A linguistic study of reduplication in Sesotho

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Abstract

The concept of reduplication has attracted interest from many linguists in recent years. This is because reduplication is an important phenomenon in languages. Although some linguists have tried to look at reduplication in Sesotho, its role and function in this language has been neglected. This paper looks at the usage of reduplication and its role in the enrichment of Sesotho. The paper reveals that Sesotho makes use of partial and complete reduplication with various functions such as: showing plurality, emphasis, diminutives, echoic expressions, completeness, originality, intensity, frequency, among others. Another interesting fact in this paper is that Sesotho, like English (Ghomeshi et al., 2004, p. 308) has contrastive reduplication where some speakers use it to contrast one concept from others. In addition, the paper reveals that reduplication in Sesotho can be categorized into prototypical meaning, literal meaning, intensified meaning and value-added meaning.

Introduction

Reduplication is a morphological process through which the root or stem of a word or a syllable is repeated. Reduplication is a word formation process in which some part of a base (segment, syllable, morpheme) is repeated either to the left or right of the word or, occasionally, within the middle of the word. Ghomeshi et al. (2004, p. 309) define reduplication as the doubling-up of words in speech and prose for rhetorical effect; and they give the following example to substantiate this definition: "*You are sick sick sick!*". While reduplication is found in a wide range of languages and language groups, its level of linguistic productivity varies from language to language. Most researchers have argued that reduplication is used to indicate frequency or intensity of an action signaled by the repeated verb. Some linguists have identified reduplication as used in inflections to show semantic or grammatical functions such plurality, intensity, and in lexical derivation, to create new words. It often occurs when a speaker adopts an expressive or figurative tone more than ordinary speech. Tannen (1987, p. 108) considers reduplication as a limitless resource for individual creativity and the central linguistic meaning making strategy.

According to Ekanjume (2008, p. 136), reduplication is often described phonologically in one of two different ways: either (1) as reduplicated segments

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(sequences of consonants/vowels) or (2) as reduplicated prosodic units (syllables or moras). In addition to phonological description, reduplication often needs to be described as a reduplication of linguistic constituent (i.e. words, stems, roots). As a result, reduplication is interesting theoretically as it involves the interface between phonology and morphology.

Although linguistic forms of reduplication at the lexical level have been explored by many linguists, Wang (2005, p. 305) observes that there is a general tendency among linguists to overlook its functions at other levels like discourse. Reduplication is also found in other levels. Phonologically for instance, reduplication is described as reduplicated segments (sequences of consonants/ vowels) or reduplicated prosodic units (syllables or moras). Moreover, phonological descriptions are drawn from morphological reduplication of words, stems and roots. Thus, reduplication is interesting theoretically because it involves the interface between phonology and morphology. In reduplication, the base is a word (or part of the word) that is often copied. The reduplicated element is called the reduplicant, and most often repeated only once as in *wena, lula-lula* which means 'you, sit for a while' (*lula* 'to sit').

The process of reduplication can be partitioned into two parts, namely, partial reduplication and full or complete reduplication. Partial reduplication is when only a part of a word is repeated. For example, in Sesotho, *haholo* means 'much' when reduplicated it becomes *haholo-holo* which literally means 'very much'. Complete or full reduplication on the other hand is when an entire word is repeated. For example, the Sesotho words *kholo* and *hape* mean 'big' and 'again respectively; when reduplicated they become *kholo-kholo* and *hape-hape* which literally mean 'very big' and 'again and again' respectively. O'Grady et al. (1996, p. 210) argue that partial reduplication may affect only consonant-vowel sequence of the base, as is the case of the Sesotho word *haholo*. In the case of partial reduplication, the repeated word's position in Sesotho could be a suffix, prefix or occasionally an infix. Although some linguists (like Bauer, 1994, p. 68) give a categorization of reduplication based on whether a language allows only 'duple' reduplication or 'duple' and 'triple' reduplication, Sesotho words are repeated only once. This implies that Sesotho does not allow triple duplication.

Types of reduplication

In Sesotho, there is both partial and complete reduplication as already mentioned. The analysis of Sesotho words reveals that Sesotho verbs can adopt either partial or total reduplication depending on the length of the verb. To this effect, three categories of word-length have been established. The first group is made up of monosyllabic verb roots which tend to repeat the whole word during reduplication. An example is ja which means 'eat', and can be reduplicated as *ja-ja* or most commonly as *ja-eja* which means 'eat little'.

The second group is made up of disyllabic verbs which also repeat the whole word during reduplication. Examples of disyllabic verbs which undergo complete reduplication include *bua* which means 'speak' and *ema* meaning 'wait'. When reduplicated, these verbs become *bua-bua* meaning 'speak a little bit' and *ema-ema* meaning 'wait a little bit' respectively. Although only verbs have so far been used in describing reduplication in Sesotho, nouns and adjectives also

have reduplicated forms. In Kriel (1984, p. 50) for instance, the word *kgale* (khale in Southern Sesotho/Sotho orthography) means 'a long time ago'. When reduplicated it becomes *kgale-kgale* meaning 'a long long time ago'. Both the monosyllabic and disyllabic examples reveal instances of complete or total reduplication.

The third category is made up of words with more than two syllables, hence polysyllabic words. In this group of words, only parts of the word are reduplicated in most cases giving rise to partial reduplication. For instance, the word *baholo* 'ancestors' can be reduplicated partially as follows *baholoholo* meaning 'ancestors who lived a long time ago'

Functions of reduplication
One of the common functions of reduplication in Sesotho is to show intensity. When Sesotho speakers want to show the intensity of something, they simply use reduplication by repeating a whole word or part of a word. For instance, the adjective 'white' is *tsoeu* in Sesotho. When reduplicated, it becomes *tsoeu-tsoeu* meaning extremely white. Thus, Sesotho speakers will say *tsoeu-tsoeu* when they want to show that what they are referring to is really white. In the same light, the Sesotho word *Kapele* means 'quickly', when reduplicated it becomes *Kapele-pele* meaning 'quick quick' or very very quickly'. Therefore, when speakers of Sesotho want to show the degree of fastness of an action, or when they want an action to be done speedily, they will use the reduplicated form above. Similarly, when an action is consistently slow, Sesotho speakers use reduplication to show the degree or intensity of the slowness. Thus, the Sesotho word *butle* which means 'slow' will become *butle-butle* meaning 'slow slow' (extremely slow). Another example of reduplication showing intensity is with the word *hena* which means 'irk', 'bother', 'trouble someone', 'meddle', 'touch' or 'handle a person in a certain unacceptable way'. When this word is reduplicated, it becomes *henahena* meaning 'irk consistently either by touching or handling a person in a certain unaccepted way'. It is thus used to show the intensity of the annoyance of the person undergoing the action.

Sesotho also uses reduplication to create a diminutive effect, and this is very common among the discourse of its speakers. This has to do mostly with verbs which show the littleness of what has been done. Diminutive therefore indicates an action done just 'a little' or with low intensity. For instance, in Sesotho the verb *tsamaea* means 'walk' or 'go', but when reduplicated as *tsama-tsamaea* it becomes 'go or walk a little'. In the same light, *noa* which means 'drink' becomes *noa-noa* 'drink a little', when reduplicated. Thakhisi (2003, p. 40) argues that Sesotho nouns can also undergo morphological changes to show smallness of size, degree or little frequency. For instance, the noun *monna* 'man' may be reduplicated as *monnana* to show that the speaker has little or no regards to the manliness of the referent. In other words, this means that the speaker is trying to belittle the other person. In addition, there are instances when a man is 'supposedly' not behaving like a man. In such cases, the man will be referred to as *mosalisali* which literally means that 'he is a woman woman', that is, 'he is weak'. *Mosali* means 'woman', when reduplicated, it becomes *mosalisali* meaning 'woman woman'. Also, when someone says something which others do not consider or take serious, they will refer to that person as *oa bua bua* meaning 'he is talking talking'. In Sesotho, *bua* means 'talk' which when reduplicated becomes

bua bua meaning 'talk talk' or 'talking nonesense'. When the above expression is used for someone who has said something, it implies that what he/she is saying has no substance and so should not be taken seriously. In the same light, the word for little in Sesotho is *nyane* which when reduplicated becomes *nyanenyane*, hence 'little little'. Thus, anything which has no substance in Sesotho is referred to as *nyanenyane* meaning 'little little' (of little or no importance). The diminutive effect of reduplication can be used to refer to a short period action of less importance. For instance, the Sesotho word *homo* means 'converse'; when reduplicated it becomes *homohomo* which simply means 'a short conversation of little or no importance'.

Nouns in Sesotho, like other African languages, are classified into various classes. These classes are indicated by a prefix that is part of the noun, as well as agreement markers on verbs and quantitative roots connected with the noun. Plurality and quantification are marked by a change of class indicated by a change in the prefix. As an example, the word *leshoehleshoehle* is a class five word but when prefixed with *ma-*, it changes to class six and becomes plural *mashoehleshoehle*. In addition to the class prefixes indicating plurality, Sesotho also uses reduplication to further indicate plurality. Below are some Sesotho words which, in addition to the plural class prefix, when reduplicated functions in plurality and/or quantification. This can be illustrated using the following examples:

Stem	Gloss	Reduplication	Gloss
Lets'oele	multitude of people	*mats'oeletsoele*	multitudes of people
Nku	sheep	*mankunku*	groups of sheep
Sekete	thousand	*liketekete*	thousands of thousands
Lichaba	nations	*lichabachaba*	groups of different nations

Reduplication also serves the function of emphasis in Sesotho. For instance, the Sesotho word *wena* means 'you'. When someone is talking to another and wants to emphasize that he/she is actually referring to that person, he/she can say *wena wena* meaning 'you you' (you in particular). Also, it is common to hear Sesotho speakers asking questions like *ena na?*, which literally means 'I as in the first person singular?', when they are being addressed in a group. In so doing, the speaker is trying to isolate him/herself from the group by stressing/emphasizing on the word 'I'. Again, the Sesotho word for truth is *nete*. When Sesotho speakers want to emphasize on the 'truth', they will reduplicate the word to have *nete nete* which simply means 'truth truth'. Another example of emphasis is with the word *kholo* which means 'big'. When a Sesotho speaker wants to refer to something which is enormous or huge, they will say *kholokholo* eaning 'big big' (to emphasize on the size of the thing). This is mainly because Sesotho does not have equivalent words for huge or enormous. Again, *seka* 'evaluate' can be reduplicated to give *seka-seka* which indicates 'a highly evaluative process or action.'

Sesotho equally uses reduplication to show frequency of repeated actions. For instance, the verb *otlaka* in Sesotho means 'beat up', when reduplicated it becomes *otlakaka* which means 'repeatedly beating someone'. It therefore shows that the action of beating is one that is frequently done. Another example is *pota* which means 'round', and which when reduplicated it becomes *pota-pota*

meaning 'round round'. This simply denotes an action of rounding which is repeated over and over, that is, rounding repeatedly. Similarly, the Sesotho word *sheba* means 'search' or 'look', and when reduplicated it becomes *shebasheba* meaning 'search search', that is, 'search over and over.' Another example of repeated action is with the use *of the word hape which means again. When this word is reduplicated, it becomes hape-hape* meaning 'again and again' as in the following example: *Ke tlile hape-hape* 'I came again and again.'

It has been shown by some researchers that reduplication can convey echoic expressions. According to Shanthi (nd) A Crosslinguistic Study of Reduplication, echoism is a distinctive form of expression which includes repetition of words for expressive effect. Echoic expressions are said to have both primary and secondary onomatopoeia. Within primary onomatopoeia, there is an attempt to direct imitation of naturally occurring sounds in sound symbolism or natural correspondence between sound and sense. In Sesotho, there are echoic expressions with primary onomatopoeia which demonstrate naturally occurring sounds as shown in the following examples:

Stem	Gloss	Reduplication	Gloss
Tseke	a flash	*tseketseke*	when lightening flashes or when sharp blades are flashed in the air
Soahla	emerge from	*Soahlasoahla*	when something is done on the side nowhere such as snakes moving in the grass
Fahla	sprinkling	*fahlafahla*	sprinkle when it is raining moderately
Jethe	jump off	*Jethe*	when a person ascends from a height
Kokolo	caw	*Kokolokolo*	a sound made by a cock

As Lee and Lee (2008, p. 671) point out, reduplication can also display a semantic effect by narrowing the effect of an action to 'a prototypical variant of a non-reduplicated form'. Thus, although the following Sesotho examples are not necessarily clear cases of reduplication, they however display a semantic effect in that they show a repeated action.

Stem	Gloss	Reduplication	Gloss
Hata	step	*hataka*	to walk with heavy steps
Rafola	throw weight around	*Rafolaka*	to walk all over people (with pride)
hoanka	cokcy	*hoanka ka*	to walk in a bossy manner
hloekisa	clean	*Hloekisisa*	to clean something so that it becomes spick and span
Fata	dig	*Fataka*	digging repeatedly

Finally, there are some reduplicated forms in Sesotho which are used to denote a temporal action. This function can be said to be employed in other to lessen the degree of importance of the action being referred to. For instance, the Sesotho word *lula* means 'sit'. When this word is reduplicated, it becomes *lula-lula* which does not mean *'sit sit' but rather 'sit for a while' (sit temporarily). Another example is *goga* which means 'to talk', but when reduplicated becomes *goga-goga* meaning 'to talk with someone for a while'. Similarly, the Sesotho word *bala* means 'read' but when reduplicated it becomes *bala-bala* meaning 'read for a while'.

The contrastiveness of reduplication in Sesotho

According to Ghomeshi et al. (2004, p. 307) Contrastive Reduplication is a phenomenon of colloquial English that involves the copying of words and sometimes phrases as in 'It's tuna salad, not SALAD-salad', or 'Do you LIKE-HIM-like him? Drawing on a corpus of examples gathered from natural speech, written texts, and television scripts, Ghomeshi et al. (2004) show that contrastive reduplication restricts the interpretation of the copied element to a 'real' or prototypical reading. Turning to the structural properties of the construction, they show that contrastive reduplication is unusual among reduplication phenomena in that whole idioms can be copied, object pronouns are often copied (as in the second example above), and inflectional morphology need not be copied. Thus the 'scope' of contrastive reduplication cannot be defined in purely phonological terms; rather, a combination of phonological, morphosyntactic, syntactic, and lexical factors is involved.

Sesotho, like English (Ghomeshi et al., 2004, p. 308) has contrastive reduplication where some speakers use it to contrast various concepts from others. In Sesotho, speakers can sometimes opt for reduplication as a means of contrasting one concept from another. An important fact about contrastive reduplication is that it puts an emphasis and most importantly a distinction between word meanings, showing literal as opposed to figurative meaning. A common occurrence of contrastive reduplication in Sesotho is a case where a speaker would want to distinguish liquid milk from powder milk. The Sesotho word for milk is *lebese*. When a speaker says *Ke batla lebese* – 'I want milk', he/she can be given any type of milk. In other to distinguish the type of milk that a speaker wants from others, he/she will say *Ke batla 'lebese-bese* which means 'I want milk milk'. In this situation, the speaker is trying to contrast 'milk in a liquid form' from 'milk in any other form'. The speaker is thus trying to specify the type of milk that he/she wants.

Another very common example is the case where Sesotho speakers use the partial reduplicated form of *lokhoa* meaning 'a white person' or European' to specify that they are actually referring to an 'English man'. In other words, when a Sesotho speaker wants to specify that he/she is referring to an 'English man', he/she will use the form *lekhoa-khoa*. When this form is used, the speaker is making it clear that he/she is not just referring to any 'European' or 'Whiteman', but rather to a specific one – one from the United Kingdom.

Speakers of Sesotho have the tendency of giving snacks (biscuits, groundnuts, simbas, etc.) to their visitors. When someone (a friend) visits another and is hungry and wants real food (as opposed to snacks), he/she will say *ke batla loji loji* which means 'I want food food (real food)'. This also shows genuinity in the person's request in that the person needs food because he/she is actually hungry.

Also, because Sesotho speakers love drinking beverages, when someone is asking for water he or she might be given a beverage. Thus, if someone really wants water, he/she will use reduplication to contrast water from other beverages. It is therefore common to hear a Sesotho speaker say *ke kopa metsi metsi* which means 'can I have some pure water?' In a similar manner, *nama* means 'meat' in Sesotho which can be extended to other forms of proteins like fish, chicken, etc. If someone is asking for meat and just says *nama*, he/she could be given any of

the proteins available. Therefore, in other to distinguish cow meat from other types of proteins a speaker will say *nama-nama* which simply means 'meat meat'. Another instance of contrastive reduplication in Sesotho is when speakers use reduplication to contrast something which is original or has high quality from one which is fake or of low quality. For instance, the Sesotho word for leather is *letflalo*. When a Sesotho speaker wants to distinguish real, genuine, or original leather from fake synthetic material, he/she will say *leflalo-flalo* which means 'leather leather' (real/genuine/original leather). Similarly, the Sesotho word *moriri* means 'hair'. To distinguish natural human hair from man-made hair, a Sesotho speaker will use partial reduplication and say *moriri-riri* which simply means 'hair hair' (real hair), as opposed to fake or manmade fibers.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at the concept of reduplication in Sesotho with focus on its usage while showing the role of this phenomenon in the enrichment of this language. It has been shown in this paper that Sesotho has both partial and complete reduplication. The length of the word and the part of speech are some of the elements that determine whether the word can be partially or totally reduplicated. Precisely, it was revealed that monosyllabic and disyllabic words undergo complete reduplication, while polysyllabic words undergo partial reduplication. The paper discusses reduplication in Sesotho with respect to the several functions that it has in this language. It was shown that reduplication functions in showing plurality, emphasis, diminutives, echoic expressions, completeness, originality, intensity, frequency, and temporal actions.

This paper has also revealed that Sesotho, like English (Ghomeshi et al., 2004, p. 308), has contrastive reduplication where some speakers use it to contrast one concept from another. In addition, the paper reveals that reduplication in Sesotho can be categorized into prototypical meaning, literal meaning, intensified meaning and value-added meaning based on the functions listed above.

The analyses in this paper equally reveal that reduplication has a widespread role for Sesotho speakers in their daily discourse, and exist functionally and pragmatically in all types of everyday Sesotho Language. The use of reduplication for expressive and aesthetic effect in Sesotho is very extensive, as it is widely used by the speakers of this language. It basically serves a semantic purpose.

As Shanthi (A Crosslinguistic Study of Reduplication n.d.) puts it, reduplication as a form is partly predictable and regular, corresponding to expected sound alternation patterns. However, despite the numerous researches on reduplication, languages still have specific patterns which can not be generalized and which some linguists consider as exceptions. This is supported by Waugh and Jakobson (1987, p. 17) who say that 'it is not possible to predict that each pattern will undergo the same alternation for all languages and variations are not deterministic.' Thus, there should not be any formulated rules of reduplication since this depends on the patterns of different individual languages. However, it is evident that reduplication is an interesting word play which serves to enrich any language and its people, as is the case with Sesotho.

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