

English Reduplication in the Malaysian Context: Feasibility Studies in Embedding Reduplication Rules

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Abstract

Reduplication is playful in certain languages while informative in others. The recent emergence of the form together-gather, single-mingle, calling-calling and later-later brings forth the need to examine where and how the form emerged. The social contact Malaysians achieve is a vocabulary enriching mechanism just as how English has some 900,000 words. Also the catchy-ness of reduplicated words, for businesses' branding holds a key to an economically successful country. Also, this paper studies the feasibility of reduplicating rules, in particular of the English language and Bahasa

Abstrak

Reduplikasi adalah hal yang menyenangkan dalam bahasa-bahasa tertentu, dan informatif bagi yang lain. Saat ini, kemunculan bentuk kata-kata 'together-gather, single-mingle, calling-calling dan later-later' menimbulkan kebutuhan untuk menguji tentang darimana dan bagaimana bentuk ini muncul. Kontak sosial yang terjadi diantara orang-orang Malaysia telah memperkaya terbentuknya beragama kosa kata baru. Artikel ini mengkaji tentang penerapan aturan-aturan reduplikasi, khususnya Bahasa Inggris dan Bahasa Malaysia.

Key Words: *English reduplication, Malay reduplication, Manglish reduplication, Malay English reduplication, English Malay reduplication.*

Introduction

The recent emergence in the Malaysian context of a non-native reduplicated form in speech, *together-gather* (or 'to gather-gather') denoting cooperativeness with intimacy, *single-mingle* denoting a semantic phonological reduplication and *later-later* and *calling-calling* which denotes indefiniteness and uncertainty, has brought forth our attention to study these forms' formation, its rules and construct and the reasons behind its emergence. In researching this, we have hypothesized that it may have been due to contacts among languages that had this form emerge. Due to this, the study also touches on the feasibility of applying reduplication rules between the languages in contact, which may '*together-gather*' create more lexical entries into these languages.

Reduplication is a form by which a word is duplicated in forming new semantical or pragmatical meanings of the words reduplicated¹ denotes reduplication as a morphological procedure, in which, the inflectional and/or derivational formatives used to signal specific category are directly derivable from the phonological or prosodic structure of the uninflected and underived simplex form. Reduplication, is seen as morphological when the root or stem and constituencies are duplicated, but phonological when only segments, syllables of consonants and vowels, or prosodic and more are duplicated.

In the field of linguistics, reduplication is categorized as:

- a. Lexical reduplication: creates new words and inflections; must be distinguished with repetitions (syntactic reduplication or syntactic repetition)
- b. Phonological reduplication
- c. Sign Language reduplication
- d. Language Game reduplication
- e. Language Acquisition reduplication (baby-talk)

In the English language, reduplication e.g. *hurdy-purdy*, was seen as just a word-playing tool, but has ever since progressed into more meaningful categories. This is evident with the emerging forms of 'shm-' prefix in reduplicating words, a principle adopted from the Yiddish language, for an example "*backcopying-shmackcopying*" (Nevins, Wagner, MIT) denoting pejorative and depreciative meaning to the words reduplicated. There is also nowadays, reduplications in the form of Contrastive Reduplication (CR), as an example "*sick-sick*", which gives meaning of really sick, or of a precedent setting whereby the hearer had a worst of time being sick. Other contrastive reduplication examples are found in colloquial English "*It's tuna salad, not salad-salad*," or "*Do you like him-like him?*"² or "*Are you serious-serious?*" representing

truthfulness. The most distinguishable forms of reduplication in English, observed from the base word and reduplicant, are the full reduplication and partial reduplication. A full reduplication sees the reduplicant repeated after the root form (base word), whereas the partial reduplication sees the reduplicant form a consonant germination or vowel lengthening to a nearly complete copy of a base.³ A reduplication may also see the reduplicant neither similar phonologically nor morphologically, but similar at the semantic and pragmatic levels of the base word. There are seven classes of reduplication particularly in the English language that has been documented as of yet, there are:

- a. 'Baby-talk' reduplication, e.g., wee-wee.
- b. Multiple partial reduplications, e.g., hap-hap-happy (as in song lyrics)
- c. Deprecative reduplication, e.g., table-shmable.
- d. Rhyming reduplication, e.g. super-duper, willy-nilly, pall-mall, . .
- e. Ablaut reduplication e.g. flim-flam, zig-zag, sing-song, pitterpatter. . .
- f. Intensive reduplication e.g. You are sick sick sick!
- g. Contrastive reduplication e.g. Is that salad-salad or chicken salad?

This study sought to prove Pragmatic Reduplication (PR), a form which is becoming a common practise among Malaysians when speaking English. The form of "*together-gather*" denoting intimacy and, what can be said as a superlative form of cooperativeness is being used by many. In a recent show from 'Jalan-jalan, Cari Makan' a show produced by TV3 of Media Prima Sdn Bhd, the host, Maria Tunku Sabri was seen and heard extending an invitation for an intimate outing to movie producer David Teoh in his restaurant, the Lime Restaurant. As a form of cooperativeness, the form was heard used by the Fly FM radio presenter, inviting all dancers (more specifically 'shufflers') from all over Malaysia to participate in their dancing competition in order to ensure a festive-like crowd turnout. This form of PR should also be regarded as a type of reduplication in the English language, although only just seen in the Malaysian context.

Another form seen in the use of reduplication in the Malaysian context is the, "single-mingle" and "dating-mating" form, and used as a pragmatical (partial) rhythmic reduplication, in denoting the status of a person in their romantic involvement. The third form encountered in use by Malaysians is the full reduplication form of, what we would coin

as, Indefinite Reduplication (IR). This form denotes an indefinite proposition of time, by the speaker i.e. *calling-calling* means to keep in touch, within no timeframe. The recent emergence of these forms urges us in searching its basis and foundation.

Problem Statement

There are, to date, only some 250 Bahasa Malaysia (BM) words which entered the English language lexis, while English words have been adopted into BM in numbers, and at times, with its grammatical tense intact e.g. "komited" from the English 'committed' which has the past tense affixed to it. There is feasibility for both languages to concomitantly adopt each others' words for lexicon enrichment. Although English language, to date, has some 900,000 entries to its lexicon, while BM less, however both could still embrace more, especially by reduplication, where in English; there is little or no rules to apply into forming reduplication. With the varied BM reduplication rules, the English language should flourish, as BM is an Austronesian language which has vast possibilities when reduplicated words are concern.

Languages in contact due to migrations, foreign students and expatriates should also be considered so as to enable the rules of reduplication from the respective languages to be applied into the English language. The surfacing of certain English reduplication, under the Malaysian context, for example: *together-gather* and *forever-ever*, tempts me to discover where and how did the reduplication came about, its meaning if varied in any way, and in hypothesizing a framework and ultimately a rule, to create meaningful reduplications using BM reduplication rules, if not the other languages in contact with BM (Bahasa Melayu) and ME (Malaysian English), in deriving a reduplication word for English.

The words reduplicated, in the Malaysian context, insofar have been adopted from morphological and phonological rules of the parent-languages, such as Sanskrit, Persian Portuguese and Arabic, and as of late English. In the English language, ever since the sixteenth century, reduplication rules or words have been formed such as *helter-skelter* and *shilly-shally*.⁴ In the English language, according to Sinclair, the speaker/writer first selects a prosody which is then applied to semantic preference...which (in turn) controls the collocational and colligational patterns. In BM, the reduplicated words are mostly to indicate plurality, while ME has reduplication words indicating abundance, repetitive and

intensifications, much like the other New Englishes (NE) of mostly commonwealth countries.

Research Objective

To examine the influx of *reduplication* brought forth by migrant workers, international students and expatriates along with their languages, into BM or ME.

Research Methodology

In this research, we underwent a process of eliciting facts through conversations, interviews (formal and informal) and distributing of questionnaires to the many Malaysians living around us.

Sampling Procedures

This case study was conducted by first collecting data on the languages, creating questionnaires with the data and interview subjects using the data. Next, comparing data with BM, cross-compare with interviews with Malaysian's BM and English use, finally, generalizing an analysis.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study are:

- Interviews – unstructured in order to elicit reduplication in everyday language use, with our colleagues where in BM, reduplication is a natural aspect.
- Questionnaires – in-person and in open-ended form, a test for reduplication in respective language proficiency, record reduplication forms when subjects use English, and when using both native and English language simultaneously.
- Observations – watching television programs, listening to radio broadcasts and everyday interactions between ourselves and the community.

Findings

In the case of *together-gather* or *to gather-gather*, at first consideration, the easiest conclusion would be that it must be echo reduplication, but a more in-depth look reveals that it mimics BM's partial reduplication without affixations, which shall be discussed below.

Reduplication in BM, has principles as follows:⁵

- A. Full reduplication – where full reduplication of the root word, with or without affixations. For example:

- a. Without affixations - *pulau-pulau, buku-buku, sungguh-sungguh, tiba-tiba, kura-kura, and labah-labah.*
 - b. With affixations - *pelatih-pelatih, kehendak-kehendak, persatuan-persatuan, and pemimpin-pemimpin.*
- B. Partial reduplication – where reduplication of the base word, whereby the base word could be a root word or coined words, reduplicated to the front, to the back of the base word. The first syllable is usually reduplicated, and the reduplicant affixed at the front of the base word with process of the vowel shifting into a schwa. For example:- *LAKI-lalaki-lalaki, JARI-jajari-jejari, SIKU-sisiku-sesiku, SLAPA-sisiapa-Sesiapa, LANGIT-lalangit-lelangit, BertURUT-turut, and menCARI-cari.*
- a. Words with affixations are not only reduplicated by its base word neither the affixed words, only with verbs and adjectives that the reduplication is seen, and its positioning depends on certain verbs. For example: *berlari-lari, terdiri-diri, and sepandai-pandai.*
 - b. Partial reduplication with affixations on the reduplicant, are for example: *tolong-menolong, bantu-membantu, kasih-mengasihi, cinta-mencintai, and kejar-mengejar.*

Generally, partial reduplication might be seen as, from the root word “ikut” which means ‘follow’, to become:-

ikutkan - ‘to follow’

mengikut-ikut - ‘mimicking’

terikut-ikut - ‘follow without discretion’

terikut-ikutkan - ‘follow continuously’

ikut-ikutan - ‘trends that is followed’

- C. Rhythmic Reduplication – where reduplicated words follow a certain rhythm, in the root word, and reduplicated, with the reduplicant’s phonological changes and altered. It is divided into three depending on the sound it gives:-
- a. Vocal reduplicated – there is a significant similarity and vocal harmony. For example: *Sayur-mayu, cerai-berai, kuih-muih, tungkus-lumus, selok-belok, hangar-bingar, lauk-pauk, hina-dina, gotong-royong, and hiruk-pikuk.*
 - b. Consonant reduplicated – there is a significant characteristics phonologically on the reduplicant. *gunung-ganang, simpang-siur, bukit-bukau, mandi-manda, mundar-mandir, bolak-balik, kayu-kayan, and batu-batan.*
 - c. Free reduplication – there are no significance in vocals or consonants in the reduplicant. For example: *Anak-pinak, saudara-mara, lintang-pukang, and titik-bengik.*

From the above explanation on BM's reduplication, the *together-gather* form might fall under the partial reduplication without affixation, while the form *single-mingle* might fall under the rhythmic 'vocal' reduplication, while *calling-calling* should be under full reduplication. I would now compare the three new forms with English's reduplication rules.

However, in the English language, the reduplication form is seen somehow as playful and as just figure of speeches, bringing about an entirely new grammatical function or semantic feature in providing emphasis.

- A. Exact (Full) reduplication – where reduplicants are derived from the base word, mostly seen contrastively, indicating literal and not figurative noun-genuinity as opposed to fake/incomplete. For example:

- a. Are you a *doctor-doctor*?
- b. Is that *salad-salad*

Another full reduplication is mostly seen as onomatopoeic, or baby talk. For example:

- c. *knock-knock, bye-bye, pooh-pooh, bam-bam*

- B. Ablaut (Partial) reduplication – where the reduplicant undergoes processes of ablaut vowel alternation, onset alternations and rhyming words.

- a. Vowel alteration is when the vowels undergo a process, where the base word most usually have a high vowel, while the reduplicant usually have a low vowel. These are two independent meaning words combined in deriving a new concept of meaning. For example: *tip-top, flip-flop*.
- b. Onset alternation is when the consonant is changed in the reduplicant, most of the time lacking meaning. For example: *mumbo-jumbo, walkie-talkie*.
- c. Rhyming words, which both base and reduplicant lack in meaning but as when combined brings a new meaning, and are mostly found in nursery rhymes. For example: *lovey-dovey, itsy-bitsy*.

The English reduplication rules may be seen lacking in variety but nevertheless is available. Although seen as an unproductive wing of the English language, as in able to produce semantically meaningful words, reduplication is more common than usually suppose, and rhyming is a main causatory agent in its formation⁶ and that its formation, are randomly achieved. Words like *grandstand* and *backpack* are forms that saw rhyming as an essential formulation device. Therefore there are no

reasons to disregard the formation of the ME *together-gather*, *single-mingle* and the indefinite definite reduplication as *calling-calling* and *later-later*, as a possible entry into English reduplication.

The form *together-gather* has both words their own meanings, which may not conform to the (partial) ablaut reduplication form of rhyming words, and a glance sees it as a redundant form, but in ME it has a different meaning with 'together' and 'gather' altogether. *Together-gather* in ME context does also mean as 'together' does in English – with each other – but with a more emotional and intimate form. The other form *to gather-gather*, where 'gather' in English means to move/collect from one place to another, gain and obtain things irregularly distributed or those not clearly separated from another, in ME means the same but intensified, as how was used by the radio disc-jockey on how to gather dancers all over Malaysia.

The indefinite reduplication, *calling-calling* or *later-later* in ME express an uncertain hope, whereby when one "should be calling-calling each other" means to keep in touch without any emphasis, and when "I'll create more examples later-later" means that the examples will be done later than later, and has an indefinite term, whereby it could also not be done with (the examples) at all.

Seen as more a semantic reduplication than rhythmic, the *single-mingle* form adheres to the rhyming and creates a new meaning – an unmarried/unattached person whom available for love relationship. Withal, the forms emerging from a non-native speaker might be seen as an initial step towards constructing a more varied reduplication rules in English.

A. in the same sentence, occurring later in the sentence. For example.

- a. *Both Wani and Wafi both thinks they are great.*
- b. *Their house also big-big also.*
- c. *Discussions sparked discussions.*

B. Root-Sound Reduplication – where pairs of words occurs in the same sentences, but either the base word has affixation or the reduplicant or vice versa, or with both having different affixations or derivatives, creating an echo effect of poetic assonance or alliterations. For example:

- a. *The issues have been amply amplified in recent meetings.*
- b. *Careful care*
- c. *Moody mood*
- d. *Informed information*

C. Lexical Double Effects – where the use of pair words which involves reduplication of sounds or other features which has

significance, occurring one after another, indicating sense of appropriateness. For example, numerals often starts with the same syllable:

- a. *One two* heads always escape.
- b. I was there *four five* years ago.
- c. Was it *seven eight* months ago?

Menon believed that the juxtaposed reduplication may have been influenced by the mother tongues of Malaysian, namely Malay, Tamil and Cantonese. This is so because BM and the Austronesian (family of languages) reduplication have grammatical functions for plurality. In conversing in English, Malaysians are more likely to use the non-juxtaposed reduplication rather than juxtaposed, in fact more likely to use the root-stem reduplication more than juxtaposed reduplication.⁷

The Malay language is heavily influenced by the Sanskrit language. Its reduplication rules are categorised as nominal reduplication and verbal reduplication.⁸

- a. Nominal reduplication; emphatic "vayám-vayam" which means 'we ourselves'. Another example is the adverb-like "rathaa-rathi" which means 'chariot against chariot', where the Base word is. "ratha" meaning 'chariot'
- b. Verbal reduplications that denotes present, perfect, aorist, conjugations intensive "bhari: bhr" which is the intensive form of bhr which means 'bear' and lastly, conjugations desiderative

Furthermore, in Sanskrit reduplication isn't one simple rule it's a collection of many heterogeneous rules, with varying degrees of complexity; and its resemblance to nonreduplicative affixation isn't confined to overall formal similarity; this also extends to their parallel morpholexical fragmentation, as in numerous other languages; and, finally, Sanskrit reduplication doesn't always involve copying; sometimes it is so prototypically affixal that it isn't really reduplication at all.⁹ In short the rule in formation of reduplication in Sanskrit, is rule-constellation.

Conclusion

Reduplication is a wide world phenomenon, the emergence of baby-talk all around the world's languages, backed by the recent neuro-imaging of the baby's brain that saw babies are more able to recognise two syllables-talk, for example: mama, emak, omei, umi, amma, mom, back the theory of reduplication as universal. Whenever nature calls, it

most ultimately be referred to as */she-she/* or */shu-shu/* when searching for the nearest restrooms.

The development of technology has also brought about reduplication universals, where the reduplicated word (although more onomatopoeic than reduplication) */kring-kring/*, would mean telephone all over the world. Other onomatopoeic reduplications such as */haha/*, */hehe/* and */huhu/* for laughing, */woohoo/* for happiness, */vroom-vroom/* for automobiles, or business brands such as */coca-cola/* for the soft drink and */google/* for the internet search engine, has been instilled in the minds of the people, and are used in everyday life to either for symbolizing i.e. */coca-cola/* for water to drink, or for production of economic goods. Therefore, there is a need to consider reduplication as a form of word-formation, and with BM or ME vast reduplicational rule, it is pivotal that a framework of reduplicational rules is drafted so as to develop the words created.

Discussions, Suggestions and Recommendations

Reduplication words seen in speeches, movies, articles was previously seen as word play in making certain words look good, but nevertheless include meanings, whether semantical or pragmatical. In the English Language, reduplication occurs functionally and pragmatically, routinely employed in advertisements, newspapers, political slogans and textual heading.¹⁰ Nadarajan gave an example from National Geographic, that had "Monkey see, monkey recognize", "Snakes, snakes, snakes", "Terrors of Tasmania" and "Dawn in the Deep" as their topic headings. She also further demonstrated that advertisements rely on repetition (reduplication) advertisement. The use of reduplication for expressive and aesthetic effect in English is more extensive than previously thought possible and new studies are constantly coming up with instances that show its usage to be much more widespread than originally believed. We believe that further research should investigate into reduplicational rules to set up a corpora-base of reduplication words. With the corpus, a framework can be achieved and drafted, which could then serves to produce massive numbers of reduplicated words, which should serve purposes and needs. Reduplication is clearly a form close to Malaysian's heart as seen by their mix of reduplicational words onto a language that lacks reduplication words. This also marks a variety of the English language, distinguishing ME from other varieties of English

Endnotes:

- ¹ B. Hurch, (ed.), *Studies on reduplication*, (Walter de Gruyter, 2005)
- ² J. Ghomeshi, R. Jackendoff, N. Rosen & K. Russell, "Contrastive Focus Reduplication in English (The Salad-Salad Paper)," in *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 22, 307-357. (2004)
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- ⁴ David Crystal, *The Stories Of English*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004)
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