

Iconicity of modified reduplication

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This article presents a cross-linguistic study on the iconicity of modified reduplication (MRD). Although the iconic potential of reduplication has been addressed by researchers (e.g. Sapir 1921: 79-82, Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 128, Fischer 2011), not enough attention, with some notable exceptions such as Cabrera (2017), has been paid to the distinct character of MRD in opposition to full reduplication. MRD here refers to the juxtaposition of two linguistic forms that are phonologically similar but not identical, differing in either vowel quality or initial consonant. Modification of vowel quality is also known as ablaut reduplication (e.g. English *chit-chat*, Lhasa Tibetan *zam zom* ‘careless work’, Tshangla *napanopo* ‘silly’) and modification of initial consonant is also known as rhyming reduplication (e.g. English *hotchpotch*, Finnish *hyrskyn myrskyn* ‘in a state of disarray’, Turkish *bulutulut* ‘cloud and the like’).

Drawing data from a wide array of languages and language families (e.g. Finnic, Germanic, Indic, Slavic, Tangkic, Tibetic and Turkic), our paper argues that MRD has cross-linguistically potential to express four types of iconicity in each of which the iconicity arises from the structural comparison (or perceiving the similarity and dissimilarity) of two juxtaposed similar but not identical phonological forms:

1) Duality/plurality of similar but not identical sounds, e.g. Finnish *pim pom* ‘ding dong, sound of door-bell’, Denjongke *t’ant’ij* ‘cling clang’, Bengali *ṭapur ṭapur* ‘rain pattering’

2) Duality/plurality of similar but not identical items, e.g. Denjongke *dakdok* ‘occurring as an assortment of small items of various sizes’, Lhasa Tibetan *phap phop* ‘cloths etc.’, Nepali *khānā sānā* ‘food and such things’, Turkish *kapi mapi* ‘door[s] and the like’

3) Duality/plurality of similar but not identical locations (e.g. Dzongkha *pchamchim* ‘scattered, here.there’, Lhasa Tibetan *thar thor* ‘scattered’), also suggesting alternating motion between locations (e.g. Scots *hitherum ditherum* ‘a drying wind [of eddying nature]’, Tibetan *lang ling* ‘drifting, swinging’, Spanish/English *tiki taka* ‘style of football characterized by short passing and movement’) and reciprocity between two locations/persons (Bengali *mārā* ‘hit’ > *mārāmāri* ‘violence, fighting’, English *hobnob* ‘to drink to each other [arch.]’, Kayardild *junkuyunku* ‘towards each other’)

4) Nonnormativity arising from the comparison of two similar but non-identical forms: a) falling short of the norm, e.g. English *flim flam* ‘deceptive nonsense’, Tshangla *thapathopo* ‘slow-witted’, Lhasa Tibetan *’dzag ge ’dzog ge* ‘pell-mell’, Estonian *kiraldi-viraldi* ‘badly, poorly’, Turkish *okudu mokudu* ‘read (PST) improperly, skimmed’; b) exceeding the norm, e.g. English *super-duper*, *teeny-weeny*

While the types of iconicity listed above have been hinted at by other researchers (e.g. Thun 1963, Fischer 2011, Armoskaite & Kutlu 2015, Cabrera 2017), this paper presents the first unified crosslinguistic study of the iconicity of MRD which highlights the similarity of ablaut reduplication and rhyming reduplication, and establishes an iconically-based common ground between such diversely labelled phenomena as “expressives” (Diffloth 1979), “ideophones” (Mikone 2001), “echo formations” (Abbi 2018) and “m-reduplication” (Armoskaite & Kutlu 2015).

The study also shows that similar but not identical forms occur in many languages on the paradigmatic level in personal and demonstrative pronouns, giving further evidence that MRD

has iconic potential to represent two or more locations, e.g. Swedish *här* ‘here’ vs. *där* ‘there’, Finnish *minä* ‘1SG’ vs. *sinä* ‘2SG’, Finnish (dialectal) *myö* ‘1PL’ vs. *työ* ‘2PL’ vs. *hyö* ‘3PL’.

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