

# Bahnar Reduplication<sup>1</sup>

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### **0. Introduction**

Bahnar has several reduplicative formations. Each expresses a distinct meaning. Often reduplication is used to describe some emotion—the speaker's reaction to a particular situation.

Bahnar reduplication occurs with one and two-syllable roots and with affixed stems. It occurs mainly with verbs, nouns, adjectives, and descriptive roots, but is able to occur to a lesser degree with other classes of roots.

The reduplicative formations consist of series of two, three, or four phonological words. The words within each series are related by partial or complete similarity of form.

Banker, E. 1964, "Bahnar reduplication", in *The Mon-Khmer Studies Journal*, vol. 1, pp. 119-134. ([purl.org/sealang/banker1964bahnar-reduplication.pdf](http://purl.org/sealang/banker1964bahnar-reduplication.pdf))

The first word of the series generally is a free root and can often occur in a different reduplicative formation, the root meaning remaining the same.

Incomplete reduplication acts only on the vowel or on the vowel and final consonant: the initial consonant or consonant cluster of the main syllable and the presyllable remain unchanged.

When prefixed stems reduplicate, the prefix is always omitted; e.g. *drâng* 'to answer', *pōdrâng* 'to cause to answer', *pōdrâng-drâng* 'to cause to answer then change to do something else immediately'.

The reduplication formulae will be expressed by the following symbols:

**C** = the initial consonant or consonant cluster in one-syllable words, and the presyllable and initial consonant or consonant cluster of the main syllable in two-syllable words. If the final consonant remains unchanged or has an irregular change it is also represented by **C**.

**X** = the vowel and final consonant of the main syllable when both are involved in a regular reduplication change.

**V** = the vowel when only the vowel is involved in the change or when the final consonant change is irregular.

**Cσ** = the presyllable formed by the reduplication of the initial consonant or consonant cluster of one-syllable words. When the word begins with a consonant cluster, either the entire

cluster or only the first consonant of the cluster may be reduplicated.

### 1. Contrary to expectation or desire

(CX → CX-Caĭ) meaning 'contrary to expectation or desire' has the widest range of applicability of the Bahnar reduplication types, being able to occur with all classes of roots except grammar markers such as connectives and prepositions. The reduplication occurs on the particular word being emphasized but the whole sentence partakes of the 'contrary to expectation' feeling. It can occur with one or two-syllable roots or derived stems.

<i>'bok</i> 'man'	<i>'bok-'baĭ</i> 'not worthy to be called a man, but is'
<i>gô</i> 'to wait'	<i>gô-gaĭ</i> 'don't want to wait, but will wait'
<i>tih</i> 'big'	<i>tih-taĭ</i> 'thought he would be small, but he is big'
<i>'wh</i> 'negative'	<i>'wh-'aĭ</i> 'thought he did (want it), but he didn't'
<i>kɔleng</i> 'to look at'	<i>kɔleng-kɔlaĭ</i> 'not worth looking at, but look anyway'
<i>totruih</i> 'describes good smell'	<i>totruih-totraĭ</i> 'didn't think it would smell good, but it does'

<i>pōdrōng</i> 'rich'	<i>pōdrōng-pōdrai</i> 'didn't think he would be rich, but he is'
<i>bobe</i> 'goat'	<i>bobe-bobaï</i> 'I don't want (to eat) goat, but I am'
<i>pōhrūk</i> 'to dress someone'	<i>pōhrūk-hrai</i> 'did not want to dress him, but did it'
<i>nōnoh</i> 'like that'	<i>nōnoh-naï</i> 'did not think it would be like that, but it was'
<i>jōpōm</i> 'to have done'	<i>jōpōm-pai</i> 'did not want to do it, but did'
<i>tōblah</i> 'to fight each other'	<i>tōblah-blai</i> 'did not think we would fight each other, but we did'

## 2. Displeasure, disgust, and anger

**2. 1.** (CX → CX-Cěl-CX-Cet) meaning displeasure, disgust, and anger occurs with all common and proper nouns. It is the only four-word reduplicative formation.

Following is a situational example of the use of this reduplicative formation :

A rabbit (*tōpai*) came into Rok's garden and ate Rok's sweet potato vines. When Rok discovered what had happened he said, « *tōpai-tōpěl-tōpai-tōpet* » 'That rabbit!'

Following are examples of noun roots and derived stems that occur in this reduplicative formation :

<i>Rök</i> 'name of person'	<i>Rök-Rěl-Rök-Ret</i>
<i>Kontum</i> 'name of place'	<i>Kontum-Kontěl-Kontum-Konet</i>
<i>kõ</i> 'dog'	<i>kõ - kěl - kõ - ket</i>
<i>'dak</i> 'water'	<i>'dak-'děl-'dak-'det</i>
<i>bonât</i> 'a dam'	<i>bonât-boněl-bonât-bonet</i>
<i>ponai</i> 'stirring stick'	<i>ponai-poněl-ponai-ponet</i>

An alternate form of the second word of this reduplication series is Cěu, but Cěl is preferred.

*topai - topěu - topai - topet* 'That rabbit !'

**2.2.** (CX→CX-Cêh) occurs with verb roots and prefixed verb stems. This reduplicative formation carries a negative meaning, 'don't perform that action ; why are you doing that?' An overtone of displeasure is directed either against the person spoken to or the person or thing spoken of.

Following are examples of verb roots and prefixed verb stems that occur in this reduplicative formation.

<i>gô</i> 'to wait'	<i>gô-gêh</i> 'don't wait, what are you waiting for?'
<i>tők</i> 'to go up'	<i>tők-têh</i> 'don't go up there, why are you going up there?'
<i>sa</i> 'to eat'	<i>sa-sêh</i> 'don't eat that stuff, it isn't worth eating'

*koleng* 'to look at'      *koleng-kolêh* 'don't look at that  
(drawing), it isn't  
any good'

*pohrük* 'to dress  
someone'      *pohrük-hrêh* 'don't dress him,  
what are you doing  
that for?'

*totôn* 'to hit each  
other'      *totôn-têh* 'don't hit each  
other, why do you  
do that?'

### 3. Consecutive action

CX → (CX-CX) or (Cσ CX), the 'consecutive action' reduplicative formation occurs with most verbs, giving them the meaning 'complete the action of the verb first, and then change to doing something else immediately'.

**3. 1.** When the consecutive action reduplicative formation occurs with one-syllable verb roots, the root may be completely reduplicated (CX-CX) or the initial consonant of the root may be reduplicated to form a presyllable (CσCX).

*sa* 'to eat'      *sa-sa*      'to eat first, and then do  
*sosa*      something else immediately'

*drâng* 'to answer'      *drâng-drâng* 'to answer first, and then  
*dơdrâng*      do something else  
*drodrâng*      immediately'

*tep* 'to sleep'      *tep-tep*      'to sleep first, and then do  
*totep*      something else immediately'

<i>plih</i> 'to change clothes'	<i>plih-plih</i>	'to change clothes first,
	<i>po<sup>o</sup>plih</i>	and then do something else
	<i>plo<sup>o</sup>plih</i>	immediately'
<i>chǒ</i> 'to tie up'	<i>chǒ.chǒ</i>	'to tie up first, and then do
	<i>chơchǒ</i>	something else immediately'
<i>năm</i> 'to go'	<i>năm-năm</i>	'to go first, and then do
	<i>nonăm</i>	something else immediately'

**3.2.** When the consecutive action reduplicative formation occurs with two-syllable verb roots or prefixed stems the the verb is completely reduplicated (CX-CX).

<i>kɔleng</i> 'to look at'	<i>kɔleng-kɔleng</i>	'to look at (book) first,
		and then (eat)'
<i>homet</i> 'to prepare'	<i>homet-homet</i>	'to prepare first, and then
		(go)'
<i>kotăp</i> 'of hen to lay egg'	<i>kotăp-kotăp</i>	'of hen to lay egg first,
		and then (cackle)'
<i>po<sup>o</sup>hrük</i> 'to dress someone'	<i>po<sup>o</sup>hrük-hrük</i>	'to dress someone first,
		and then (go)'
<i>totôn</i> 'to hit each other'	<i>totôn-tôn</i>	'to hit each other first, and
		then (make friends)'
<i>po<sup>o</sup>drâng</i> 'to cause to answer'	<i>po<sup>o</sup>drâng-drâng</i>	'to cause to answer
		first, and then (leave)'

**3.3.** A few of the one-syllable verb roots that occur in the consecutive action reduplicative formation occur in identical form

in one of the intensive reduplicative formations. (cf. 4. 1. 3. Verb)  
Where there would be ambiguity the consecutive action reduplication is generally followed by 'moï' 'first' plus an appropriate coordinate construction. 'Consecutive action' always refers to a future action, whereas the 'intensive' always describes a past action.

*ih chochă jên 'moï, na ba năm*

'you look-for-cons-act. money first, then we go'

*sư chochă jên wowăl*

'he look-for-intensive money not-find'

#### 4. Intensive

**4.1.** CX → (CX-CX) or (CσCX) the complete reduplicative formation occurs with nouns, adjectives, descriptives, temporals, and verbs, giving them an intensive meaning. Two-syllable words must reduplicate completely (CX-CX). One syllable words often reduplicate just the initial consonant to form a presyllable (CσCX).

**4.1.1.** Reduplicated nouns with this formation have the meaning «all of that particular item in a given situation».

*'bok* 'man'                      *'bok-'bok* 'all the men in a given place'

*'bσ'bok*

*kǒ* 'dog'                              *kǒ-kǒ* 'all the dogs in a given area'

*kσkǒ*

*bobe* 'goat'                              *bobe-bobe* 'all the goats in a given  
village'

*bônât* 'a dam'      *bônât-bônât* 'all the dams in a given area'

*pônai* 'stirring stick'      *pônai-pônai* 'all the stirring sticks in a given house'

**4. 1. 2.** Reduplicated adjectives with this formation have the meaning 'all of that particular type of thing in a given situation'.

*tih* 'big'      *tih-tih* 'all those big (trees) in the village'

*kok* 'white'      *kok-kok* 'all the white (flowers) on that plant'

*'lǒng* 'beautiful, good'      *'lǒng-'lǒng* 'all the good (food) on the table'.  
*'lǒ*'*lǒng*

*pōdrǒng* 'rich'      *pōdrǒng-pōdrǒng* 'all the rich (Bahnar) in an area'

*kōmǒ* 'dirty'      *kōmǒ-kōmǒ* 'all the dirty (clothes) in the wash'

**4. 1. 3.** Reduplicated descriptives, temporals, and verbs intensify the root action or characteristic. Some one-syllable roots, in addition to the (CX-CX) or (CǒCX) formations, can take a third formation by doubling the CǒCX to give (CǒCX-CǒCX).

## Verbs :

<i>chǒ</i> 'to tie up'	<i>chǒ-chǒ</i> 'to tie up very well'
	<i>chochǒ</i>
<i>nǎm</i> 'to go'	<i>nǎm-nǎm</i> 'to go and go with no'
	<i>nonǎm</i> 'destination in mind'
	<i>nonǎm-nǎm</i>
<i>bǎt</i> 'to know'	<i>bǎt-bǎt</i> 'to know a lot'
	<i>bobǎt</i>

## Temporals :

<i>hěi</i> 'earlier'	<i>hěi-hěi</i> 'much earlier'
	<i>hohěi</i>
	<i>hohěi-hěi</i>
<i>sǒ</i> 'long time ago'	<i>sǎ-sǎ</i> 'very long time ago'
	<i>sosǎ</i>
	<i>sǒ-sosǎ</i>
<i>kɔnh</i> 'later'	<i>kɔnh-kɔnh</i> 'much later'
	<i>kokɔnh</i>

## Descriptives :

<i>'dit</i> 'describes movement of chest while beathing'	<i>'dit-'dit</i> 'describes very rapid movement of chest while breathing quickly'
	<i>'dɔ'dit</i>
	<i>'dɔ'dit-'dit</i>
	<i>'dɔ-'dit-'dɔ-'dit</i>
<i>prâ</i> 'describes noise of coin being laid down'	<i>prâ-prâ</i> 'describes noise of many coins being laid down'
	<i>pɔ-prâ</i>

*chowɔ* 'describes slow walk of a sick person'      *chowɔ-chowɔ* 'describes very slow walk of sick person'

There are a number of descriptives which are found only in this reduplicated intensive form, never as a simple free root or in any other combination. Only descriptives have been found to occur like this, and they can all take both the (CX-CX) and (CɔCX) forms.

*nɨŋ-nɨŋ* 'describes something very heavy'  
*nɔnɨŋ*  
*dɛŋ-dɛŋ* 'describes being very near to performing  
*dɔdɛŋ* some action'  
*trɔn-trɔn* 'describes many things lined up one  
*tɔtrɔn* behind another'  
*giot-giot* 'describes the hop of a rabbit'  
*gɔgiot*  
*glāk-glāk* 'describes heavy laughter'  
*gɔglāk*  
*blūk-blūk* 'describes the bubbling of water when  
*bɔblūk* someone is drowning'  
*'bɯk-'bɯk* 'describes someone talking big'  
*'bɔ'bɯk*  
*yők-yők* 'describes someone doing something  
*yøyők* fast and with determination'

*hok-hok* 'describes feeling of great loneliness'  
*hohok*

**4.2.** (CVC → CVC-CaC-maC) and (CX → CX-Cônh-mônh), the three-word reduplicative formations, occur with descriptives giving them an intensive meaning. (CVC-CaC-maC) gives an extensive meaning whereas (CX-Cônh-mônh) gives a distributive meaning, e. g.

*hlêl* 'of a jar to be full'

*hlêl-hlal-mal* 'of many jars to be full'

*hlêl-hlôn-môn* 'of each of the many jars to be full'

Not all of the descriptive roots are able to have both an extensive and a distributive meaning.

The third word in these reduplication series can be omitted without altering the meaning.

**4.2.1.** (CVC-CaC-maC) 'extensive' occurs only with descriptives which have high or mid vowels. The vowel length of the root is retained in the reduplication, e. g.

*hônĥr* 'to be sweaty'    *hônĥr-hônĥr-mă* 'of many people to be sweaty'

*bobrâk* 'noise of people talking'    *bobrâk-bobrăk-măk* 'noise of many people talking'

*blu* 'of a few people to arrive'    *blu-bla-ma* 'of many people to arrive'

*grôk* 'noise of stomach rolling'      *grôk-grak-mak* 'noise of stomach rolling many times'

*tobŭl* 'of person to sleep curled up'      *tobŭl-tobăl-măl* 'of many people to sleep curled up'

*soluě* 'to describe evil-looking face'      *soluě-soluă-mă* 'to describe many evil-looking faces'

**4.2.2.** (CX-Cônh-môn) 'distributive' occurs with descriptives which have any vowel except *ô*. There is no length distinction on *ô* in Bahnar so the vowel length of the root is not reflected in the reduplication.

*hônhr* 'to be sweaty'      *hônhr-hônôn-môn* 'of each of the many people to be sweaty'

*bôbrâk* 'noise of people talking'      *bôbrâk-bôbrôn-môn* 'noise of each group of many people talking'

*tobŭl* 'of person to sleep curled up'      *tobŭl-tobôn-môn* 'of each one of many people to sleep curled up'

*soluě* 'to describe evil-looking face'      *soluě-soluôn-môn* 'to describe each evil-looking face of the many'

*'bô'blŏ* 'to describe lazy person'      *'bô'blŏ-'bô'blôn-môn* 'to describe each of many lazy people'

*hohah* 'of girls laughing and giggling'      *hohah-hohôn-môn* 'to describe each of many girls laughing and giggling'

*molueng* 'to describe drunk person'      *molueng-moluôn-môn* 'to describe each of many drunk persons'

**4. 3.**  $(CV_1C \rightarrow CV_1C-CV_2C)$  and  $(CV_1C_1 \rightarrow CV_1C_1-CV_2C_2)$ , incomplete reduplicative formations, occur with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and descriptives, giving them an intensive meaning.

Most of the roots which can take this reduplicative formation cannot take other reduplicative formations.

If the root is one syllable, the already intensive formation can be further intensified by reduplicating the initial consonant of each word in the formation to form presyllables, e. g. *hěch* 'small broken piece', *hěch-hoch* 'many small broken pieces', *hohěch-hohoch* 'very many small broken pieces'.

**4. 3. 1.** In  $(CV_1C \rightarrow CV_1C-CV_2C)$  only the vowel changes. This change can be predicted on the basis of vowel height. The high and mid vowels change to *a*, and the low vowels change to *o*. The length of the high and mid vowels is retained on the *a*, but the length of the low vowels is not reflected on the *o*. It seems possible that originally the *o* was *ô*, which would account for the lack of vowel length reflection. (cf. 4.2.2.); e. g.

<i>bobât</i> 'to spend money unwisely'	<i>bobât-bobăt</i> 'to spend a lot of money unwisely'
<i>űr</i> 'noise of car'	<i>űr-ăr</i> 'noise of many cars'
<i>toring</i> 'a group of villages'	<i>toring-torang</i> 'many groups of villages'
<i>hek</i> 'to tear'	<i>hek-hok</i> 'to tear many things'
	<i>hohok-hohok</i> 'to tear many, many things with a vengeance'

*hăt* 'to do hurriedly' *hăt-hot* 'to do very hurriedly, flutter around'

**4.3.2.** In  $(CV_1C_1 \rightarrow CV_1C_1-CV_2C_2)$  both the vowel and final consonant change. There seems to be no regularity or predictability to either the vowel quality, the vowel length, or the consonant change.

<i>trăp</i> 'heavy'	<i>trăp-trîn</i> 'very heavy'
<i>kola</i> 'a scar'	<i>kola-kolěch</i> 'many scars'
<i>krěnh</i> 'fragile'	<i>krěnh-kroh</i> 'very fragile'
<i>holěnh</i> 'to lie'	<i>holěnh-holeo</i> 'to lie very much'
<i>iě</i> 'small'	<i>iě-ioch</i> 'very small'
<i>preh</i> 'to hit at'	<i>preh-prěng</i> 'to hit at many times'
<i>gleh</i> 'to be tired'	<i>gleh-glĭn</i> 'to be very tired'
<i>tih</i> 'large'	<i>tih-tap</i> 'very large'
<i>sōu</i> 'offspring'	<i>sōu-se</i> 'many offspring'
<i>hli</i> 'to fear'	<i>hli-hlot</i> 'to fear very much'
<i>golor</i> 'to roll something'	<i>golor-gole</i> 'to roll something a lot'
<i>tôm</i> 'enough'	<i>tôm-těch</i> 'everything'
	<i>totôm-totěch</i> 'intensively everything'

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1. I am indebted to Maxwell Cobbe for help in locating previous studies on the reduplication systems of other Southeast Asian languages.

Of particular interest were the following :

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