

Was she sick sick? ¿Enfermo enfermo? k'ojan k'ojan?:

A pragmatic investigation of adjective reduplication in Spanish, English and Yucatec Maya

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Introduction.

Reduplication is a linguistic process that has been studied through both a morphological (Abbi 1992) and a phonological (Wilbur 1973) lens. In general, reduplication is the reiteration of a morpheme, word, or phrase, and the effect of this doubling is an alteration to the semantic meaning of the original utterance. Partial reduplication refers to the reiteration of a morpheme while total reduplication reiterates an entire word or phrase. Worldwide, reduplication is a common feature found in hundreds of languages, but the effect of reduplication varies between languages. In Mandarin, reduplication can communicate plurality when *ren* 'person' is reduplicated *renren* 'person-person' or 'people' (Chao 1968: 202). In Shuar, *puéngar* 'good' is intensified when reduplicated *puéngar-puéngar-eiti* 'It is very good' (Rouby & Riedmayer 1983:45). In Swahili, *maji-maji* 'somewhat wet' has a meaning that decreases in intensity from *maji* 'wet'. (Ashton 1952: 316). Cross-linguistically, cases of reduplication have been observed in noun, adjectives, nouns, verbs, and adverbs.

The current study focuses on total reduplication of adjectives in English, Spanish, and Yucatec Maya. Yucatec Maya is the third most spoken indigenous language in Mexico, and its speakers live in the Yucatan Peninsula. Yucatec Maya, like many other American indigenous languages, has an extensive reduplication system including partial and total reduplication (Bricker & de Poot 1998). English also has many cases of partial and total reduplication. Partial reduplication can be found in phrases such as *tick-tock* or *dilly-dally* with a change in sound (Thun 1963). Speakers of Jewish English also employ partial reduplication with the morpheme *schm-* in cases like *paper-schmaper* (Nevins & Vaux 2007). Total reduplication is common in English and is often used to determine authenticity, for example, a *coke-coke* as opposed to a *coke* (off-brand, diet, etc) (Kajitani 2005:94). Spanish, on the other hand, does not have many

documented cases of reduplication. In fact, according to Stolz, Stroh, and Urdze (2011), Standard Spanish doesn't use reduplication, but some Mexican-Spanish speakers use reduplication to intensify some adverbs such as *luego luego* 'later later' (meaning immediately) and *casi casi* 'almost almost' (an intensified form of almost).

As previous literature has suggested that augmentation and intensification are the most common forms of reduplication (Uspensky 1972: 70), the current study aims to identify some of the characteristics of adjective reduplication across three languages in order to see if there are any cross-linguistic patterns that emerge. Additionally, very little research has been done on the effects of negation on semantic meaning of reduplicated items. Therefore, this study aims to explore that aspect. The research questions for the present study are:

1. Is there new semantic meaning assigned to an adjective it is reduplicated? If so, what is that change in meaning? How is the new meaning different than the former?
2. Does negation of a reduplicated adjective change the original meaning of the reduplicated adjective? How so?

By exploring subtle differences in meaning between single iterations and their reduplicated forms in both affirmative and negated utterances, as well as making cross-linguistic comparisons, it is hypothesized that patterns within languages will be more prominent than cross-linguistically.

Methodology.

In order to test these hypotheses, sentences were used from the *Corpus of Contemporary English* (Davies 1995) that contained reduplicated adjectives. In order to cover a variety of adjectives, one adjective was selected of Dixon's (1991) categories of adjectives:

1. Dimension: big, short, etc.
2. Physical property: strong, ill, etc.
3. Velocity: fast, quick, etc.
4. Age: new, old, etc.
5. Color: red, black, etc.
6. Value: good, bad, etc.

7. Difficulty: easy, difficult, etc.
8. Qualification: probable, possible, usual
9. Human propensity: fond, angry, anxious
10. Similarity: similar, different, etc.

As there were no examples of reduplicated adjectives from categories #8 and 9 found in COCA corpus, example sentences were fabricated reduplicating the adjectives in a sentence taken from the corpus. These sentences were then translated to Spanish and Yucatec Maya, and all sentences were negated. Four native English speaking consultants, four Spanish speaking consultants, and two Yucatec Maya speaking consultants participated in acceptability judgement tests in which the consultants either accepted or rejected the sentence. If the participant accepted the sentence, they were asked the meaning of noun phrase containing the reduplicated adjective.

Results.

The three languages presented very different patterns of native speaker acceptability. Yucatec Maya, a language that has been documented to have very frequent reduplication, presented a very high acceptance rate. In all of the cases, consultants reported an augmented meaning, but the increase was similar to the effect of adding *jach* 'very'. The only sentence containing a reduplicated adjective that was rejected was the adjective of velocity because the reduplicated form has already lexicalized, and therefore the reduplicated form of *se'eb se'eb* 'fast' (*se'eb se'eb se'eb se'eb*) was not accepted.

English, a language that has many examples of recorded nominal reduplication, provided several interesting findings. All of the examples taken from the corpus were cases of spoken reduplication, but the speakers rejected three of the reduplicated adjectives unanimously:

- Velocity: All I could feel was her heart beating *fast fast*.
- Difficulty: To want to get home.... *Easy easy* excuse.
- Similarity: Let's eat *different different* food and celebrate.

Overall, there were two possible semantic changes in the reduplicated forms: an intensified form or an authentic form. For example, in the sentence *You just had a bad, bad dream*, consultants commented that *bad* increased so much that “after waking up, you still feel bad”. Additionally, the meaning of authenticity was communicated in sentences such as *About half of the agents called in sick. Sick sick*. The consultants reported that, in this sentence, it could either mean that the agents were so sick that they couldn’t stand or that there was no way that the agents were faking their illness. Interestingly, the two sentences that were fabricated were both unanimously accepted by the native English speaking consultants.

In Spanish, at least one consultant rejected every sentence provided with the exception of one, and only one sentence was unanimously rejected:

- Unanimously accepted: Value: *Te despertaste de un sueño malo malo*. ‘You had a bad, bad dream’
- Unanimously rejected: Similarity: *Comamos comida diferente diferente y celebremos*. ‘Let’s eat different, different food and celebrate’

With dialectal differences were taken into account, another pattern occurred. Two consultants were from Spain while another two were from Mexico. When the Spanish and Mexican consultants’ responses were separated, it is evident that Spain-Spanish speakers have a lower acceptability rate while Mexican speakers both accepted five other categories that the peninsular speakers did not:

- Dimension: *Dirigir esto no un parte grande grande de mi trabajo*. ‘Managing this is not a big big part of my job’
- Physical Property: *Casi la mitad de los agentes estaban enfermos. Enfermos enfermos*. ‘Almost half of the agents were sick. Sick sick’
- Age: *Era una mujer vieja vieja ahora*. ‘She was an old, old woman now’
- Color: *Tiene ojos verdes verdes*. ‘He has green, green eyes’
- Human propensity: *Lo dijo en un susurro triste triste*. ‘She said it in a sad, sad whisper’

This finding suggests that there is dialectal variation within the Spanish language.

The second goal of this study was to study the effects of negation on reduplicated adjectives. Similar to the affirmative reduplication, Yucatec Maya had a very high acceptance rate among the native speaker consultants. The negated sentence with the reduplicated velocity adjective (*fast fast*) was rejected as well because of the lexicalized form which cannot be reduplicated. Once negated, the human propensity (*sad*) was rejected because it was another lexicalized example. In Yucatec Maya, *mix ki'imakuoli'I* 'sad', contains the negation particle *mix* already incorporated in the morphology, making negation impossible:

* *mix mix ki'imakuoli'I'I* 'not sad'

Both consultants suggested that the semantic difference between the negated single iteration and negated reduplicated forms was not as strong in Yucatec Maya as it may be in other languages, which was similar to the findings in the affirmative sentences. Nevertheless, acceptance rates were the highest in this language than the other languages studied.

In English, there appears to be a significant difference in acceptance of affirmative and negative reduplication. In this study, seven of the ten examples were rejected by at least two consultants, and only three adjectives were unanimously accepted. All consultants accepted the reduplicated forms of dimension adjective (*not big big*) and color adjectives (*not green green*), citing that there were significant differences between the single iteration, the reduplicated affirmative form, and the reduplicated negated form. For example:

- He has green green eyes. 'Very green eyes'
- He doesn't have green green eyes. 'Could be yellow-green or light green'

This suggests that English has a reduplication system that can be an intensifier in the affirmative form and a weakening agent in the negated form. There were also changes to the meaning of authenticity in the negated form for the physical property adjectives (*not sick sick*). While the affirmative *sick sick* meant 'very sick', the consultants understood the negated form to be a lack of authenticity, suggesting that the agents were faking their illness or "just had a hang-over". This suggests that reduplication can introduce both authenticity and inauthenticity with affirmative and negated adjectives, a finding that is new to the field of reduplication research.

The negated reduplication in Spanish had a much higher rejection rate than the other cases. At least one consultant rejected each of the negated sentences, but only two sentences were unanimously rejected:

- Difficulty: *no fácil fácil* ‘not easy easy’
- Qualification: *no usual usual* ‘not usual usual’.

This finding was interesting because, according to previous literature, Spanish does not allow for reduplication except for certain adverbs in the Mexican dialect of Spanish. Consultants reported that the effect of reduplication was similar to adding the intensifier *muy* ‘very’ or the suffix *-ísimo*, which in Spanish augments the adjective (*fácil* ‘easy’, *facilísimo* ‘very easy’). The fact that some of these sentences were accepted by both peninsular Spanish and Mexican speakers suggests that reduplication may be increasing in acceptability in the Spanish language.

Conclusion.

The current study suggests that reduplication may be more prominent than previous literature has suggested. Yucatec Maya, a language that implements reduplication frequently, uses reduplicated forms of adjectives to augment semantic significance, and this process is so frequently used that some forms, such as *se’eb se’eb*, have lexicalized as a reduplicated form. English appears to have a relatively extensive use of adjective reduplication with two potential significances: augmentation and authenticity. Spanish presents the most interesting case as it is a language that historically does not allow for reduplication, but speakers from two different dialects accepted several of the reduplicated adjectives. The only unanimously accepted sentence in all three languages was the reduplicated value adjective:

- You just had a bad, bad dream.

It is important to note that, while consultants accepted reduplicated adjective phrases, this does not mean that reduplication is a part of formal speech. Future studies should include a more normalized pitch component and include adjectives theoretically should be able to be intensified like *dead*. Additionally, the Spanish *pero* ‘but’ has been suggested to allow for reduplication:

- *Grande, pero grande* ‘big, but big’ (suggesting very big)

It would be beneficial to include similar conjunctions in each language to see if this is a function of other languages as well.

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