REDUPLICATION IN BAMYILI CREOLE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bamyili is a small government settlement near Katherine, in the
Northern Territory, Australia. At the time of the research being re-
ported, there were about 400 Aboriginal Australians in the community
and less than 100 white Australians. There were a number of tribal
groups represented (Dalabon, Maiali, Djauan, Rembarrnga, Gunei and
others) with no one group having clear dominance, and a dialect of
Australian Creole English (ACE) was the principal language of the adult
aboriginal population.

This language, Bamyili Creole (BC), appears to be moving very rapidly
toward Australian English (AE), in part due to the location of the com-
munity near a major town and in part due to the school program, es-
pecially the presence on the faculty of two aboriginal teachers who
speak excellent AE. Because of this rapid acculturation, there is a
wide span of competence, from that of old people who speak a range of
heavy creole varieties to that of children and young adults who switch
between AE (standard and non-standard) and light creole varieties.

The reduplication which occurs in BC is characterised by doubling
of the entire word with only minor phonological changes, and has been
labelled simple reduplication. This process occurs in pronouns, modi-
fiers, verbs and nouns, but the function differs across classes. In the
first three, reduplication is semantically motivated and encodes indi-
viduated sets or repeated actions. In the case of nouns, reduplication
is pragmatically motivated and occurs in speech directed to infants or
in lexical items that are particularly relevant for young children.

The semantically-motivated reduplication in certain respects is simi-
lar to that found in other English-based creoles, including Jamaican,

Krio and Pidgin English of West Cameroon. This resemblance could be
used to support claims of the genetic relationship of these languages.
In the case of verbs and adjectivals, similar functions have been
identified in aboriginal languages, which may constitute evidence of
the influence of the substratum languages. However, because of its
iconcity, reduplication appears to be an easily acquired process and
it has been developed even by groups which have not had previous experi-
ence with it (Washabaugh, forthcoming). The possibility must be con-
sidered that this iconcity is the only source of the process in the
language of Bamyili. The reduplication of nominals cannot be used to
support the genetic relationship of BC to other languages because it
conforms to that found in baby-talk registers in such diverse languages
as Japanese, Zuni, Comanche and English. It appears to be motivated
by a belief on the part of adults that doubling facilitates communi-
cation with becinning speakers. In the case of BC, this particular
function of reduplication is limited to nouns because this is the only
instance when it does not have semantic force.

2. THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES WHICH UNDERGO REDUPLICATION

A brief discussion of the forms which are affected by reduplication
is in order. First, in the verbal system there is a formal distinction
made between intransitive and transitive verbs. Transitive verbs
carry the enclitic im ∿ um, depending on whether the stem ends in a
front or back vowel, as follows:

1. Ai bin judum   kanggaru.
    I PST *shoot* + TRANS *kangaroo.*

    'I shot the kangaroo.'

2. De   baidim   yu langa am.
    they bite + TRANS *you on   arm.*

    'They bite you on the arm.'

The transitive/intransitive distinction has also been identified as
the source of a morphological distinction which occurs in the continuous
aspect (Sharpe and Sandefur, 1976). Intransitives undergo reduplication,
while transitives take the enclitic - bad

3. Dubala   bin raurau.
    they-DUAL PST *fight* + REDUP.

    'They were fighting.'

4. Im bianimbad   dad laii.[1]
    he hide + TRANS + CONT *that candy.*

    'He's hiding that candy.'

Past and future tenses are indicated by bin and gona respectively, and these forms precede the main verb. When bin follows the third person singular pronoun im, a phonological rule produces imin:

5. Imin   bogi langa rlba.
    he + PST *swim in   river.*
    'He swam in the river.'

6. Mibala gona go langa Katherine.
    we-INCL *gonna go to   Katherine.*
    'We're going to go to Katherine.'

Modifiers in BC are marked by the enclitics -wan or -bala when they do not precede the modified nominal:

7. Bla   im drej, im yelowan.
    PREP-GEN *he dress it yellow* + MOD.
    'Her dress is yellow.'

There is a strong tendency for the modifier to carry -bala if the referent is human; otherwise, -wan is used:

8. jadbala - *'sad'*

    naigidbala - *'naked'*

    bladwan - *'flat'*

    gugwan - *'ripe'*

Intensification in BC is achieved by lengthening the stressed vowel of the modifier or by using the suffix -is, which is related to the English superlative:

9. gu:dwan daga - *'very good food'*

    bigiswan noj - *'an enormous nose'*

Nouns occur in simple form only. Plurality may be indicated by a collective form such as mab *'mob'*, lad *'lot'*, or by the use of a numeral such as dubala *'two'*:

10. Nomo idim   jad lad beri.
    NEG   *eat* + TRANS *that lot berry*
    'Don't eat those berries.'

A nominal appositive often redundantly encodes the number of the subject:

11. Jad nəda lad bibəl   de bin go jare.
    that other lot people they PST *go that way*
    'Those other people went that way.'

3. REDUPLICATION IN PRONOUNS, ADJECTIVALS AND VERBALS

Simple reduplication performs related functions in the pronominal, adjectival and verbal systems of BC. In the pronoun system, the

reciprocal mijamed and the reflexive mijelb are both affected by this
process although only mijelb actually undergoes doubling. Mijamed has
been noted in other dialects of ACE, but it occurs only infrequently
in BC, as follows:

12. Yunbala   itim   mijamed.
     you - DUAL *eat* + TRANS *together.*
     'Eat it together.' ∿ *'Share it.'*

Mijelb is an invariant form which remains the same for all persons
and numbers. It is used with transitive verbs in sentences that are
structurally similar to their English counterparts:

13. Imin   lanim   mijelb bla   swim.
     he + PST *learn* + TRANS REFLEX *about swim.*
     'He taught himself to swim.'

14. De   bin megim   mijelb don.
     they PST *make* + TRANS REFLEX *stone.*
     'They made themselves stones.' ∿
     'They turned themselves into stones.'

The reflexive form can also be used with an intransitive verb without
the surface reflex of a preposition. Informants translated these
sentences with either *'alone'*, or a reflexive or reciprocal prep-
ositional phrase, the choice of which was determined by semantic
constraints imposed by the verb:

15. Mibala bin go mijelb.
     we   PST *go* REFLEX.
     'We went by ourselves.' ∿ *'We went alone.'*

16. De   bin toktok   mijelb.
     they PST *talk* + REDUP REFLEX.
     'They were talking among themselves.' ∿
     'They were talking to each other.'

17. Imin   toktok   mijelb.
     he + PST *talk* + REDUP REFLEX.
     'He was talking to himself.'

When there is a single occurrence of mijelb, the activity of the subject,
either an individual or a group, is seen as a single activity and is
translated accordingly, as the above examples show. The subject
represents a unit composted of one or more individuals performing the
activity in question as a group.

However, when the reflexive is reduplicated, the maning changes.
Consider the following examples:

18. De   bin toktok   mijelbmijelb.
     they PST *talk* + REDUP REFLEX + REDUP.
     'Each man was talking to himself.'

19. De   bin buḍum   miselbmiselb.[2]
     they PST *put* + TRANS REFLEX + REDUP
     'Each man put something aside for himself.'

20. Jad lad gel de   gejimbad   pləm mijelbmijelb.
     that lot girl they gather + TRANS + CONT *plum* REFLEX + REDUP.
     'Each girl is gathering plums for herself.'

Here the action of the verb is not predicated of the group but in terms
of each member of that group. Activities such as talking or food gather-
ing, which are normally collective activities, are being performed by
individuals who are acting strictly on their own behalf and are referred
to together by the subject only because of their physical proximity.

An apparent counter-example to this is the following sentence:

21. De   bin sitimbad   mibelbmijelb.
     they PST *sit* + TRANS + CONT REFLEX + REDUP.
     'Each man was sitting.' ∿ *'They were sitting with each other.'*
     ∿ *'They were sitting together.'*

One possible explanation for this sentence is that sitting is not an
activity whose normal performance involves a structured group. When
attention is focused on the individual's act of sitting, the semantic
force of the sentence is that of a reciprocal. This should be contrasted
with 16 above, where the single occurrence of mijelb has reciprocal
meaning.

The use of mijelb in a reduplicated as well as a single form permits
the encoding of both reciprocal and reflexive meaning with one lexical
item. It is quite likely that the scope of this item has made the use
of a separate reciprocal, mijamed, unnecessary in BC.

The following sentence types have been reported in New Guinea High-
lands Pidgin (Wurm, 1971:604):

22. [oli kamap wanpela wanpela]
     'They came one by one.'

23. [tupela i paitim wanpela wanpela]
     'They   hit   each other.'

Here we find the reduplicated impersonal pronoun encoding both indi-
vidual action and reciprocal action, so the pattern does not conform
closely with the one found in BC.

Using reduplication to encode the action of the individual within
the group is similar to the semantic force of reduplicated adjectivals,
which modify a noun that refers to a set of indivuated objects:

24. Ai bin lug olḍə grinwangrinwan   abul langa tri.
     I PST *look all* + *the green* + MOD + REDUP *apple in   tree.*
     'I saw all the green apples in the tree.'

25. Jad lad gilaj, de   jainijalniwan.
     that lot glass they shiny + REDUP + MOD.
     'Those glasses are shiny.'

In some environments, this may be the only encoding of plurality, as in:

26. Imin   gejim   lilwanlilwan   bad.
     he + PST *catch* + TRANS *little* + MOD + REDUP *bird.*
     'He caught some little birds.'

This function differs from that found in many other English-based creoles, where reduplication of adjectivals and adverbials intensifies or attenuates (with changes in the intonation pattern):[3]

27. Gullah (Turner, 1949)
         'ʃo'ʃo – *'very sure'*
         'dɛdɛ – *'exactly there'*

28. Jamaican Creole (Cassidy, 1957)
         pretty-pretty – *'very pretty'*
         flat-flat – *'extremely flat'*
         yallo-yallo – *'somewhat yellow, yellowish'*

29. Krio (Hancock, 1964)
         bigbig – *'very big'*

However, in West African Pidgin English, reduplication of adjectives as well as nouns can indicate plurality. Consider the following examples (Agheyisi, 1971:62):

30. Pesin-pesin ful dat rum.
     'People   fill that room.' ∿
     'That room is full of people.'

31. Meri get smol   pikin fo haos.
     'Mary has a small child at home.'

32. Meri get smol-smol pikin   fo haos.
     'Mary has small   children at home.'

Reduplication of adjectives in this language can also intensify, so doubled forms such as the one in 32 are ambiguous.

    In Alawa, an Australian language spoken south of the Roper River, reduplicated adjectives intensify (Sharpe, 1972):

33. yumuymař – *'very good'*

However, in Dyirbal, an Aboriginal language spoken on the Cape York Peninsula, reduplicated adjectivals refer to three or more things (Dixon, 1972):

34.   mIdimIdI - *'lots of little ones'*
      gulgIrigulgIri - *'lots of prettily painted men'*

Given the different meanings of reduplicated adjectivals in both other
English-based creoles and Aboriginal languages, it is difficult to
identify the source of this feature of BC.

In the verbal system, reduplication of intransitive verbs encodes
continuous, habitual or repeated actions:

35.   Dad   dog   Im   rənrən   garrim ship.
      that dog he ran + REDUP with   sheep.

      'That dog is running among the sheep.'

36.   Im   gedobgedob   dad   tri.
      he get + off + REDUP that tree.

      'He's climbing down from that tree.'

Forms which are translated as predicate adjectives in copular sen-
tences are problematical since they do not appear with the modifier
marker -wan and probably should be analysed as verbs. They are sem-
antically similar to iterative intransitives and are used to describe
a state repeated over time, resulting in a higher level of codability
in the creole than in English. They differ from the reduplicated
adjectivals discussed above because they can be used to describe one
individual:

37.   Im   drəngdrəng.
      he drunk + REDUP.

      'He's drunk, as usual.'

Occasionally the distinction between transitive and intransitive
verbs may be overridden and a verb that is both semantically and syn-
tactically transitive will be doubled to emphasise the repetition of
an action:

38.   Imin   gilimgilim   dad   dog.
      he + PST hit + TRANS + REDUP that dog.

      'He was beating that dog repeatedly.' ∿
      'He beat that dog repeatedly.'

39.   Im   gedin   fat, dad   gel,   im oldə taim   idimidim.[4]
      he getting fat that girl he all + the time eat + TRANS + REDUP.

      'That girl is getting fat (because) she's always eating.'

This would suggest that while there are syntactic constraints on re-
duplication, its semantic force may result in its extension to classes
of verbs that do not usually undergo this process.

A meaning difference between the single and double form can also be
seen in the complementation process. Consider the following sentences:

40. Im laiglm   boglbogl.
     he like + TRANS *swim* + REDUP

     'He likes to swim.' ∿ *'He likes swimming.'*

41. Im laigl bogl.[5]
     he like swim.

     'He wants to swim.'

In sentence 40, the speaker is claiming that the subject likes an ac-
tivity, and it is reasonable to assume that this activity is repeated
over time. Sentence 41, however, does not assert a preference for an
activity over an extended time period but rather states that the sub-
ject wants to swim at one particular moment. The habitual as opposed
to the isolated act is reflected in the double vs. the single form of
the complement.

The encoding of repeated activity by verbal doubling is also found
in go complements:

42. Im al go bllngbllngg.
     him eye go blink + REDUP.

     'His eye goes blink-blink.' (Used to describe a nervous tic.)

43. Dad men Im go grugldgrugld´ blkoj Im drəngg.
     that man he go crooked + REDUP *because he drunk.*

     'That man is staggering because he's drunk.'

In these examples, one event is perceived as consisting of the rep-
etition of one motion.

Capell (1962) has reported on the formation of the continuative or
frequentive aspect in Dalabon, one of the languages spoken at Bamyili.
This aspect refers to an action continued over a lengthy period, a
habit, or an activity repeated frequently. One of the two ways it may
be formed is by reduplication of the verbal base, with or without
glottalisation (Capell, 1962:117):

44. /gajlnlnln dubmldubml/
     'He kept on doing it.'

     /ga-na?na-n-l/
     'He keeps on looking, watches.'

This substratum language may have affected the use of reduplication in
BC. On the other hand, doubling is used for repeated actions in several
other creoles including Jamaican Creole and Pidgin English of West
Cameroon. The following sentence types have been found in the latter
(Schneider, 1966:36):

46. /I bin tlf-tlf ma kágow/
     'He repeatedly (continually) stole my belongings.'

47.   /i bin tíf ma ka'gow/
      'He stole my belongings.'

48.   /hǎ yu di tai-fés-tai-fés/
      'Why are you continually frowning?'

This usage differs from ACE in that it normally occurs in both transitive and intransitive verbs.

In pronouns, modifiers and verbals, reduplication can be related to an iconic representation of either the individual activity of members of a set, a set of individuated objects, or activities or states that are repeated, habitual or continuous. The fact that this process is iconically-based is supported by the following sentence:

49.   Im binyjibinyji.
      he belly + REDUP
      'She's pregnant.'

When asked why binyji was doubled, one Bamyili woman offered the explanation that it was because the woman's size increased by increments, which she indicated by moving her hands away from her abdomen in several motions.

4. REDUPLICATION IN THE NOMINAL SYSTEM

The function of reduplication in the nominal system contrasts radically with the functions described above. There is no iconic basis for these forms, i.e., they do not encode plurality but denote single objects: bragbrag *'frog'*, danggidanggi *'donkey'*, pəpəp *'puppy*, daldal *'doll'*. This is a departure from what occurs in other creoles where reduplication encodes plurality or is used as a means of differentiating homonyms. (See, for example, Bailey, 1966; Knowlton, 1964; Mühlhäusler, 1975; Todd, 1974.)

These forms occur almost exclusively in the language directed to infants and young children. The two exceptions found were debildebil *'devil'* and jilijili *'sugar-cane'*. The latter is a lexicalised form. There is no morpheme jili from which it can be derived. Debildebil, on the other hand, is a more difficult problem. One possible explanation may be that spirits and devils are a ubiquitous force at Bamyili and a source of concern and fear. The use of the doubled form from the baby-talk register may be an attempt to mitigate the force of a threatening concept. In any case, the use of this term in the mature form of the creole did not conform semantically to any iconic function. When plurality was indicated it was by the means of collective expressions such as jad lad *'that group'* or jad mab *'that mob'*, or by the use of a plural pronoun appositive, as shown in sentence 25.

Simple reduplication is widely distributed in baby-talk and has been reported in languages as diverse as Zuni (Kroeber, 1916), Comanche (Casagrande, 1964), Arabic, Marathi, Gilyak, English and Spanish (Ferguson, 1964), and Japanese (Sellner, 1975). It occurs in English primarily in terms used for toilet training, although *'mama'* and *'papa'* are certainly reduplicatives. Doubling may be at either the word or syllable level.

An informal attempt was made to discover the motivation for these forms in adult speech by asking speakers of English and Marathi why they thought these doubled words were used. There was no suggestion that this process was representational. Rather, it was identified as a psycholinguistic one related to either an imitation of the child's language by the adult and presumably an attempt to use his idiosyncratic code for communication, or an attempt to provide the child a better chance of decoding the adult utterance by presenting two occurrences of a syllable or a significant content word. It was felt this 'emphasised', or 'made it easier for the child'.[6] While reduplication in baby-talk is not usually confined to nouns, in BC it is because that is the only class in which it will not make a difference in meaning.

5. CONCLUSION

Nominal reduplication in BC is restricted to the baby-talk register, and this function can be identified in languages which bear no relationship whatsoever to BC. This usage must be explained as an attempt to simplify which is motivated by a common belief about communication strategies that are suitable for beginning speakers.

Reduplication in pronouns, verbs and modifiers can be related to the process of reduplication in both aboriginal languages and in other English-based creoles. It could therefore be advanced as evidence of both substratum influence and the monogenetic theory of creole origins. However, using reduplication as the critical test, just as much evidence can be gathered for a lack of relationship between BC and these two classes of languages. Given that there appears to be a large factor of iconicity in this usage, the most conservative position is that reduplication is one of the processes that are in the linguistic experience of the BC speech community and certain functions of reduplication, which can be related to the iconicity of the form, have been incorporated into the creole. To argue for the relationship of BC and another language which uses reduplication extensively would appear to be futile because of its heavy symbolic content and the relatively limited number of sematic functions it appears to have. Just as the baby-talk form of reduplication in BC is similar to that found in

other languages because of a widespread belief in its communicative effectiveness, so the semantically-motivated reduplication in the creole can be related to that in other languages because of its iconicity.

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N O T E S

1. The verb blamin *'hide'*, is derived from *'plant'*, providing insight into the hunter/gatherer's perception of agriculture.

2. Differences in orthography partially reflect the extreme phonological variation found at Bamyili.

3. One pre-adolescent girl at Bamyili described a dream she had as gudwangudwan drim, but this construction was not acceptable to adult speakers, who considered it an immature form.

4. Inchoatives such as *'getting'* are not treated as continuatives in the heavy varieties of BC and they carry no inflection. In lighter forms, the English suffix -in is being incorporated, resulting in three forms that correspond to the English imperfective.

5. The -i inflection of this verb has not been mentioned in the available reports on Australian creoles. It appears to be rare: this was the only occurrence in data collected over a three-month period. It may be related to the Neo-Melanesian predicate marker, which appears as a prefix on the verb of the constituent sentence (Hall, 1955).

6. Sellner (personal communication) has collected similar data for German and English.

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