



## Reduplication in Sinhala

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### Abstract

Reduplication, as seen in many languages of the world, is the systematic repetition of phonological material within a word for semantic or grammatical purposes. Generally, two broad types of reduplication are distinguished, depending on the size of the reduplicant: full vs. partial reduplication. Full reduplication refers to the repetition of the entire word, word stem (root with one or more affixes), or root. Partial reduplication is manifested in a number of forms such as consonant germination, vowel lengthening, or nearly complete copy of a base (Carl Rubino 2005). Sinhala employs reduplication in both of its spoken and written varieties in varying degrees and for various effects. In its written form, reduplication fulfills some stylistic functions and is mostly manifested in poetry, riddles, songs, anecdotes and narrations. The colloquial Sinhala uses reduplication in ordinary discourse and can be seen irrespective of the dialectal varieties.

The aim of this paper is to examine reduplication phenomenon in Sinhala in the broader spectrum of reduplication patterns and functions evidenced in many languages of the world. Data for the present study consisted of sentences with reduplication types and functions that can be distinguished in Sinhala. A sample of 60 sentences with such reduplication were used. The researcher consulted 05 adult native speakers of Sinhala for their grammaticality judgments about those sentences. Some major conclusions about the study are that reduplication can be observed at phonological, morphological/morpho-syntactic, and lexical levels in Sinhala and Sinhala manifests reduplication over a broad range of categories such as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. As noted in other languages, in Sinhala too both complete and partial reduplication can be observed and the reduplicated element functions as a single lexical item. Thus, reduplication is a very important linguistic tool that contributes significantly to word formation and richness of the expressive power of language. Nevertheless, from a typological perspective, Sinhala is quite impoverished when viewed against the broader spectrum of reduplication types, sub-types, functions, and even in the areas of language affected by reduplication. Despite reduplication being a pervasive phenomenon in Sinhala, the extent of its application is limited mostly to echo-formations. As for grammatical functions, present participle aspect marking was the only grammatical function it fulfills in Sinhala.

**Keywords:** impoverished, reduplication, Sinhala



## Introduction

Reduplication, as seen in many languages of the world, is the systematic repetition of phonological material within a word for semantic or grammatical purposes. Generally, two broad types of reduplication are distinguished, depending on the size of the reduplicant: full vs. partial reduplication. Full reduplication refers to the repetition of the entire word, word stem (root with one or more affixes), or root. The following examples illustrate this point.

(1) Nukuoro total reduplication.

gohu	(dark)	-	gohugohu	(getting dark)
vai	(water)	-	vaivai	(watery)

(Carl Rubino, 2005, 14)

Partial reduplication is manifested in a number of forms such as consonant germination, vowel lengthening, or nearly complete copy of a base. As Carl Rubino (2005) observes, reduplication is very common throughout Austronesia (Pacific Islands, Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar), Australia, South Asia, and many parts of Africa, the Caucasus, and Amazonia. In the Western Hemisphere, some language families are particularly amenable to reduplication, Salishan, Pomoan, Uto-Aztecan, Algonkian, Yuman, Sahaptian, Siouan, etc. (Carl Rubino, 2005, 11-30). Reduplication is equally diverse with respect to the semantic and grammatical functions it fulfills.

Example (2)

(2) Nukuoro partial reduplication.

ludu	(pick trees leisurely)	-	lludu	(pick trees frantically)
gai	(eat)	-	gagai	(fish are biting)

(Carl Rubino, 2005, 14)

The functions associated with reduplication are diverse. They range from total meaning change, word formation, marking of number (plurality, collectivity), tense, aspect, attenuation, intensity, transitivity, conditionality, reciprocity, to derive temporal adverbials etc.

(3) Tausug, Austronesian, Philippines: total meaning change

laway	(saliva)	-	laway-laway	(land snail)
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(4) Indonesian: word formation

mata	(eye)	-	mata-mata	(spy)
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Alabama (USA) marks the temporary versus permanent distinction in verbal aspect with vowel lengthening (5).

(5) loca (to be black/covered in suit) – looca (to be a black person)

Also, attenuation with germination (6)

(6) kasatka (cold) - kassatka (cool)

Plural formation in Papago (Uto-Aztecan, USA) (7)

(7) gogs (dog) - gogogs (dogs)

Plural formation from Adjectives (8) (Hitchiti, Muskogean).

(8) cikti (thick (liquids)) – cikciti (thick, plural)



To create lexical subclasses as in Ilocano to make comparative adjectives (9).  
(9) dakkel (big) – dak-dakkel (bigger).

To intensify the meaning of an action (Arapesh, Papua New Guinea) (10).  
(10) Su (touch/hold) - susu (touch all over)

To derive temporal adverbials from temporal nouns as in Indonesian (11).  
(11) pagi (morning) - pagi-pagi (early in the morning).  
(Carl Rubino, 2005, 11-30)

To convey a diminutive interpretation, as in Sranan (12).  
(12) ferfi ‘to paint’ > ferfi-ferfi ‘to paint a bit’  
(Silvia Kouwenberg and Darlene LaCharite, 2005, 533)

To extend the meaning /inclusive function.

Hindi:

(13) aam ‘mango’ > aam-vaam ‘mangoes and such fruit

Kannada:

(14) kannu ‘eye’ > kannu-ginnu ‘eyes and so forth’  
(Elinor Keane, 2005, 244)

The above examples do not constitute an exhaustive list of different forms and functions of reduplication that can be seen in many languages of the world. Some languages have further fine grained reduplicative patterns and functions as shown by Dixon (1998). Nevertheless, some valid generalizations can be derived from the above examples with respect to the diversity of reduplicative patterns, broader scope of functions covered by them, participation of diverse language families which are even genetically remote from each other, the extent of word classes affected by reduplication, as not only nouns and verbs, but even adjectives, adverbial formation too can be seen as a result of reduplication, and the systematic nature of reduplication.

Existing literature on reduplication offers a number of theoretical standpoints and approaches, some of which complement each other, and can be largely subsumed under phonological and morphological approaches. According to some of these theoretical standpoints, the instances of reduplication can be viewed as a phonological process (Newman, 2000), morphological (Marantz, 1982), syntactic (Utz Maas, 2005), interaction between the phonological and morphological modules of grammar (Eric Raimy, 2000), transformational approach (Carrier, 1984), to name some of the most prominent. The present study does not attempt to analyze the Sinhala data in relation to a particular theoretical alignment mainly because such standpoints abound, and also the focus of the study is to explore reduplication in Sinhala mainly with respect to major types and functions associated with this phenomenon.

Sinhala employs reduplication in both of its spoken and written varieties in varying degrees and for various effects. In its written form, reduplication fulfills some stylistic functions and is mostly manifested in poetry, riddles, songs, anecdotes and narrations. The colloquial Sinhala uses reduplication in ordinary discourse and can be seen irrespective of the dialectal varieties. It can be observed at phonological, morphological/morpho-syntactic, and lexical levels. Sinhala manifests reduplication over a broad range of categories such as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. As noted



in other languages, in Sinhala too both complete and partial reduplication can be observed and the reduplicated element functions as a single lexical item. Thus, reduplication is a very important linguistic tool that contributes significantly to word formation and richness of the expressive power of language.

The aim of this paper is to examine reduplication phenomenon in Sinhala in the broader spectrum of reduplication patterns and functions evidenced in many languages of the world. In particular, it seeks to answer the following research questions.

- a) What are the reduplication types manifested in Sinhala?
- b) What categories or linguistic elements are affected by this process? / In what areas of language is reduplication manifested?
- c) What are the functions of reduplication?
- d) Where does Sinhala fit in a typology of reduplication?

It is hoped that the study will contribute significantly to the body of empirical and theoretical literature related to reduplication phenomenon in Sinhala, notably in the absence of a well-articulated study in this area.

## Methodology

### Data and Data Analysis

Data for the present study consisted of sentences with reduplication types and functions that can be distinguished in Sinhala. A sample of 60 sentences with such reduplication were used. The researcher consulted 05 adult native speakers of Sinhala for their grammaticality judgments about those sentences. Although the researcher himself is a native speaker of Sinhala, still the grammaticality judgments of others were sought for better accuracy. The examples and example sentences given in the following sections are the data used for this purpose and the grammaticality judgments and opinions of native speakers of Sinhala were sought with respect to them.

### Sinhala complete reduplication: Nouns

- (15) mal-mal  
flowers-flowers ‘full of flowers/colorful

The above example is a class changing reduplication. Though the composition of the compound is by two nouns, the resulting element is an adjective, as shown in the following example.

- (16) Nangi mal-mal gaumak andala aava  
Small sister mal-mal frock wearing came  
Small sister came in a frock with floral decoration/colorful frock

### Sinhala complete reduplication: Verbs

One way of making the present participle of verbs in Sinhala is through reduplication.

- (17) bala-bala ‘seeing’  
(18) Nimal potha **bala-bala** bath keva  
Nimal (Nom) book seeing-seeing rice ate  
Nimal ate rice while reading the book



To express intensity/to intensify (19).

(19) enna-enna - 'come come'

**Sinhala complete reduplication: Adjectives.**

Adjectives are often reduplicated to intensify the quality/nature expressed by them (20, 21).

- (20) rasa-rasa dodam  
Sweet-sweet oranges (very sweet oranges)
- (21) punchi-punchi geval  
Small-small houses (very small houses)

**Sinhala complete reduplication: Adverbs.**

Adverbs are often reduplicated to intensify the degree expressed by them (22).

- (22) hemin-hemin  
Slowly-slowly (very slowly)

**Sinhala partial reduplication: nouns**

The pluralizing suffix –al is repeated and the resulting compound noun functions as a single lexical item where the leftmost element determines the overall meaning.

- (23) geval-dorawal  
houses-doors (houses)

Although the above compound is compositional, there are reduplicated elements which are non-compositional, as both the elements convey meaning only as a single lexical item (24, 25).

- (24) lata-pata - 'knickknack'
- (25) val-pal - 'gossip'

**Sinhala partial reduplication: verbs**

- (26) kaala-beela  
Eat (pp)-drink(pp) (enjoying life)
- (27) api hondata kaala-beela innava  
We well eat-drink live  
We enjoy life

**Sinhala partial reduplication: Adjectives**

- (28) sata-kapata 'cunning'

**Sinhala partial reduplication: Adverbs**

- (29) jara-bara 'noise of something being crushed'
- (30) indala-hitala 'occasionally'



## Other functions of Reduplication

### Proverb formation

Sinhala uses extensive uses of reduplication to make proverbs. In such cases, the verbal element is iterated. The form of the verb depends on the intended meaning and often the iteration adds a rhythmic effect.

(31) kala kala de pala pala de  
do (adj) do (adj) things effect effect things  
'Your actions will determine the consequences' (negative effect)

(32) Gahanna gahanna vandina miniha moodaya  
Hit (Inf) hit(Inf) worship(adj) man fool  
'the man who tolerates being beaten many times is a fool'

### Expressives

By far the most common and extensive use of reduplication in Sinhala can be observed in the formation of expressives. This corresponds to the imitations of different sounds of nature, sounds made by animals, and thus fall within the traditional conception of onomatopoeia/echo formations. Once again, both full and partial reduplication can be observed. The reduplicated element functions as a single lexical item and therefore is non-compositional.

### Full Reduplication

(33) kaak - kaak 'crow's noise /cawing'  
(34) gudu - gudu 'drinking sound'  
(35) haka-haka 'laughing sound'

All the above have an adverbial function.

**Partial Reduplication:** here the second/final syllable is repeated (36).

(36) dadi-bidi 'sound of interchange of blows or of the falling of some heavy things in succession'. But in its actual use, it means doing something quickly/hurriedly and hence conveys an adverbial function (37).

(37) mama dadi-bidi gaala negitta  
I(Nom) dadi-bidi like got up  
'I got up quickly'

## Results

This study aimed to explore the reduplication phenomenon in Sinhala in the broader context of reduplication patterns and functions manifested in the world's languages. It sought to answer a number of research questions and the following sections attempt to answer those.

### (a) What are the reduplication types manifested in Sinhala?

As the above data indicated, two broader types of reduplication can be observed: full and partial. Both contribute significantly to the word formation and expressive range of Sinhala. Full reduplication results in the formation of compound words which are compositional as well as non-compositional with respect to their semantic properties. Within these two broad types, further fine-grained sub classes are not manifested.



**(b) What categories or linguistic elements are affected by this process? / In what areas of language is reduplication manifested?**

Reduplication can be observed in all four major word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in Sinhala. The process occurs both as full and partial. However, their distribution with respect to each other is not uniform. For example, in the case of complete reduplication, verbs are the most reduplicated elements, whereas nouns are the least. At the level of partial reduplication, adverbs are the most reduplicated elements.

**c) What are the functions of reduplication?**

The most notable grammatical function reduplication fulfills in Sinhala is the present participle formation which can be subsumed under aspect marking. The root form of most of the transitive verbs can be reduplicated to form the present participle. However, this form cannot occur on its own. Rather it should occur with a main verb and hence, is quite similar to the English infinitive where only PRO can occur (38), (39).

(38) Nimal<sub>i</sub> [PRO<sub>i</sub> koopi bi-bii] potha baeluwa  
Nimal (Nom) [PRO coffee drinking-drinking] book read  
'Nimal read the book while drinking coffee'

(39) Nimal<sub>i</sub> tried [PRO<sub>i</sub> to leave]

The functions associated with reduplication in Sinhala are limited when compared to many other languages discussed in the preceding sections. In addition to the present participle formation, other common functions are the derivation of manner adverbials and expressives. A limited number of them also function as intensifiers. In terms of word formation, what we can see mostly is the derivation of compound words. Yet, derivation of totally new words as in Indonesian "bantal – 'pillow' > bantal-bantal 'railway tie' is absent.

**d) Where does Sinhala fit in a typology of reduplication?**

Though reduplication in Sinhala is a pervasive phenomenon, its range is quite limited in terms of both types/sub-types and functions. Of the feasible types, less grammatical distinctions and more semantic distinctions can be observed. The following table presents the Sinhala facts in relation to the other languages we discussed in the preceding sections.

Table 1: Typology of Sinhala Reduplication

Language: Sinhala	Presence	Example languages:	Presence
1. Formation of totally new words	No	Indonesian	Yes
2. Marking of plurality	No	Papago (Uto-Aztecan, USA)	Yes
3. Marking of aspect	Yes	Alabama	Yes
4. Number (collectives, distributives, limitatives)	No	Santali, Pangasinan, Ao Naga	Yes
5. Inchoative (to mark beginning of verbal action)	No	Till (Salish)	Yes
6. Attenuation	No	Tigre (Semitic, Eritrea)	Yes





7. Intensity	Yes	Arapesh (Papua New Guinea)	Yes
8. Transitivity	No	Fijian	Yes
9. Conditionality	No	Luiseno	Yes
10. Case	No	Chukchi (Russia)	Yes (Absolute)
11. Proverb formation	Yes	Languages shown here	No
12. Formation of lexical subclasses (comparative degree marking)	No	Ilocano	Yes
13. Diminutive	No	Tuvan (Altaic, Siberia)	Yes
14. Altering of word class	Yes	Kayardild (Pama Nyungan)	Yes
15. Meaning extension/inclusive function	Yes	Tamil, Kannada, Bengali	Yes
16. Pretense	No	Ilokano	Yes

As shown in the table, Sinhala reduplication is limited to only 05 of the 16 properties listed above. Nevertheless, the proverbial formation seems to be unique to Sinhala. Overall, Sinhala is quite impoverished in a typology of reduplication.

In terms of where reduplication occurs, Sinhala displays all full reduplication types manifested in other languages. They are reduplication of the entire word, stem (root with one or more affixes), or root. As for partial reduplication, world's languages show a number of forms such as consonant germination, vowel lengthening, or the reduplicated material can be partial root, simple root, or a partial stem as in Ilocano (Austronesian, Philippines). In Sinhala, however, this range is quite limited. In most of the languages with partial reduplication, reduplicated material is most often found at the beginning of a base (with medial and final positions too as other possibilities). Yet, quite interestingly in Sinhala partial reduplication, the reduplicated material is found only at the final position. This can be seen as copying of the entire base except the initial consonant-vowel (CV) which is replaced by another consonant-vowel of the reduplicant. This patterns with Tuvan (Altaic, Siberia) as in *pelek* 'gift' *pelek-selek* 'gift- DIMINUTIVE, or as in Tamil *puli* 'tiger' > *puli-kili* 'tigers and other beasts' where the initial CV of the reduplicated material is replaced by *ki*. These are generally termed as echo constructions. Complex reduplication patterns with some vowel or consonant change in the medial position, or phoneme alteration as we notice in some other languages are not available in Sinhala. What is available can be termed as simple reduplication of a base/stem/suffix.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the reduplication phenomenon in Sinhala in a general typology of reduplication manifested in the world's languages. As the preceding data and the discussion show, Sinhala is quite impoverished when viewed against the broader spectrum of reduplication types, sub-types, functions, and even in the areas of language affected by reduplication. The author did not wish to analyze the data presented in relation to a particular theoretical standpoint mainly because such standpoints abound. However, such a study will be quite useful in the absence of





sufficient studies in this area with respect to Sinhala language, and can be the focus of a future study by a prospective researcher. The answers to the research questions highlight that despite reduplication being a pervasive phenomenon in Sinhala, the extent of its application is limited mostly to echo-formations. As for grammatical functions, present participle aspect marking was the only grammatical function it fulfills in Sinhala.

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