Morphological Doubling Theory 1: evidence for morphological doubling in reduplication

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This is one of two talks (the other presented by Cheryl Zoll) which presents arguments for analyzing reduplication as involving morphological, rather than phonological doubling. While previous theories (e.g. Marantz 1982, Steriade 1988, McCarthy & Prince 1995) have generally analyzed reduplication as involving the phonological copying of some portion (perhaps all) of a stem or word in order to flesh out a prosodic reduplicative template, the approach taken here, which shares insights with work by Downing (e.g. Downing 1999) as well as with the morphological blending approach of Nick Sherrard, argues that reduplication is a type of morphological construction that calls for two (or more) semantically identical morphological constituents, as shown below.

(1)  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mother} & \quad (\text{meaning} = \text{some function of the meaning of the daughters}; \ \text{phonology} = \text{some function of the phonology of the daughters}) \\
\text{Daughter } \#1 & \quad (\text{meaning} = \text{that of Daughter } \#2; \ \text{may be subject to special phonology}) \\
\text{Daughter } \#2 & \quad (\text{meaning} = \text{that of Daughter } \#1; \ \text{may be subject to special phonology})
\end{align*}
\]

While the occurrence of two semantically identical subconstituents is perhaps most transparently construable for total reduplication (see e.g the Repeat Stem constraint of Yip 1998), we marshal abundant evidence for this view from affix reduplication as well as partial reduplication (in which one of the semantically identical subconstituents is phonologically truncated). This particular talk focuses on morphological arguments; the talk presented by Zoll focuses on those (often understudied) phonological phenomena that support the morphological doubling theory.

Three main arguments, many involving data new to the theoretical literature on reduplication, will be presented for analyzing reduplicated words as containing two or more semantically identical morphological subconstituents.

- Idiomaticity in reduplication, including affix reduplication and triplication
- Semantically null reduplication, including phonologically and morphotactically driven reduplication
- Morphotactic differences between two semantically identical stems, including empty morphs present in one but not other, and different suppletive allomorphs of same morpheme in the two copies

When the meaning of a construction is not predictable from the meanings of the daughters, it must be stipulated as a property of the construction as a whole (or, in HPSG or Construction Grammar terms, in the featural description of the mother node), as argued more generally by e.g. Goldberg 1995, Sag 1997, Sag & Wasow 1999, Fillmore et al. 1988, and Koenig 1999, among others. Thus idiomaticity (or exocentricity) in reduplication supports the existence of a morphological construction like that in (1).
Affix reduplication and triplication offer strong evidence of this kind of idiomaticity. We survey several cases in which affix doubling – meaning doubling that clearly targets specific affixes, rather than prosodically delimited portions of a stem – correlates with a meaning that is completely unrelated to the meaning of the affix in question. In Hungarian, doubling of preverbs, many of which have their own meanings, confers a frequentative meaning on the whole preverb-verb complex (see e.g. Tauli 1966). In Amele, iterative aspect is expressed by doubling the object marker, or the root, or both (Roberts 1987; Roberts 1991); in Boumaa Fijian, plurality is normally marked by root reduplication, but a spontaneous/adversative prefix which happens to be present in the verb must, arbitrarily, reduplicate too (thus ta-lo’i ‘bent’ but ta-ta-lo’i-lo’i ‘bent in many places’ (Dixon 1988). The fact that doubling an affix does not necessarily result in twice the meaning of that affix (however construed), but rather can have a completely unrelated meaning, shows that the meaning of reduplication resides with the construction, not with the reduplicated element itself. Triplication provides a similar argument in those languages where triplication means something distinct from reduplication, as in e.g. Mokilese progressive and/or continuative aspect constructions (Harrison 1973; Harrison 1976).

Semantically vacuous reduplication offers another type of evidence for the constructional view. Whether to supplement a phonologically subminimal stem (e.g. Chukchee; Krause 1980, Kiparsky 1986) or as an arbitrary requirement of some affix(es) (e.g. Nancowry (Radhakrishnan 1981)), reduplication can occur with no semantic consequence whatsoever. This argues against the view that reduplicants are morphemes with their own meanings, and suggests that the meaning, or lack thereof, of reduplication be a property of the construction as a whole.

But perhaps the clearest type of morphological evidence in favor of analyzing reduplication as a construction calling for more than one instance of a semantically defined stem consists of those constructions in which the stems in question are phonologically distinct by virtue of containing different morphemes. This can occur when one stem contains a semantically empty morph that the other does not (including, but not limited, to cases previously referred to as Melodic Overwriting), but can also occur when different suppletive allomorphs of the same morpheme occur in the two different stems. Examples are drawn from, among other languages, Sye (Oceanic; Crowley 1998), several Bantu languages, and Kawaiisu (Zigmond et al. 1990). Closely related to the suppletive allomorph cases are “synonym” constructions, common cross-linguistically but particular rife in southeast Asia, in which two words, possibly but not necessarily of different etymological backgrounds, that happen to be synonymous are used in juxtaposition. In Acehnese (Durie 1985) there are structural parallels between total reduplication and juxtaposition of synonyms, both of which occur in the language. Acehnese is also among many languages in having “juxtaposition of opposites”, or antonym constructions; while unlike reduplication in that the two stems involved crucially disagree along some semantic dimension, these constructions are very like reduplication in that the crucial relationship between the daughters is semantic.

Once viewed as a morphological construction, reduplication can be put into a larger context and related successfully to similar constructions that occur in syntax. We touch on this briefly, exemplifying syntactic doubling constructions and discussing their many striking similarities to morphological doubling in reduplication.
References


