Triplication and ideophones in Chintang

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I. Introduction

It is generally observed that most of the Kiranti languages have relatively few monomorphemic adverbs. What is common instead is adverbs based on reduplication or triplication and involving regular or ideophonic (onomatopoetic) roots. In this paper we discuss triplication in Chintang.[1] Triplication has been discussed only for a few languages, for example in Bantawa (Rai & Winter 1997), another Kiranti language, and in Tibetan (Uray 1954) and the Austronesian language Thao (Blust 2001).

II. Formation

Triplication in Chintang is formed by repeating a base twice and adding an adverbializing suffix *–wa*. The base can be a nominal or verbal root with a regular lexical meaning, but often the base is an ideophonic element. Compare the following examples:

1. rak-rak-rak-wa   mi   om-no
    (burning red coal)-ADVLZ   fire   burn-NPST
    'The fire burns very strongly.'

2. hɨk-hɨk-hɨk-wa   hɨk   phan-no
    (wind/air)-ADVLZ   wind/air   blow-NPST
    'It is very windy.'

3. huŋgo them-them-them-wa   kon-no
    3   (lost)-ADVLZ   walk-NPST
    'S/he walks aimlessly.'

4. paĩ   chɨk-chɨk-chɨk-wa   cuŋ   lus-no
    today   (pinch)-ADVLZ   cold   feel-NPST
    'It is very cold today'

5. asin-da   rep-rep-rep-wa   nam   nud-e
    yesterday-LOC   (ideophone)-ADVLZ   sun   good-PST
    'Yesterday the sunshine was very bright.'

6. akko   a-phuwa   dɨk-dɨk-dɨk-wa   lis-e
    1sGEN   1sPOSS-elder.brother   (Ideophone)-ADVLZ   become-PST
    'My elder brother became seriously ill.' (no more moving, like a log)

In examples (1) and (2). *rak* and *hɨk* are nominal roots meaning 'burning coal' and 'wind, air', respectively. Example (3) and (4) involve the verb roots *them-* and *chɨk-*, meaning 'be(come) lost' and 'pinch', respectively. (5) and (6) are based on the roots *rep* and *dɨk* which are ideophones, and as such fall outside the regular syntactic category system. Despite these categorial differences, all three types are marked by the same suffix *-wa* and the resulting form is always an adverb. As we will see later, this adverbial form can also be further inflected in order to derive an adjective.

In many languages, triplication can be successfully analyzed as recursive reduplication, i.e. a triplicated form results from reduplicating an already reduplicated form (cf., among others, Singh & Wee 2002). Thus, from the colloquial English of Singapore, Singh & Wee (2002) report such forms as *cough-cough* 'keep coughing' along with *cough-cough-cough* 'keep on coughing',

This is not so in Chintang, for the following reasons. First, not every triplicated form also allows a reduplicated form. For example, speakers reject reduplicated forms of *rak* 'burning coal' in example (1) or the ideophonic root *rep* in example (5). Some triplicated forms have reduplicated alternatives, e.g. the ideophonic *dɨk* is also attested in reduplicated form:

7. mahima-ŋa   kanchi   u-thaũ-be=ta
    sickness-ERG   K.   3sPOSS-place-LOC=FOC

    dɨk-dɨk-wa   lis-ad-a-ŋs-e.
    (ideophone)-ADVLZ   be-TEL-PST-PERF-PST

    'Kanchi has become so ill that she could not move.'

But the fact that not all triplicated forms have reduplicated alternants suggests that in Chintang triplication is distinct from recursive reduplication. Another difference between reduplication and triplication in Chintang is that the adverbializer *–wa* is obligatory with triplicated forms, but optional with reduplicated forms.[2] Thus alongside examples with *–wa* as in (7), we also find examples like the following:

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[2] We do not know yet the conditions governing the use of *–wa* in reduplicated forms. The adverbializer is obligatory in cases of partial reduplication (postreduplication), as in *omchek-omchek > omchekchekwa* 'tidy, clean'. We leave the analysis of reduplication to another study.

8. bago   pak-pak   kok   ca-no.
    DEM   (ideophone)   cooked.rice   eat-NPST
    'This one eats without ever stopping.'

These formal differences between triplication and reduplication suggest that in Chintang triplication is directly generated from its base, not via recursive reduplication.

III. Triplication and Syllabic Structure

The bases which undergo triplication are monosyllabic, and can take any shape that Chintang syllables can normally have: CVC, VC, CV, CVV. The following examples illustrate these bases:

9. mi   sip-sip-sip-wa   yuŋ-no
    fire   blink.one's.eye-ADVLZ   be(come)-NPST
    'The fire is (*or:* is becoming) very weak.'

10. a-nisa   ɨk-ɨk-ɨk-wa   hab-e
    1sPOSS-younger.sibling   (ideophone)-ADVLZ   cry-PST
    'My younger brother/sister cried for a long time.'

11. te-te-te-wa   num   cho-no
    (ideohone)-ADVLZ   salt   strong-NPST
    'The salt is too much strong.'

12. cha   duda   kui-kui-kui-wa   thuŋ-no
    baby   milk   (ideophone)-ADVLZ   drink-NPST
    'The baby drinks milk continuously (with some noise)'

We have collected nearly 100 triplicated Chintang forms and about 95% of them have a CVC structure. There are no instances of disyllabic bases undergoing triplication.

IV. Triplication, ideophones, and parts of speech

As we saw above, triplication in Chintang is often based on ideophonic elements. Under a classical definition, an ideophone is "a vivid representation of an idea in sound, a word often onomatopeic, which describe a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity." (Doke 1935: 118). Based on a recent survey, Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz (2001: 1) conclude that "the word formation of ideophones differs from other words in their tendency for iconicity and sound symbolism. Finally it was clear that ideophones are part of spoken language-the language register, where gestures could be used-rather than written language. It was not surprising that ideophones are often accompanied by gestures or even considered as "vocal gesture" (e.g. in Japanese, in Southern Soho or in the Australian Jaminjung)." Ideophones are extremely common in the

languages of the world, but because of the traditional priviledge enjoyed by written genres they have received little attention in the theoretical literature.

It is often noted that ideophones do not fall into the regular system of syntactic categories or parts-of-speech. For Tibetan, Uray (1954) concludes that triplication only occurs with ideophones (onomatopoetic words), so that "their sematic content and the part of speech they belong to might be unsettled, fluctuating" (Uray 1954:239). In Thao (Blust 2001), by contrast, the base is always a verb and the resulting triplicated form is also a verb with some intensity of meaning to it. Blust explicates the semantics as '[+ more of the same]' (but see Singh & Wee 2002 for discussion).

Chintang is different from both types of languages: the base can be a verbal, nominal, or ideophonic root while the output of triplication is always an adverb, marked as such by –wa.

V. Further derivation of triplicated forms

Triplicated forms are always adverbs in Chintang. As such, they have the same morphological and syntactic valences as other adverbs. In particular, like other adverbs, they can be used as attributes in an NP by adding the nominalizer clitic =ko ~ =go 'NMLZ'. Consider the following pairs of examples, where the a-versions illustrate an adverbial and the b-versions an adnominal use of triplicated forms:

13. (a) phak-hi   tok-tok-tok-wa   nam-no
       pig-shit   (ideophone)-ADVLZ   smell-NPST
       'The pig-shit smells very strongly'

    (b) tok-tok-tok-wa=go   phak-hi
        (ideophone)-ADVLZ=NMLZ   pig-shit
        'Very strong smelling pig-shit'

The clitic =go is the regular marker of adnominal attributes based on monomorphemic adverbs (14), nominal or pronominal stems bearing adverbial cases (15), and on clauses (16):

14.   anemnɨŋ=go   kaya
       last.year=NMLZ   rice.paddy
       'last year's paddy'

15.   yo-lam=go   siŋraŋ-ce (clan_his.016)
       ACROSS-MEDIATIVE=NMLZ   tree-ns
       'the trees from over there'

16.   u-cekt-u-gond-o-ko=go   katha (tiger.008)
       3nsA-speak-3P-AMBULATIVE-3P-NPST=NMZL   story
       'a story that they tell around here.'

Triplicated forms cannot be used in adnominal position directly, without =go; and =go cannot be suffixed to triplicated forms without –wa-derivation: for instance, it is not possible to form *tok-tok-tok=go-wa instead of tok-tok-tok-wa=go in (13b).

VI. Conclusion

Our findings suggest the following properties of triplication in Chintang:

i. Triplication is mostly based on single syllables, and it always involves complete bases (not parts of them)
ii. Unlike other languages, base syllables can not only come from verbal but also from nominal and ideophonic roots.

Triplicated forms are obligatorily marked by an adverbializing suffix -*wa*.

iii. Reduplication and triplication are likely to constitute two different and independent processes
iv. Like in other languages triplication contributes to intensify the meaning and is to some degree iconic.

Triplicated forms marked by –*wa* are very common in Chintang discourse, and they compensate to a substantial degree for the lack of monomorphemic adverbs in the language. Chintang has no written tradition, and this is probably part of the reasons why triplication often involves ideophonic bases, or has itself an ideophonic tone to it. However, once the language will be written, there is a danger for the original ideophonic representations to be lost. Therefore, documenting ideophones is an important, in fact essential, task of endangered languages research, and in our current research project, large collections of Chintang ideophones will be deposited in the DOBES archive (www.mpi.nl/dobes).

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