peck on the lips, a soft kiss. A far cry from the English definition of 'smack' (as in, to slap).

Paf: The sound of hitting something (or someone)

In French, a slap (une gifle, une baffe) is accompanied by a big "paf!" (we say "et paf, une baffe!+").

Other French sounds for hitting would be "vlan", "pif" (especially when hitting someone on the nose), "pof", "tchoc", "tchac", "bang"...

Guili-guili: The sound for tickling

OK, OK, this isn't quite an onomatopoeia, but it's still a good one. While in English you might say tickly tickly or something equally ridiculous, in French it's the adorable guili-guili. Pronounce this one with a hard G, the u is silent. So Gili-gili.

Quin-ouin and Areuh-areuh: The sounds to imitate a baby

Similar to how a crying baby makes a wah-wah noise in English, they say "ouin-ouin" in French, featuring the very nasal sound "in".

And instead of something like "coochy-coo" when talking to a cute little tyke, French people say "areuh-areuh".

Pan-pan! The sound of gunfire

It doesn't sound quite as menacing as the English bang bang... but "pan-pan" is in any action comic you'll pick up in France.

Chut: The sound for 'shhhh'

Next time you're at a French cinema and you're being disturbed by a loud popcorn eater, turn and say "chut" to them. It's a pretty loud word for a hushing sound, if you consider the T is pronounced, but we can guarantee it's effective.

Plouf: The sound of falling into water

You can forget making a splash; when it comes to the French onomatopoeia, it's a "plouf" all the way. And the sound for falling on the ground is "patatra" (rather than whack, or kaboom).

Aïe: The sound for pain

Anyone who has ever read a French Asterix comic will have seen this. It's

pronounced just like “eye” and is often repeated three times: “aïe-aïe-aïe”! In English, we might say ow or ouch, which you'll agree are a lot less expressive.

Miam: The French version of Yum

French people often show their appreciation for food by humming a “mmmm” sound, but they're also very likely to say miam. Worth remembering next time you're dining with your French mother-in-law.

Beurk: The French sound for Yuck

If you're in France and you're eating something like an Andouillette, you might say "beurk" if you felt like being particularly rude. We recommend you don't put this one into practice too much, perhaps you should stick with "miam" (above).

Ron-ron: The French sound for sleeping

And lastly, there's no zzzz for the French, who prefer a gentle "ron-ron" instead to signify sleeping. If you really roll your R while saying it, you can easily see why they say it.

This story was put together by French language expert Camille Chevalier-Karfis, the founder of the language site [French Today](#).