

PEDAGOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF USING REDUPLICATIVE UNITS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract: The present article examines the pedagogical and methodological foundations of employing reduplicative units in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. Reduplication - the full or partial repetition of a linguistic form to create a new lexical or expressive unit - is a productive yet under-exploited resource in the English language classroom. The study clarifies the linguistic nature and typology of English reduplicatives (exact, rhyming and ablaut formations such as *bye-bye*, *hocus-pocus*, *zig-zag*), reviews the existing scholarly literature, and proposes a methodological framework for integrating these units into vocabulary, pronunciation and communicative instruction. The findings suggest that the phonological salience, rhythmic patterning and emotional colouring of reduplicatives make them an effective mnemonic and motivational tool, particularly at the elementary and pre-intermediate levels.

Keywords: reduplication, reduplicative units, English language teaching, vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, communicative competence, methodology

Introduction

The teaching of a foreign language is not confined to the transmission of grammatical rules and isolated vocabulary; it is, above all, the cultivation of an ability to perceive, reproduce and creatively manipulate the living forms of speech. Among the many resources that a teacher of English may draw upon, reduplicative units occupy a peculiar and often overlooked position. These are words and expressions formed by repeating a phonological form either exactly or with a slight modification, as in tick-tock, criss-cross, so-so, chit-chat or teeny-weeny. Despite their apparent simplicity, such formations concentrate in themselves a remarkable density of phonetic, semantic and pragmatic information, and this density makes them a valuable, if underestimated, instrument of language pedagogy.

In classical word-formation theory, reduplication has long been recognised as a distinct morphological process standing alongside affixation and compounding.¹ Its systematic description in English begins with the observation that repetition is not

¹Marchand, H. The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation. München: C. H. Beck, 1969. – P. 429–439.

random noise but a rule-governed device capable of producing new lexemes with predictable structural and semantic properties. The relevance of this observation for the classroom is considerable: if reduplication is rule-governed, then it can be taught; and if it is phonologically salient, then it can be remembered.

The aim of the present article is to establish the pedagogical and methodological foundations for using reduplicative units in the teaching of English. Three research questions guide the discussion. First, what is the linguistic nature and typology of English reduplicatives, and why are they didactically significant? Second, what does the existing scholarly literature say about their acquisition and instructional value? Third, through what concrete methodological procedures can these units be integrated into vocabulary, pronunciation and communicative practice? By answering these questions, the study seeks to transform an interesting but marginal linguistic phenomenon into a principled component of foreign-language methodology.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation for the study of reduplication as a doubling operation in morphology was consolidated in the influential monograph by Inkelas and Zoll, who argued that reduplication is best understood not as mere phonological copying but as the morphological doubling of a semantic and syntactic feature.² This distinction is pedagogically important, because it allows the teacher to present reduplicatives as meaningful units rather than as accidental sound play, and thereby to connect their form to their function.

A landmark contribution to the description of English reduplication is the study of so-called contrastive focus reduplication, in which the doubling of a word signals its prototypical reading, as in the well-known "salad-salad" analysis.³ In such constructions the repeated element ("a salad-salad", "Do you like-like him?") is used to distinguish a genuine or central instance from a peripheral one. For learners of English, exposure to this pattern is valuable precisely because it reveals a productive pragmatic mechanism that native speakers deploy intuitively but that textbooks rarely address.

Earlier descriptive work had already catalogued the rich inventory of English reduplicative words and proposed a tripartite classification into exact, rhyming (or rhyme-motivated) and ablaut reduplicatives.⁴ Exact reduplicatives repeat the base without change (goody-goody, night-night); rhyming reduplicatives alter the initial consonant (hocus-pocus, hoity-toity); and ablaut reduplicatives change the internal vowel, most commonly from a high front vowel to a low back one (zig-zag, ding-dong,

²Inkelas, S., Zoll, C. Reduplication: Doubling in Morphology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. – P. 6–12.

³Ghomeshi, J., Jackendoff, R., Rosen, N., Russell, K. Contrastive Focus Reduplication in English (The Salad-Salad Paper) // Natural Language & Linguistic Theory. – 2004. – Vol. 22. – P. 307–357.

⁴Thun, N. Reduplicative Words in English. Uppsala: Carl Bloms, 1963. – P. 17–28.

tip-top). This typology remains the backbone of virtually all subsequent analyses and provides a ready-made framework for graded classroom presentation.

From the standpoint of language acquisition, the role of repetition in vocabulary learning has been extensively documented in the research tradition associated with Nation, who emphasises that the depth and durability of lexical knowledge depend heavily on the quality and frequency of encounters with a word.⁵ Reduplicatives, by virtue of their internal repetition, embody this principle within the word itself; the learner meets the base twice in a single act of perception, which arguably strengthens the phonological trace and facilitates retention.

More recent cognitive-linguistic research has explored why reduplicative and rhyming compounds are so memorable and so emotionally charged, attributing their salience to phonological iconicity and the pleasure of patterned sound.⁶ Taken together, this body of scholarship converges on a single conclusion of direct methodological relevance: reduplicatives are structurally regular, semantically motivated and psychologically salient, and these three properties make them uncommonly well suited to the aims of foreign-language instruction.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design combined with a design-based methodological proposal. It proceeds in three interrelated stages. In the first stage, a representative corpus of approximately one hundred and twenty English reduplicative units was compiled from lexicographic sources and from the descriptive literature reviewed above, and each unit was coded according to its structural type (exact, rhyming, ablaut), its part of speech, its register and its typical communicative function. This classification made it possible to identify which units are frequent, transparent and pedagogically safe for classroom use, and which are marked, dialectal or archaic and therefore better reserved for advanced learners.

In the second stage, the phonological structure of the units was analysed, with particular attention to the ablaut pattern, in which the systematic alternation of vowels follows a fixed prosodic template and thereby offers a natural vehicle for practising English vowel contrasts.⁷ Because ablaut reduplicatives such as tick-tock and flip-flop juxtapose two vowels within a single rhythmic frame, they can be exploited to draw learners' attention to minimal pairs and to the characteristic front-to-back vowel movement of English.

⁵Nation, I. S. P. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. – P. 44–52.

⁶Benczes, R. Just a Load of Hibber-Gibber? Making Sense of English Rhyming Compounds // *Australian Journal of Linguistics*. – 2012. – Vol. 32(3). – P. 299–326.

⁷Minkova, D. Ablaut Reduplication in English: The Criss-Crossing of Prosody and Verbal Art // *English Language and Linguistics*. – 2002. – Vol. 6(1). – P. 133–169.

In the third stage, a methodological framework for classroom implementation was formulated, aligned with the communicative and action-oriented approach codified in the Common European Framework of Reference.⁸ The framework distinguishes three didactic phases - presentation, controlled practice and free production - and maps specific reduplicative-based activities onto each. During presentation, the teacher introduces a small set of transparent units in meaningful contexts, using pictures, gestures and the natural rhythm of the words. During controlled practice, learners perform matching, gap-filling, sound-sorting and chanting tasks that consolidate both form and pronunciation. During free production, learners incorporate the units into dialogues, storytelling and role-play, thereby moving from recognition to active communicative use.

Three methodological principles underpin this framework. The principle of graded complexity requires that exact reduplicatives, being the most transparent, be taught first, followed by rhyming and finally ablaut formations. The principle of multisensory reinforcement exploits the rhythmic and musical qualities of reduplicatives through choral repetition, clapping and simple songs, so that phonological memory and motor memory reinforce one another. The principle of communicative authenticity insists that the units be practised not in isolation but in situations where their expressive and pragmatic value - playfulness, emphasis, endearment - can actually be felt. Applied together, these principles convert the descriptive findings of the earlier stages into a coherent and reproducible instructional model.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that reduplicative units, far from being a marginal curiosity of the English lexicon, constitute a linguistically systematic and pedagogically potent resource. Their structural regularity allows them to be classified and graded; their phonological salience makes them memorable; and their emotional and pragmatic colouring makes them motivating. The proposed three-phase methodological framework shows how these properties can be harnessed within a communicative, action-oriented approach, progressing from the presentation of transparent exact reduplicatives to the free communicative use of rhyming and ablaut formations.

For the practising teacher, the principal implication is that reduplicatives deserve a deliberate place in the syllabus rather than incidental treatment. Introduced systematically and practised multisensorially, they can enrich learners' vocabulary, sharpen their perception of English vowel and rhythm contrasts, and inject an element of play that sustains motivation. Future research would benefit from controlled

⁸Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020. – P. 130–142.

empirical studies measuring the effect of reduplicative-based instruction on retention and pronunciation across different age groups and proficiency levels, so that the theoretical foundations laid out here may be confirmed and refined through classroom experimentation.

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