



Reduplication in West Germanic:

A comparison of Dutch, Afrikaans and American English

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Overview

- **Introduction**
- Afrikaans: literature and corpus study
- Dutch and (US) English: literature and corpus study
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Reduplication = repeating (part of) the stem within a word
- Occurs in many language families
- Part of language acquisition
 - *papa, mama*
- Often also in onomatopoeas
 - *tamtam, boemboem, wafwaf*

Introduction

- Full and partial reduplication, like *chit-chat*
- Triplication = repeating stem thrice *vroem-vroem-vroem*
- Can have a grammatical function
 - Formation of plural:
Malay: rumah (house), rumah-rumah (houses)
 - Tense formation:
Ancient Greek: λύω (I loose), λέλυκα (I have loosed)
 - Derivation
Mandarin: 人 rén (person), 人人 rén rén (everyone)

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- Dutch and (US) English: literature and corpus study
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Literature

- Well-known phenomenon in Afrikaans
- Has been mentioned in literature quite a few times:
Botha 1988, Conradie 2007, Den Besten et al. 2012, Van Huyssteen 2000, 2004, Van Huyssteen & Wessing 2007
- Usually descriptive
- Can be used to:
 - (1) create an adverbial form replacing a present participle out of a verb
 - (2) semantically intensify the unduplicated form
 - (3) semantically attenuate the unduplicated form
 - (4) indicate the speaker's heightened emotional state

Literature

(1) Die leeu loop **brul- brul** weg.

the lion walks roar roar away

‘Roaring repeatedly, the lion walks away.’

(Botha 1988: 2)

(2) Flinkdink, die vinnige spelletjie vir **slim- slim** mense.

Flinkdink, the fast game.DIM for clever clever people

‘Flinkdink, the fast game for very clever people.’

(Conradie 2003: 20)

(3) Sy **voel- voel** met haar voet hoe warm die water is.

she feel feel with her foot how warm the water is

‘She tentatively puts her foot into the water to feel how warm it is.’

(Combrink 1978: 78)

(4) Die ongeluk het **hier- hier** gebeur.

The accident has here here happened

‘The accident has happened right here (scarily close to me!)’

(Biberauer, p.c.)

Corpus study

- VivA Korpusportaal
 - 300M+ words
 - mainly Standard Afrikaans and written language
 - contains also literature and some transcriptions of spoken language
- Reduplication occurs
 - For almost all parts of speech
 - Mostly mono- and disyllabic words of Germanic origin
 - About 500 different lemmas

Corpus study

- Semantic functions
 - Intensifying/attenuating
‘n bietjie-bietje, gesug-sug, blou-blou, dreun-dreun, byna-byna, ja-ja
Reën drup-drup teen my vensterruit.
 - Grammatical: creating an adverb from a verb
Hy het huppel-huppel weggehardloop.

Corpus study

- Semantic functions
 - Grammatical: creation of adverbs from non-verbs
een-een, bietjie-bietjie, groep-groep
cfr. Dutch 'een voor een', 'beetje voor beetje', 'groep voor groep'
Gooi die beslag bietjie-bietjie in die warm vet [...]
 - Idiom: name of games
dokter-dokter, bal-bal, huisie-huisie
cfr. Dutch 'doktertje', 'balletje', 'huisje'

Corpus study

- Semantic functions

- Idiom – create new words

dik-dik, dirk-dirk, kêr-kêr (animals and plants)

Dis 'n jaar van bling-bling (everything that is shining)

handjie-handjie 'hand in hand'

hoor-hoor ('hear hear')

fluit-fluit, my storie is uit

Vrydagnag reën dit so kol-kol in die berg ('here and there')

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Literature



Ik had genderneutrale idealen – ‘bij ons geen Barbiepoppen’ – maar Sofie bleek een meisje-meisje. Dus die prinsessenjurken kwamen er wel. Ons kind mocht zijn wie

Carmen De Vos (photographer, DS Magazine 25/02/2022)

Literature

- RE not considered as part of the core grammatical system in AE and Dutch
- The 'prototypical X' semantic function seems to be emerging at the moment
- Intensification: also used more often than expected given that RE is not part of AE and Dutch morphology

Literature

- Intensification: also used more often than expected given that RE is not part of AE and Dutch morphology
- (5) Wie denkt dat hij **gauw- gauw** zaakjes kan doen...
who thinks that he quickly- quickly business can do
'Who thinks that he can do business very quickly...'
- Often with a pejorative feeling (i.e. expressive meaning component)

Literature

- Other frequent function with nouns: ‘vocative’

(6) **Meisje meisje**, wat heb je toch gedaan.
girl girl what have you PRT done
‘Girl girl, what have you done.’

Literature

- Hardly any literature on RE in English so far
- Hohenhaus (2005): study into reduplication in British English
- The first to mention the existence of the ‘prototypical X’ semantic function

(8) There was a bath in the guest house, well, not a **bath-bath**, rather a large sink. (Hohenhaus 2005: 299)

- No literature yet on RE in Dutch

Literature



(Belgian advertisement for road safety, DS 31/03/2019)

Literature

- ‘Prototypical X’ function:
- ‘The compound as a whole picks out a *prototype reading* or (partly dependent of the part of speech involved) one of *extreme degree* of what the doubled constituent on its own denotes [...] it characterizes an instance/expression/example of a referent of a word that corresponds most to the core meaning of this word.’ (Hohenhaus 2005: 301)

Literature

- ‘Prototypical X’ function is ‘still’ underrepresented in 2005 in the British National Corpus
- Some interesting findings:
 - RE occurs with all lexical word classes (N, A, V)
 - Verbal RE can have different forms (*lying lying, cried-cried, gone-gone*)
 - Preference for RE with Germanic words rather than Latinate ones

Corpus study

- AE: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)
 - 1.1 billion words
 - Eight genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, TV and Movies subtitles, blogs, and other web pages
- Dutch: SoNaR corpus (+ recent Twitter data)
 - SoNaR: 500 million words
 - Mostly written, but also spoken Dutch

Corpus study

- Methodological issue: not easy to automatically extract all reduplications from a corpus
- Solution for now: manual extraction using a set of frequent nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs

Corpus study: AE

- RE occurs with nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs
- Most common semantic function is intensification

(9) It was all about **work work**.

(10) And those **blue blue** eyes from the highest heaven.

(11) All I wanted to do was **sleep sleep**.

(12) We're all gonna act **nice nice**.

Corpus study: AE

- The 'prototypical X' semantic function is found in all categories as well

(13) A: Would you like a **drink-drink**? B: No, I'm on the water wagon tonight.

(14) I don't mean a bit blue, like a bruise. I mean **blue blue**.

(15) I don't mean **lie lie**. I mean use legalese to dance around the truth.

(16) No, not **great great**. You know, not too great.

Corpus study: AE

- RE has also become part of some idiomatic expressions:

(17) We got to make **nice-nice** with the company.

(18) OK then, time for **sleepy-sleepy**.

(19) I've never tried **brown-brown** before.

(20) **Hear hear!** Well said, sir.

Corpus study: Dutch

- RE occurs with nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs
- Most common semantic function is intensification

(21) Wat schaft de pot? **Vlees vlees!**

what gives the pan meat meat

‘What’s for dinner? A lot of meat!’

(22) Schreeuwen, meppen en **huilen huilen.**

scream hit and cry cry

‘Scream, hit and a lot of crying.’

Corpus study: Dutch

- RE occurs with nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs
- Most common semantic function is intensification

(23) Daniëlle, die was toch **kwaad kwaad**.

Daniëlle, who was PRT angry angry

‘Daniëlle, he was super angry.’

(24) De foto werd **gauw- gauw** getrokken.

the picture was quickly quickly taken

‘The picture was taken very quickly.’

Corpus study: Dutch

- The ‘prototypical X’ semantic function is found in all categories as well, most frequently with nominal RE

(25) Het probleem is dat je een **man- man** wilt.
the problem is that you a man man want
‘The problem is that you want a real man.’

(26) Geen hubba hubba, **slapen slapen**.
no hubba hubba, sleep sleep
‘No intercourse, actual sleeping.’

Corpus study: Dutch

- The ‘prototypical X’ semantic function is found in all categories as well, most frequently with nominal RE

(27) **Ziek ziek** of ziek in het hoofd?

ill ill or ill in the head

‘Really ill (physically ill) or mentally ill?’

(28) Hersendood mss, maar nie **dood-** **dood**.

brain.dead maybe.ABBR but not dead dead

‘Maybe brain dead, but not really dead.’

→ Even with non-gradable adjectives

Corpus study: Dutch

- Also a few occurrences of RE who became part of idiomatic expressions

(29) Dus hebben we de zaak maar **blauw-blauw** gelaten.

So have we the case but blue blue left

‘So we decided to just let the case go.’

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Conclusion

- Afrikaans:
 - Highly frequent compared to Dutch/English
 - Many lemmas
 - No prototypical use
 - Not only intensifying but also grammatical functions (creating adverbs)
 - More idiom

Conclusion

- (US) English/Dutch:
 - Not a lot of idiom, but sometimes old (*blauwblauw*)
 - Mainly intensifying
 - Prototypical use: new and growing
 - Need more spoken data

Future investigations

- Compare with UK and SA English
- Compare with German
- Test the semantic functions and category restrictions of RE in English, Dutch and German with native speaker judgments



Baie dankie!
Bedankt!
Thank you!

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