

# Simulative reduplication in Vietnamese

Tue Trinh



Leibniz-Zentrum  
Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft



SPAGAD Speech Acts  
in Grammar and Discourse

SEALS 32, Chiang Mai University, 17/05/2023

# Phonology

- A productive reduplication strategy in which the reduplicant appears to the right of the base and is segmentally identical to the base except that its last rhyme is 'iêc' [ɪək]

- (1)
- |    |                                |   |  |
|----|--------------------------------|---|--|
| a. | sách [sɛk] 'book'              | → | sách-xiêc [sɛk.sɪək]                       |
| b. | cam [kam] 'orange'             | → | cam-kiêc [kam.kɪək]                        |
| c. | ếch [ɛk] 'frog'                | → | ếch-iêc [ʔɛk.ʔɪək]                         |
| d. | sinh viên [siŋ.viən] 'student' | → | sinh viên-sinh viêc<br>[siŋ.viən.siŋ.viək] |

# Morphophonemic rule

- We assume there is a morpheme RED

(2) a. cam+RED → cam-kiếc  
b. sinh viên+RED → sinh viên-sinh viên

- Let  $[w \_X]$  be a word whose last rhyme is X

(3)  $[w \_X]+RED \rightarrow \underbrace{[w \_X]}_{\text{base}} + \underbrace{[w \_iək]}_{\text{reduplicant}}$

cf. Vu (1998), Pham and Pham (2020)

# Agenda

- Describe some intuitions about RED
- Propose an analysis

## Uncertainty inference

- N-RED can suggest uncertainty on the part of the speaker

(4) A: Nam đang ăn gì đây?

Nam is eating what

B: Nó đang ăn cam.

He is eating orange

C: Không đúng. Nó đang ăn quýt.

That's not true. He is eating tangerine.

(5) A: ...

B: Nó đang ăn cam- kiếc gì đó

He is eating orange- RED DEM<sub>wh</sub>

C: #Không đúng. Nó đang ăn quýt.

That's not true. He is eating tangerine.

→ I will not discuss DEM<sub>wh</sub>

## Similarity to disjunction

- Disjunctions license similar uncertainty inferences

(6) A: Nam đang ăn gì đây?

Nam is eating what?

B: Nó đang ăn cam hoặc quýt.

He is eating orange or tangerine.

C: #Không đúng. Nó đang ăn quýt.

That's not true. He is eating tangerine.

## Proposal: semantic weakening

- Proposal: RED weakens the meaning of the base word

- (7) a.  $\llbracket \text{cam} \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{orange} \rrbracket$   
 $= \{x \mid x \text{ is an orange}\}$
- b.  $\llbracket \text{cam hoặc quýt} \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{orange or tangerine} \rrbracket$   
 $= \{x \mid x \text{ is an orange}\} \cup \{x \mid x \text{ is a tangerine}\}$
- c.  $\llbracket \text{cam-RED} \rrbracket$   
 $= \{x \mid x \text{ is an orange}\} \cup \{x \mid x \text{ is similar to an orange}\}$   
 $=_{\text{def}} \text{sim}(\text{orange})$

- (8)  $\underbrace{\text{John is eating an orange}}_{\text{stronger}} \Rightarrow \underbrace{\text{John is eating an sim(orange)}}_{\text{weaker}}$

cf. Armoskaite and Kutlu (2014), Smith (2020)

## weakness $\neq$ ignorance

- Weaker  $p$  does not generally imply ignorance of stronger  $q$

(9) John lives in Paris  $\Rightarrow$  John lives in France

A: Where does John live?

B: He lives in France.

$\nrightarrow \neg K_S$  John lives in Paris

(10)  $x$  is a male student  $\Rightarrow x$  is a student

A: Who did John talk to?

B: He talked to a student.

$\nrightarrow \neg K_S$  John talked to a male student

(11)  $x$  is an orange  $\Rightarrow x$  is an orange-RED

A: What is John eating?

B: He is eating an orange-RED

$\rightsquigarrow \neg K_S$  John is eating an orange

$\rightarrow$  why?



## weakness + alternative = ignorance

- Weaker  $p$  does imply ignorance of stronger  $q$  if  $q$  is an alternative of  $p$

(12) A: Does John live in Paris?

B: He lives in France<sub>He lives in Paris</sub>

$\rightsquigarrow \neg K_S$  John lives in Paris

(13) A: Did John talk to a male student, a female student, or a professor?

B: He talked to a student<sub>He talked to a male student</sub>

$\rightsquigarrow \neg K_S$  John talked to a male student

cf. Grice (1967)

## RED invokes alternatives

- Solution: X-RED has X as alternative

(14) A: What is John eating?

B: He is eating an orange-RED<sub>He is eating an orange</sub>

$\rightsquigarrow \neg K_S$  John is eating an orange

cf. Fox and Katzir (2011), Trinh and Haida (2015), Trinh (2018)

## Incompatibility with classifiers

- N-RED cannot combine with the classifier for N

- (15) a. Nam đang mua sách- xiếc gì đó  
Nam is buying book- RED DEM<sub>wh</sub>
- b. #Nam đang mua hai quyển sách- xiếc gì đó  
Nam is buying two CL book- RED DEM<sub>wh</sub>
- c. Nam đang mua hai quyển sách gì đó  
Nam is buying two CL book DEM<sub>wh</sub>

# Semantics of CL

- Nouns in classifier languages are “number neutral”
- CL maps  $P$  to the set of  $P$  atoms

- (16) a.  $\llbracket \text{sách} \rrbracket = \{x \mid x \text{ is a singular book or a plurality of books}\}$   
 $= \{a, b, c, \dots a+b, a+c, b+c, a+b+c, \dots\}$
- b.  $\llbracket \text{quyển sách} \rrbracket = \{x \mid x \text{ is a singular book}\}$   
 $= \{a, b, c, \dots\}$

## Selectional requirement of CL

- CL imposes requirements on the semantics of the noun it combines with

(17)  $[[\text{quyển}^2]] = [\lambda P : P = \text{book} [\lambda x. x \text{ is a singular } P]]$

- Weakening  $P$  causes presupposition failure

(18) #quyển sách- xiếc

CL book- RED

because: book-RED  $\neq$  book

## More on CL

- But we know that **quyển** can combine with things similar to books

$$(19) \text{ quyển} + \begin{cases} \text{sách 'book'} \\ \text{sổ 'notebook'} \\ \text{lịch 'calendar'} \\ \dots \end{cases}$$

- This means we should revise our semantics for CL

$$(20) \llbracket \text{quyển} \rrbracket \neq [\lambda P : P = \textit{book} [\lambda x. x \text{ is a singular } P]] \\ = [\lambda P : P = \textit{sim(book)} [\lambda x. x \text{ is a singular } P]]$$

## Contextual dimension of RED

- Again: why is RED incompatible with CL?

$$(21) \underbrace{[\lambda P : P = \text{sim}(\text{book}) [\lambda x. \dots]]}_{\text{quyên}^2} + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \checkmark \text{ sách 'book'} \\ \checkmark \text{ lịch 'calendar'} \\ \dots \\ \times \text{ sách-xiếc 'book-RED'} \end{array} \right.$$

- Tentative answer: CL requires grammatical similarity while RED only guarantees pragmatic similarity

$$(22) \text{ a. } \llbracket \text{quyên}^2 \rrbracket = [\lambda P : P = \text{sim}_g(\text{book}) [\lambda x. x \text{ is a singular } P]]$$

$\text{sim}_g(\text{book}) = \text{books and things considered similar to books by the grammar}$

$$\text{ b. } \llbracket \text{book-RED} \rrbracket = \text{sim}_c(\text{book})$$

$\text{sim}_c(\text{book}) = \text{books and things considered similar to books in the context}$

## $sim_g \neq sim_c$

- Two different nouns describing the same object may differ with respect to their ability to combine with QUYỂN

- (23) a. Nam đang đọc một tờ/quyển tạp chí chuyên môn  
Nam is reading a CL journal professional
- b. #Nam đang đọc một tờ/#quyển báo chuyên môn  
Nam is reading a CL journal professional
- (24) A: Nam đang đọc sách-xiếc gì đó  
Nam is reading book-RED DEM<sub>wh</sub>
- B #Không đúng. Nó đang đọc báo/tạp chí.  
That's not true. He is reading a journal
- (25) a.  $tạp\ chí \subseteq sim_g(book)$ ,  $báo \not\subseteq sim_g(book)$   
b.  $báo, tạp\ chí \subseteq sim_c(book)$



## Puzzle: dismissiveness

- RED may also convey an dismissive attitude on the part of the speaker

(26) A: Nam làm nghề gì?

What does Nam do

B: Giáo sư- giáo xiếc gì đó.

Professor- RED DEM<sub>wh</sub>

↪ the speaker disdains professors

- I leave this to future research

# Acknowledgements

This work is supported by the ERC Advanced Grant “Speech Acts in Grammar and Discourse” (SPAGAD), ERC-2007-ADG 787929. I thank the organizers (esp. Paul Sidwell) for their work in making this conference possible. All errors are my own.

- Armoskaite, Solveiga, and Ethan Kutlu. 2014. Turkish m-reduplication: A case of simulative number. Turkic Languages 18:271–288.
- Fox, Danny, and Roni Katzir. 2011. On the characterization of alternatives. Natural Language Semantics 19:87–107.
- Grice, Paul. 1967. Logic and Conversation. In Studies in the Way of Words, ed. Paul Grice, 41–58. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Pham, Andrea Hoa, and Andrew Anh Pham. 2020. Productive reduplication in southern Vietnamese. Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 13:1–10.
- Smith, Ryan Walter. 2020. Simulative plurality and the nature of alternatives. Semantics and Pragmatics 13:1–44.
- Trinh, Tue. 2018. Keeping it simple. Natural Language Semantics 26:111–124.
- Trinh, Tue, and Andreas Haida. 2015. Constraining the derivation of alternatives. Natural Language Semantics 23:249–270.
- Vu, Sonny. 1998. A unified analysis of some Vietnamese reduplication forms. Proceedings of SEALS 8:165–191.