

REDUPLICATION IN THE M'NONG LANGUAGE

Dinh Le Thu

Viet Nam National University

Ho Chi Minh City

0 Introduction

The M'ngong language belongs to the South Bahnaric language subgroup of Mon-Khmer, part of the greater Austroasiatic language family. M'ngong is native to the southern and southwest parts of Dak Lak province and the northern part of neighboring Song Be and Lam Dong provinces, all in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The M'ngong language is spoken by 67,062 people in Viet Nam (1989 census). This paper on morphological reduplication in M'ngong is based on the dialect of M'ngong Preh spoken in the villages of Cu Jut and Dakgan in Dak Lak province.

1 The Forms of Reduplication in the M'ngong Language

The M'ngong language has several forms of reduplication. Each form expresses a distinct meaning and follows a phonetic rule. Reduplication in M'ngong is used in some of the following ways: to describe an emotion or an attitude of the speaker in a particular situation, to indicate the degree or the characteristic nature of the base word, or to express onomatopoeia, among others. The reduplicants often consist of either a series of two-syllable or four-syllable units, though some three-syllable units do occur.

1.1 *Two-Syllable Constructions*

The first (or the second) syllable of a two-syllable series generally is a free root and does not change as reduplication occurs, and its meaning also remains the same. This reduplication occurs mainly with adjectives, verbs, nouns and descriptive roots, but it also occurs to a lesser degree with other classes of roots. In onomatopoeic words, the reduplicated syllable has no lexical meaning. There are two types of reduplication which form two-syllable constructions: total and partial reduplication.

1.1.1 Total Reduplication

Total reduplication involves the complete repetition of the original free root. The free root has a syllable structure which falls into one of three structural types: an open syllable (ending in a vowel), a sonorant syllable (ending in a nasal or semivowel), or a closed syllable (ending in a unreleased stop). The following are examples.¹

¹ The script used in this paper is based on the Vietnamese Quoc Ngu alphabet, commonly used to represent other indigenous languages spoken in Vietnamese. Many consonants and are pronounced as they are in English, while the vowels used in this paper require some explanation: 'a' is IPA /a/, 'â' is /ɤ/, 'e' is /e/, 'ê' is /e/, 'i' is /i/, 'o' is /ɔ/, 'ô' is /o/, 'ô'' /ɤ:/, 'u' is /u/, 'u'' /i/. Among the notable exceptions for consonants, 'ng' is /ŋ/ and 'nh' is /ɲ/. Long vowels can be indicated by a line above.

- a) Open syllables: *bro' bro'* 'continuously', *bru bru* 'homeless, neglected', *mhao' mhao'* 'every afternoon'
- b) Sonorant syllables: *blao blao* 'stagger, reel', *iom iom* 'quietly, softly', *blun blun* 'very fast', *hol hol* 'smoulder', *vir vir* 'mooching around/moping about', *đưng đưng* 'flame, blaze'
- c) Closed syllables: *bik bik* 'thumps', *groc groc* 'flock', *hop hop* 'open the mouth wide, gape'

The initial consonant of a reduplicated syllable can be a single consonant or a consonant cluster. The combinations of bilabial voiced stops with liquids such as: [br], [bl], [-br], [-bl] and the single consonant [r] are particularly common in the reduplicated root. Other consonant clusters found in reduplicated forms include: [gr], [gl], [kr], [kl], [dr], [pl], [tr], [nd], [n'h], [r'h], among others.

1.1.2 Partial Reduplication

This reduplication can be divided into several types: (a) changes of the initial consonant, (b) changes of the vowel, (c) changes of the final consonant, and (d) changes of both the vowel and final consonant. Each type is discussed and illustrated below.

(A) Changing of the initial consonant:

In this construction, the vowel and the final consonants of the syllable remain unchanged, while the initial consonant or consonant cluster is changed according to a particular pattern. For the majority of the data fitting this form, the initial consonant of the first syllable is a liquid, either an [r] or an [l], and the second syllable can begin with any consonant. The following are examples of these alternations.

- r - b** : *rik bik* 'swarm, teem - insects', *rôc bôc* 'whisper', *rok bok* 'in a hushed tone'
- r - c** : *riř cřp* 'sound of small bird- tweet tweet', *rřc cřc* 'bend over some work'
- r - d** : *rup dup* 'of house : lowly, shabby', *run dun* 'stooping'
- r - h** : *raâng haâng* 'scorching, burning-hot', *rôk hok* 'wait'
- r - kh** : *rik khik* 'giggle', *rok khok* 'roar of laughter'
- r - ng** : *rôk ngok* 'swarming, teeming (with people)', *rôc ngoc* 'clean, tidy'
- r - s** : *rap siap* 'rustling of leaves, of gravel', *rap suap* 'rustle, rustling'
- r - bl** : *rip blip* 'shine, glitter of eyes', *rêp blêp* 'twinkle'
- r - kl** : *ruk kluk* 'silence of nature', *răk klăk* 'in silence, quiet of people'
- l - h** : *lřt hřt* 'flying low', *lřq hřq* 'sound of agreement'
- l - v** : *lah vah* 'rock', *lřng vřng* 'supple of movements'

(B) Changing of the vowel

(B.1) Change in the pitch only: This change can be predicted for the majority of the data on the basis of the vowel pitch. The tongue height never changes between the first and second syllable, but the pitch always changes from high to low between the two syllables. The change can also be considered as a change from a front vowel to a back vowel with the same tongue height. This applies equally whether the vowel is long or short. Some examples follow.

a. Alternation between long vowels [i-u] and short vowels [ĩ – ũ]:

i - u : *plip plup* ‘chubby, plump’, *hik huk* ‘untidy’, *ntik ntuk* ‘be hanging in the air’,
plih pluh ‘wag’, *bit but* ‘shake, vibrate’

ĩ - ũ : *dĩn dũn* ‘stooping, bending’, *cĩt cũt* ‘sound of pounding rice’, *bĩt bũt* ‘smile, smiling’

b. Alternation between long vowels [e-o] and short vowels [ě-ỗ]:

e - o : *en on* ‘feeble, weak’, *lo le* ‘be abandoned, helpless’, *ceq coq* ‘timid; abashed’,
eng ong ‘be furious; irascible’

ě - ỗ : *ěm ỗm* ‘threaten’, *krěp krỗp* ‘noise of ox cart running on stone-road’

(B.2) Change in the tongue height only: This is a second type of vowel change between the high and close vowels [i, u] and the one low and open vowel [a]. Some examples for the alternation [i-a] and [u-a] follow.

i - a : *brim bram* ‘closely-planted’, *mhip mhap* ‘very dirty, soiled’, *gik gak* ‘strut; go slowly like an important person’, *suít suát* ‘dark, gloomy’

u - a : *hur har* ‘thirst for, hunger for’, *bru bra* ‘be dispersed, flee in all directions’, *rju rja* ‘stay too long, linger’, *ruq raq* ‘drip drop’

(C) Changing of the final consonant

In this case, the final consonant of the first syllable must be a voiceless stop: [p], [t], [c], [k], [q] or a voiceless glottal fricative [h]. The final consonant occurring in the second syllable is either a liquid [l] or [r], a nasal [m], [n], [nh], [ng], or it is zero.

p - l	:	<i>nỏp nỏl</i> ‘durable, be lasting’
c - l	:	<i>khoc khol</i> ‘tattered, in rags’, <i>khuc khul</i> ‘beat about the bush’
k - l	:	<i>hok hol</i> ‘in a mess’, <i>hik hil</i> ‘playful, mischievous’
p - r	:	<i>blip blir</i> ‘boast, talk big’
t - r	:	<i>ndết ndêr</i> ‘helpless’
c - r	:	<i>ngắc ngắr</i> ‘nimble, briskly’, <i>hộc hờr</i> ‘panic-stricken’
k - r	:	<i>gok gor</i> ‘for a long time’
p - ng	:	<i>brip bring</i> ‘a very large quantity’
t - ng	:	<i>hit hing</i> ‘burning, hot’
c - m	:	<i>grắc grắm</i> ‘honest, good’
q - n	:	<i>luq lun</i> ‘grow a paunch’, <i>dhiq dhin</i> ‘fat, corpulent’
h - nh	:	<i>bhioh bhionh</i> ‘have the gift of the gab, loquacious’, <i>jờh jờnh</i> ‘uneven’
h - l	:	<i>bhiah bhial</i> ‘dripping wet’
t - zero	:	<i>vết vê</i> ‘confused, embarrassed’, <i>kut ku</i> ‘cuckoo’

Of the different combinations listed above, the most common pairs found are [k-l], [c-l], [c-r], [t-r]. These account for 51.8% of all final consonant changes found in our field work data.

(D) *Changing of both the vowel and the final consonant*

There seems to be no regularity or predictability to either the vowel quality or the final consonant change. However, there is a tendency for the second syllable to be more sonorant than the first syllable.

blăk blo ‘wander’, *răk rong* ‘take care’, *roh rai* ‘disperse’
blênh blu ‘appear and disappear’, *laq lêng* ‘roll of a drum’

One syllable words can also reduplicate just the initial consonant to form a presyllable. The first syllable is more sonorant than the second syllable.

<i>bok</i> ‘white’	>	<i>bơbok</i> ‘off white, whitish’
<i>duh</i> ‘hot’	>	<i>dơduh</i> ‘luke warm’
<i>nhot</i> ‘tough’	>	<i>nhơnhot</i> ‘slightly tough’
<i>kot</i> ‘strong, thick’	>	<i>kakot</i> ‘a little strong/ thick’

1.2 Four-syllable constructions

Four-syllable constructions occur with two-syllable free roots, which may be completely reduplicated or partially reduplicated. The reduplication formula is expressed with the following symbols.

A- one syllable in the root
 B- a second syllable in the root different from A
 A’- partial reduplication of A
 B’- partial reduplication of B
 x- a syllable, completely different from A or B
 x’- partial reduplication of X

(A) **AB > ABAB** (A two-syllable root is reduplicated completely.)

<i>mbrêh nhaâp</i> ‘scintillate’	>	<i>mbrêh nhaâp mbrêh nhaâp</i>
<i>blê blêp</i> ‘shine’	>	<i>blê blêp blê blêp</i>
<i>du hũ</i> ‘in turn’	>	<i>du hũ du hũ</i>

(B) **AB > AABB** (A and B are both free roots, each one is reduplicated completely. AA always occurs before BB.)

<i>kho ao</i> ‘clothes’	>	<i>kho kho ao ao</i>
<i>ur sai</i> ‘wife and husband’	>	<i>ur ur sai sai</i>
<i>en on</i> ‘mincing’	>	<i>en en on on</i>
<i>gơm ngơi</i> ‘laugh and speak’	>	<i>gơm gơm ngơi ngơi</i>
<i>guq dơk</i> ‘sit and stand’	>	<i>guq guq dơk dơk</i>

(C) **AB > ABAB’** (AB is a two-syllable compound word.)

<i>êng ang</i> ‘strange’	>	<i>êng ang êng rang</i>
<i>cê lết</i> ‘small, unimportant’	>	<i>cê lết cô lanh</i>