A Complicating Distortion of Syntactic Categories: The Case of Reduplication in Thai

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An interesting syntactic problem in Thai is the complicating distortion of a number of syntactic categories due to a linguistic process called reduplication. Many Thai linguists and grammarians such as Mahathanasin (1985), Udommaneesuwat (1983), Thichinphong (1980), Songwithaya, A. & Songwithaya, N. (1976), Bruminhen (1964) and Somphong (1967) have worked on reduplication of words in Thai. Some of them have attempted to analyze the relation of sound and meaning of words undergoing reduplication. However, no linguists have worked on the analysis of the relation of sound, meaning, and syntax. In this study, I propose that reduplication is not only a linguistic process affecting words but also a process that affects phrases and clauses or sentences. I will show the relationship between sound, meaning, and syntax. This relationship is quite crucial to the present analysis of reduplication in Thai. Based on this proposal, I will address some critical problems in syntax from the point of view of reduplication in Thai.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section 1: The Notion of Reduplication; Section 2: Analysis; Section 3: Some Syntactic Problems; and Section 4: Conclusion. Note that the sequence of symbols ´ ´ represents the extra high tone.

THE NOTION OF REDUPLICATION

The linguistic process called "reduplication" has been defined in similar ways by most linguists and grammarians. Crystal (1985) defines it as a term in morphology for a process of repetition whereby the form of a prefix/suffix reflects certain phonological characteristics of the root. This process may be found in Greek. In English the nearest one gets to this is in "reduplicative compound" words, such as *helter-skelter* and *shilly-shally*. Reduplication is also found in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit in the formation of various verb forms, e.g., Latin *cano* 'I sing' and, with reduplication of the initial syllable, *cecini* 'I sang, I have sung.' [1]

Langacker (1972) considers reduplication rules as a class of insertion rules involving a phonological process. Reduplication rules have the effect of copying a root, syllable, or segment and attaching it to the original segment. Normally a reduplicated element is added at the beginning of a form, but it may also be added at the end or somewhere in the middle.

According to Anderson (1985), reduplication, which consists of the copying of part (or all) of the affected stem, could be treated either as a special sort of affixation or as a type of stem modification. Reduplication most typically affects the leftmost portion of the stem. The material copied may consist of (1) the initial consonant (or cluster), perhaps reinforced by a constant vowel; (2) the initial c_0v; (3) the entire first syllable;

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[1] Peter Freeouf (personal communication).

or perhaps (4) the entire root. Unlike other grammatical processes, reduplication seems always to reflect one of a fairly limited set of categories.

Udommaneesuwat's (1983) reduplication covers two-syllable words which are classified into two types: (1) words that contain one independent syllable, and (2) those with two dependent syllables. For the former, either one or both syllables undergo reduplication. In cases where one syllable is reduplicated the meaning of the output must be related to that of the unreduplicated syllable. In the second type, both syllables must show some kind of vowel harmony, and the two syllables must co-occur to yield the meaning.

For the present study, "reduplication" is defined as a linguistic process involving such grammatical units as words, phrases, and clauses (or sentences). This means that a word, a phrase, and a clause (or a sentence) can all be reduplicated. One prominent characteristic of reduplication under investigation is productivity. That is, all members of a category can undergo this process. The way they are reduplicated is clearly uniform regardless of their type. Another property of reduplication is that the process is optional. This means that such units are themselves grammatical without undergoing the process, and they are also grammatical when reduplicated. What makes them different are the resulting phonetic forms as well as the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties.

THE ANALYSIS

Based on the definition and characteristics of reduplication proposed above, reduplication can be divided into two main types: simple and complex. Both are optional. Let us first examine some examples of simple and complex reduplications in items (1a-d). (1b) shows the simple reduplication of the word *dam* 'black,' while (1c) and (1d) show the complex reduplication of the same word.

(1)a. dam
    'black'
  b. dam-dam
    'in the black tone'
  c. dám-dam
    'very black'
  d. dam-dám-dam
    'very black'

Here I analyze as bases the first element *dam* in the sequence *dam-dam*, the first element *dám* with the high tone in the sequence *dám-dam* and the first element *dam* in the sequence *dam-dám-dam*. The second and third elements in these sequences are analyzed as the reduplicants. One motivation for this analysis is the modified-modifier pattern, or the left-to-right order, which is the main word order in Thai. For instance, a noun precedes an adjective; a preposition occurs before a noun phrase, a verb before a noun phrase complement and its modifier, and an adverb before an intensifier, etc.

If we do not treat the first element of each sequence as the base, we will face a problem with the form *dám*, the second element in the sequences (1b) and (1c) as well

as the forms *dám-dam* which are the second and third elements of the sequence in (1d). Here the form *dam* exists in the Thai lexicon, while the form *dám* does not. Based on the modified-modifier pattern in Thai, it is not plausible to analyze the grammatical form *dam* in the second or the third position of the sequence as the base. Nor is it logical to allow two bases in the sequence only for the sake of the grammatical form of the word. The simplest way of analysis in this circumstance is to treat the first element of the sequence, regardless of the form, as the base, leaving the rest as the reduplicant(s). In this way the base appears either as a grammatical form (or the form which exists in the lexicon) or as an ungrammatical form, depending on the types of reduplication. And so does the reduplicant.

In this study, the base can be a word, a phrase, or a clause/sentence. A word can be a monosyllabic or a polysyllabic word, or alliterative (that is, a word with two or more syllables that rhyme or are harmonious in vowels, or in vowel and final consonant, or in initial consonants). This includes compound words and lexical idioms. Idioms in the form of a word, phrase, and clause can all undergo reduplication.

Due to limited space, I will not discuss in detail the semantics of reduplication here. Shown in the following sections are distributions of simple and complex reduplication.

Simple Reduplication (SR)

When a grammatical unit undergoes SR, the reduplicant is completely identical to the original form or the base. This means that the reduplicant contains the same onset, rhyme and tone as the original. SR is more normal for words than for phrases and clauses. Words that undergo this process yield several types of meanings. For example, adjectives undergoing SR have the meaning 'the X type of something'; noun classifiers undergoing SR indicate individuality of the nouns they modify. SR of manner adverbs usually occurs in imperative sentences to mark commanding or ordering. This type of reduplication marks emphasis on phrases and clauses to be reduplicated.

Sentence (2a) shows an occurrence of the bisyllabic word *nâarák* 'nice' without reduplication. SR of this adjective yields the meaning 'the X type of person,' as shown in sentence (2b).

(2a) dæŋ   cʰɔ́ɔp kʰon   nâarák
     Daeng like   person nice
     'Daeng likes nice people.'

(2b) dæŋ   cʰɔ́ɔp kʰon   nâarák-nâarák
     'Daeng likes a nice type of people.'

Sentence (3) shows SR of a verb phrase. When a verb phrase undergoes SR, as illustrated in (3b), it yields an emphatic meaning.

(3a)   cʰán mây cʰɔ́ɔp kʰáw ləy
      I   not like   he   at all
     'I don't like him at all.'

(3b) cʰán mây cʰɔ́ɔp kʰáw ləy–mây cʰɔ́ɔp kʰáw ləy
     'I really don't like him at all.' (emphasis)

Complex Reduplication (CR)

Complex reduplication is divided into three types according to phonological properties. It includes Complex Reduplication 1 (CR1), with a vowel change; Complex Reduplication 2 (CR2), with a change of vowel and final consonant; and Complex Reduplication 3 (CR3), with a tone change. These changes occur in the final portion of a grammatical unit, that is, in the final syllable of a word, in the final syllable of the last word of a phrase, or in the final syllable of the last word of a clause. All grammatical units can undergo CR1, CR2, and CR3.

It is noted that CR1 and CR2 are interchangeably used because they convey a similar meaning. A speaker uses CR1 or CR2 to express her feeling towards something which she views as uninteresting, dull, unimportant, or common. CR3, on the other hand, is used to mark emphasis or intensification. The three types of reduplication are often used in a particular context or in a responsive conversation. Nonlexical units such as phrases, clauses or sentences which undergo CR are normally short. A clause thus includes a simple subject, a verb, and a simple complement.

CR1 and CR2 are often used by both male and female speakers, while CR3 is often used by female speakers, especially the young. Men rarely use CR3 because they think that it shows some female characteristics of using the language.

Complex Reduplication (CR1)

When a grammatical unit undergoes CR1, the base remains the same while the reduplicant undergoes a vowel change. Here a vowel in the final syllable of a word or of the last word of the unit must be either /ə(ə)/ or /æ(æ)/; /ə/ or /æ/ if the original vowel is short, and /əə/ or /ææ/ if the original vowel is long. Very often the /ə(ə)/ sound is preferred by a speaker to the /æ(æ)/ sound, even though the latter is interchangeably used. Sentence (4b) illustrates CR1 of the NP còtmǎay 'letter.' In this situation a speaker shows that what he is talking about is not important or interesting. Sentence (4a) contains the basic or unmodified meaning.

(4a) kʰáw kʰɯ̌an còtmǎay tʰúk wan
     he   write letter   every day
     'He writes a letter every day.'
(4b) kʰáw kʰɯ̌an còtmǎay–còtmǽæ tʰúk wan
     kʰáw kʰɯ̌an còtmǎay–còtmə̌ə tʰúk wan
     'He writes a letter (something like a letter)
     every day. (But what he writes is not interesting for me.)'

(5b) shows CR1 of the VP faŋ pleeŋ 'listen to music' in (5a), which contains the basic meaning.