

Reduplication in Romance: An Example from Cuban Spanish¹

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0 Introduction

A prototypical case of reduplication is exemplified by a previously undocumented construction in Cuban Spanish. In this reduplicative construction, the stem form of the verb is reduplicated to indicate an event of the particular reduplicated action. An example of this construction is given below:

(0) En la casa de Juana mataron un puerco y
In the house of Jane they-killed a pig and

hay tremendo comecome.
there-is tremendous eat-eat

“At Jane’s house, they killed a pig, and there is a lot of eating going on.”

This type of reduplication in Spanish is not found on the Iberian Peninsula or within Latin American countries other than Cuba². Thus, the uniqueness of the construction merits an explanation of its origin. The paper will be organized as follows: Section 1 will serve as a brief socio-linguistic history of the island; Section 2 will highlight the syntactic and semantic nuances of the construction; in Section 3, four possible source languages from Africa will be investigated; and Section 4 will relate Cuban reduplication to other types of Caribbean reduplication. I will conclude that the Bantu language Kikongo is hypothesized to be the best African source for the Cuban construction, but I will not exclude the relevance of linguistic innovation as a second potential source.

¹ I would like to thank Andrew Garrett for his insightful commentary on various stages of this project as well as Rafael Matos-Galí for his willingness to inform and endless patience during the data collection process.

² After searching colloquial dictionaries, and consulting with various Spanish scholars, I am personally not aware of any other Spanish dialect that employs productive or even semi-productive use of the type of reduplication described in this paper.

1 Cuba's Linguistic History

Cuba has experienced a similar history to other Spanish-owned colonies in the Caribbean. Initial Spanish colonization began in 1510. By 1520, an estimated 200,000 natives were reduced to 18,700. In 1544, the total population including Spanish, native slaves, and African slaves was estimated at 7,500. The largest proportion of early slaves in mining regions (before 1650) was brought from Angola, and the second largest proportion was brought from the greater Congo region, according to a survey of surnames (Díaz 2000: 43). The most represented mother tongue of early “bozales” (a Spanish term meaning *muzzle* and used to refer to slaves speaking African languages) was Kikongo (West Bantu) (Díaz 2000: 45). “Bozal Spanish” became the Cuban term for the Spanish spoken by West African slaves (McWhorter 2000: 31). This register is a restructured version of Spanish, exhibiting slight phonological reduction, but maintaining quite in tact Spanish morphology and syntax. Hence, Bozal Spanish is not classified by linguists as a creole, but rather as a second-language register used within the slave community, a slightly restructured version of Spanish. If Cuban reduplication has its origin in an African language, it would have transferred first from the African source to Bozal Spanish.

After initial slave importation of Bantu speakers from the Congo region, later importation came from more northern regions along the Slave Coast, and by the 1830's, when sugar production was driving the Cuban economy, requiring large amounts of fresh labor, speakers of Kwa and Yoruboid languages arrived in Cuba in great numbers, dominating the Bozal Spanish of the time (McWhorter 2000: 21). By 1841, African slaves made up over 40% of the population.

Early “cabildos” (African ethnic-based associations) were established within slave populations. African-based religions flourished within the *cabildos*, and the *cabildos* allowed slaves, both indentured and free, to maintain their African languages within ritualistic ceremonies. Slavery ended in the late 1800's, but the *cabildos* survived well into the late 20th century, and can even be found currently in small numbers across the country.

Today, African vocabulary is pervasive throughout the Cuban lexicon, in large part due to the growing popularity in *Santería*, which is an amalgam of African-based religions. Popularity in *Santería* has dramatically increased in the last twenty years due to changed government policy on religious freedom as well as increased profit in religion-based tourism. However, it is important to note that today the ancestors of slaves, just like all Cubans, are speaking a Cuban dialect of Spanish, similar to that of Puerto Rico. Remnants of Bozal Spanish would only be found, if it can be found at all, in very remote and isolated parts of the country. Thus, the Cuban reduplication, described in this paper, is spoken by all Cubans, urban and rural, and not just by descendents of Bozal Spanish speakers. Bozal Spanish would have simply served as the vehicle which transferred the construction to modern Cuban Spanish.

2 The Data

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2.1 Possible Input

A small set of *disyllabic* Spanish verbs serve as input to the reduplicative construction. These include:

Verb	Stem	Meaning	Reduplication	Meaning
(1) comer	come	‘eat’	come-come	‘an instance of lots of eating’
(2) tirar	tira	‘throw’	tira-tira	‘an instance of lots of throwing’
(3) cambiar	cambia	‘change’	cambia-cambia	‘an instance of lots of changing’
(4) correr	corre	‘run’	corre-corre	‘an instance of running around’
(5) chupar	chupa	‘suck’	chupa-chupa	‘an instance of lots of sucking’
(6) tocar	toca	‘touch’	toca-toca	‘an instance of lots of touching’
(7) halar	*hala	‘pull’	**hala-hala	‘an instance of lots of pulling’

*(pronounced [a.la] in regular form)
 **(pronounced [ha.la.ha.la] when reduplicated)

Table 1: Reduplicated Forms in Cuban Spanish

The reduplicated construction is syntactically treated as a noun, and, thus, allows adjectival modification and requires a determiner, just like a regular Spanish NP. The following sentences exemplify several uses of the reduplicated construction:

- (8) En la casa de Juana mataron un puerco y
In the house of Jane they-killed a pig and

hay tremendo comecome.
there-is tremendous eat-eat

“At Jane’s house, they killed a pig, and there is a lot of eating going on.”

- (9) Deja el tocatoca ese.
Quit the touch-touch that
 “Stop that constant touching!”

- (10) Los niños en la calle tienen un
The children in the street have a

tiratira de madre.
throw-throw of mother

“The children in the street are throwing something around like crazy.”

2.2 Impossible Input³

³ All Spanish verb stems, regardless of length, are able to nominalize with the derivation suffix [-dera], i.e. *caminadera* ‘lots of walking’. Thus, non-disyllabic verb stems as well as disyllabic verb stems can nominalize in this standard way. Reduplication does not limit this type of semantic/syntactic derivation.

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Each input is disyllabic.

Monosyllabic, trisyllabic and quadrasyllabic-plus inputs are rejected by native speakers, thus:

- | | | | | |
|------|------------|----------------|---|------------------------|
| (11) | va | ‘go’ | → | *va-va |
| (12) | camina | ‘walk’ | → | *camina-camina |
| (13) | desempedra | ‘remove rocks’ | → | *desempedra-desempedra |
| (14) | acumula | ‘accumulate’ | → | *acumula-acumula |

2.3 Other Reduplication in Cuba

Sound-imitation (onomatopoetic) reduplication often accompanies grammatical reduplication in language. This is the case here as well. The following data demonstrates a range of onomatopoetic expressions in Cuba:

- | | | |
|------|-------------------|--|
| (15) | [ti.ki]-[ti.ki] | ‘sound of people talking’ |
| (16) | [tra.ka]-[tra.ka] | ‘sound of a mouse in a cupboard’ |
| (17) | [ku.hu]-[ku.hu] | ‘coughing’ (cf. <i>kusu-kusu</i> in Kikongo (Fehderau 1992)) |
| (18) | [ku.či]-[ku.či] | ‘making love; sound one makes towards a baby’ |

Again, even this type of reduplication adheres to the quadrasyllabic constraint on the output.

2.4 Representation of the Reduplicative Construction

The following diagram shows a static representation of the Cuban construction. The templatic output of the construction is quadrasyllabic, and the common semantic interpretation is some type of repetition of the reduplicated action. In certain contexts this repetition can be distributed among several participants as in (8), and in other contexts the action can be repeated by one participant as in (9).

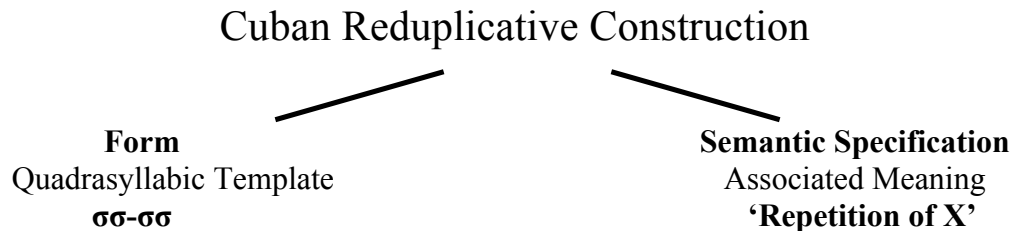


Diagram 1: Cuban Reduplication

3 Where Did this Reduplication Come From?

As mentioned above, four African languages serve as possible sources for reduplication in Cuba. These languages are Kikongo (West Bantu), spoken in modern-day Angola, Fongbe (Kwa), spoken in modern-day Togo and Benin, Éfik (Kwa), spoken in modern-day South East Nigeria, and Yoruba (Yoruboid),

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spoken in modern-day South West Nigeria. Waves of importation of different potential substrate linguistic groups are represented in Table 2⁴.

Groups in <i>relative chronological order</i>	Number of Africans landed in Cuba during slave trade
Bantu	400,000
Ewe/Fon (Gbe, Kwa)	200,000
Ibo/Ibibio (Éfik)/Ijaw (Kwa)	240,000
Yoruba (Yoruboid, Benue Congo)	275,000
Others	185,000

Table 2: Estimated African Linguistic Populations Brought to Cuba

3.1 Kikongo

The first possible source of the Cuban reduplicative construction to consider is the West African Bantu language Kikongo. Kikongo is cited as the making the largest contribution of vocabulary to the Cuban Spanish lexicon among all the African languages formerly spoken by slaves bought from the West African trade settlements (Schwegler 2000, Acosta 2000). Schwegler (2000) even goes so far as to argue that Kikongo must have been a fluently-spoken language well into the 20th century (p.159).

Based on the abundance of Kikongo and other Bantu vocabulary within Cuban Spanish (up to 3,000 vocabulary items (Schwegler 2000)), one is forced to entertain the possibility that Cuban reduplication has its roots in Kikongo reduplication. Even in short dictionaries and grammars of Kikongo (Fehderau 1992, Tavares 1932), a large amount of lexical/derivational reduplication is listed. The following data exemplify this Kikongo reduplication within the lexicon.

Fehderau (1992) lists quite a few reduplicated lexical items, of which several examples are listed here:

(19)	kupu-kupu	‘machete’
(20)	kòì-kói / koyi-koyi	‘laziness, weakness’
(21)	kòso-kóso / kusu-kusu	‘cough, tuberculosis’
(22)	ma-fùlu-fùlu	‘foam, suds, bubbles, lungs’
(23)	mingi-mingi	‘very many, very much’
(24)	ntama-ntama	‘very far away; a long time ago’
(25)	ntete-ntete	‘at the very first, (intensifies <i>ntete</i> ‘first’)
(26)	pòto-póto	‘mud, mire, slush, confusion, mix-up’
(27)	pùsu-pùsu	‘cart, pushcart, chariot’
(28)	tàla-tàla	‘to stare, n. mirror, glass’

⁴ Table statistics acquired from <http://www.batadrums.com>

Generally, Kikongo exhibits full reduplication, with a high majority of inputs being disyllabic. Because these forms are lexical dictionary entries, the forms do not exhibit any type of semantic uniformity; however I have highlighted several forms, in boldface, which could be semantically linked to repetitive actions. Within available grammars, one does find the description of synchronic productive reduplication in Kikongo, which I will discuss in the following section.

3.1.2 Productive Reduplication in Kikongo

Data from Lourenco Tavares' 1932 *Gramática Kikongo* (p.98-100) list several examples of productive derivational reduplication, which he labels as diminutive reduplication:

- (29) iana-iana 'little boy/girl'
(30) muana-muana 'little son/daughter'

Bentley (1895) describes a second form of productive reduplication:

The more general idea imparted by the Reduplication is this: -that the action is or must be performed *as quickly as possible, for a short time only, or in a short time*, that is to say, *with the least possible of delay*; it is an impatient expression, indicative of the fact that until the action is completed and finished, there will be no peace of mind; it is the Urgent Form of the Verb (Bentley 1895:973).

- (31) Tunga 'to build' tunga-tunga 'to build quickly'
(32) Vova 'to speak' vova-vova 'to speak quickly'
(33) Sumba 'to buy' sumba-sumba 'to buy quickly'
(34) Lamba 'to cook' lamba-lamba 'to cook at once'

Both productive uses demonstrate, for the most part, a disyllabic template, yet the semantic function of this productive reduplication in no way entails the actual repetition of an action. Performing an action quickly does not entail repetition, and diminutivizing a noun doesn't even involve an action at all.

However, historically, Kikongo may have had one more productive use of reduplication. Based on the following forms listed in the Bentley's two dictionaries (1887; 1895), one can hypothesize a stage in Kikongo in which reduplication was a productive process, whose meaning was 'REPETITION OF X'. One also notices in the following data that the reduplicated form tends to have nominalized semantics as well. This nominalized form seems to represent the majority of reduplicated lexical items listed in more modern dictionaries:

- (35) a. benda 'v.i., to be crooked'
b. benda-benda 'v., to prevaricate; equivocate; be fickle; unreliable'
c. benda-benda 'n., prevarication, fickleness, unreliability'
(36) a. tungununa 'v., to stare'
b. tuku-tuku 'n., a fixed stare'

- (46) wémâ ô **wiwlán** yíyá ó⁶ ACTION(/RESULT) NOUN
 book DEF RE.write rapid DEF
 ‘the rapid writing of the book’

Reduplication can also yield two other types of nominal forms: gerunds and nominalized VPs which appear in imperfective constructions (Lefebvre 2002):

- (47) a. Wémâ ô **wiwlán** yí tòn. GERUND
 book DEF RE.write go time
 ‘Writing the book took some time.’
 b. É dò **yìyì** we□. NOMINALIZED VP
 3sg be.at RE.leave POST
 ‘(S)he is leaving’

Nominalizing reduplication in Fongbe as described by Lefebvre (2002) shares similar syntactic properties with Cuban Spanish. In both languages, nominal reduplications and genuine NPs exhibit the same distribution: they both appear in argument position. In both languages, nominal reduplications share with NPs a particular word order. And finally, in both languages, nominal reduplicated constructions may not be modified by an adverbial clause with a temporal interpretation or a causal interpretation.

3.3 Éfik

Éfik represents another branch of the Kwa language family. Speakers of this branch also comprise a significant proportion of speakers of what would have been late-stage Bozal Spanish.

3.3.1 Stative Reduplication in Éfik

In Éfik reduplication to form a stative reading, the first syllable of the base will reduplicate with the initial consonant and a harmonizing vowel. As shown in the following forms, verb stems which refer to entering into a state can be reduplicated to form a stative verb, to describe the resulting state of a transformational process (Welmers 1968: 141-144):

- (48) dóŋo⁷ ‘get sick’ dòdóŋo ‘be sick’
 (49) tyě ‘sit down’ tétyè ‘be seated’
 (50) nã ‘lie down’ nana ‘be lying down’
 (51) dá ‘stand up’ dada ‘be standing’
 (52) bit ‘get wet’ bébit ‘be wet’

⁶ The symbol [o] is standing in for IPA [ɔ].

⁷ The symbol [o] is substituting for IPA [ɔ]

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3.3.1 Emphatic Reduplication in Éfik

Also used productively, the verb in Éfik can reduplicate to draw emphasis to the action, to contrast the particular action from another action (i.e. for contrastive focus):

(53) η□kedèdép byâ émi. η□kotógoto. ‘I bought these yams. I didn’t *grow* them.

3.4 Yoruba

The final language to be considered as a source for reduplication in Cuban Spanish is Yoruba. Yoruba, part of the Yoruboid family, accounts for the largest proportion of late-arrival slaves to the 19th century sugar plantations in Cuba. Yoruba is also a dominant source of ritualistic language in modern-day Santería on the island.

3.4.1 Relevant Reduplication –Gerundives

To form the reduplicant in Yoruba, the first syllable of the base is copied, and the vowel in the copied verb changes to the front, high [i] in all cases. In this type of reduplication in Yoruba, the verb is copied to form a gerund which is syntactically treated as a noun (Adewole 1997: 121-122):

(54) lo ‘go’ lilo ‘the act of going’

(55) mu ‘drink’ mímu ‘the act of drinking’

3.5 Summary

When searching for the source of a borrowed derivational construction, two factors must be considered. The corresponding construction in the source language should ideally match both the form, i.e. phonological template, of the construction in the target language, as well as the functional semantics of the construction in the target language (*for a detailed analysis of relexification see Lefebvre 1998*). These two factors logically fall out from the language learning situation. A native speaker of Language A will most likely apply a derivational construction like reduplication to words in Language B, which sound like the native words that input to the construction in question. In the case of Cuban reduplication, a speaker of an African language with disyllabic verbs that input into a reduplicated construction could quite easily have applied this construction to Spanish verbs which shared the same phonological template. Likewise, the original meaning of the African construction would be maintained; simply, the lexifier language to the construction would have changed.

Based, thus, on these two principles of phonological and semantic identity, Kikongo serves as the best source for a constructional calque. Éfik reduplication does not seem to match in either form or function. Reduplication in Yoruba matches well in syntactic category, but does not seem to match well in form or semantics. Fongbe (Gbe) reduplication matches in syntax, but not in form (for all

dialects) or semantic function. Further evidence against a possible Fongbe source is reduplication in Saramaccan. Extensive documentation shows that in Saramaccan, the Fongbe substrate can be linked to productive reduplication which forms attributive adjectives (Kramer 2002), but I have not found a nominalized repetitive reduplicated form in Saramaccan.

Even though languages from the Kwa family and Yoruba comprise a significant proportion of African vocabulary in Santeria, which has been very influential in the spread of African vocabulary to the general population, it was most likely that *early* Bozal Spanish exhibited the most restructuring of Peninsular Spanish. Kikongo speakers would have been the first Bozal Spanish speakers. Thus, the early presence of Kikongo speakers in Cuba matches up with the hypothesis that this construction is quite old. Further potential evidence towards an early date to the construction is the form [hala-hala] ‘pull-pull’, which is pronounced with a word-initial [h]; however, in modern Cuban Spanish the word-initial [h] has been lost throughout most of the island. This word-initial [h] dates back to Southern Spanish colonizers, and is preserved in the reduplicated form.

4 The Possibility of a Different Origin for Cuban Reduplication

Having analyzed a possible substrate origin for Cuban reduplication, I would like to turn to another possible explanation for the existence of the construction. This explanation simply rests on the high degree of linguistic innovation found in Cuban Spanish and in language in general. Reduplication can be highly iconic, and examples of this iconicity are found throughout the Caribbean, not just in Cuba.

4.1 The Phenomenon of Reduplication within Caribbean Creoles

Derivational reduplication is abundantly represented in just about every major Caribbean creole. Kouwenberg & La Charité (2001) discuss the semantics of this phenomenon within eight major creoles of the Caribbean: Berbice Dutch Creole(BD), French Creole⁸(FR), Jamaican(JM), Ndjuka(ND), Negerhollands(NH), Papiamentu(PP), Saramaccan(SM), and Sranan(SR). In the following table, Kouwenberg & La Charité list just a few examples of the Caribbean reduplication. In this chart, one is able to observe how, quite similarly to Cuban reduplication, these examples of Caribbean creole reduplication exploit the common metonymic association between a reduplicated verb and an associated result, event, or instrument.

Lang.	Verb Base		“Deverbal Noun Reduplication”	(K&L 76)
BD	bain	‘to cover’	bain-bain	‘lid, cover’
JM	kriep	‘to scrape’	kriep-kriep	‘scrapings’
	ich	‘to itch’	ich-ich	‘dry rash’

⁸ Denotes the French lexifier Creoles of the Caribbean.

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ND	mói	‘to be nice’	mo-mói	‘pretty-thing, beautiful’
	fon	‘to beat’	fon-fon	‘(a) beating’
PP	chupa	‘to suck’	chupa-chupa	‘blood sucker’
	tembla	‘to shiver’	tembla-tembla	‘shivers’
SM	tai	‘to tie’	ta-tai	‘string’
	nai	‘to sew’	na-nai	‘needle’
SR	koti	‘to cut’	kot-koti	‘(a) slice’
	doro	‘to sieve’	doro-doro	‘(a) sieve, sifter’

Table 3: Reduplication in Caribbean Creoles

4.2 Innovation –The Cognitive Transparency Hypothesis

Cuban Spanish is not a creole language, but the environment in which African slaves brought to Cuba learned Spanish is just the same as the second-language-learning environment of other slave populated countries in which we do find modern-day creoles. Cuban Spanish is full of linguistic innovation, and reduplication, being so highly iconic, is the type of morphological form one would unsurprisingly find as a result of linguistic innovation. As shown in Table 3 above, reduplication, somewhat similar to Cuban reduplication, exists in most all major Atlantic creole languages.

Table 3 is not necessarily evidence for shared linguistic innovation within the Caribbean because, when researching creoles, one constantly faces the same problem: that each construction of each language has a possible origin in a number of different substrates or superstrates. The point I attempt to raise is simply that one should be careful to never rule out the possibility that certain constructions in language should not be traced back to language contact. These constructions may have no origin other than the creativity of the human brain.

5 Conclusion

A limited set of disyllabic verb stems input into a reduplicative construction in Cuban Spanish. The reduplicative construction is syntactically treated as a noun, and exhibits semantics of repetition. The construction’s origin may lie in African reduplication, and the four most influential substrate languages in Cuba: Kikongo, Fongbe, Éfik, and Yoruba have been investigated to see if their reduplicative constructions match the Cuban construction both phonologically as well as semantically. It has been shown that the most plausible African substrate to the Cuban construction is Kikongo, which exhibits both phonological and semantic similarity to the Cuban construction. The possibility that the Cuban construction is a result of linguistic innovation within Cuba has been raised, and analyzed with consideration to similar reduplication within Caribbean Creoles.

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