

A CROSSLINGUISTIC STUDY OF REDUPLICATION

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Reduplication is an important phenomenon in language studies. Its linguistic forms has long been studied in terms of various formalist theories but there is a general consensus that the role of reduplication in English has been widely ignored. Recent corpus based studies have indicated that the usage of reduplication among English speakers is more widespread than assumed to be and needs in depth study. This article takes another look at the traditional forms of reduplication and current views on how they occur. It also discusses reduplication and repetition found in Malay and Tamil and compares them with English forms, in order to establish a pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Reduplication is a morphological process in which the root, stem of a word or a part of it is repeated. In many languages, reduplication is used in inflections to convey grammatical functions and in lexical derivations to create semantic forms. Tannen (1987) views it to be a limitless resource for individual creativity and the central linguistic meaning making strategy. While linguistic forms of reduplication at the lexical level have long been explored by formalist theories, Wang (2005) states that there is a general tendency among linguists to overlook its functions at the level of discourse. Rastall (2004) sees most reduplication forms that appear in the media as ephemeral in the sense that they tend to appear as word plays that do not 'enter the language' and stresses the need for studies to look at reduplications beyond their lexical level. The general level of ambivalence among linguists could be due to a preference to focus on the formal features of the language which deal with classical generative approaches, rather than look at forms that are theoretically awkward and irrelevant (Ghomeshi et.al, 2004). However, all is not lost, as there is a growing number of corpus based studies on reduplication that reveal the use of reduplication in English to be more widespread than generally believed, and its usage continuously expanding among North Americans, British and non native speakers of English (Wang, 2005; Ghomeshi et. al., 2004, Biber et. al, 1998; Conrad, 1999, Sinclair, 1997). In line with these arguments, this article attempts to look at select forms of reduplications as they appear in English, Malay (language spoken in South East Asia) and Tamil (language spoken in South Asia). It will also look at the semantic as well as functional features of reduplication at the lexical, semantic and phrasal level.