

Construction, shmonstruction: A multimodal corpus study of English *shm*-reduplication

Recent years have seen increasing interest in evaluative constructions and expressive morphology (see e.g. Grandi & Körtevényessy [eds.] 2015a, Battefeld et al. 2018, among others). In this talk, I present a corpus-based analysis of English *shm*-reduplication, a pattern in which a word is immediately repeated, but the initial consonant or consonant cluster (if any) is replaced by /ʃm/ (McCarthy & Prince 1996), as exemplified in (1) (examples from TV News Archive).

- (1) a. debate, shmebate.
b. comfort zones, schmumfort zones.

So far, most research on *shm*-reduplication has mainly focused on its phonological properties (e.g. Nevins & Vaux 2003, Kołataj 2016). The present study adds a pragmatic and a multimodal perspective, drawing on data from the TV News Archive (archive.org/tv) and the UCLA NewsScape Archive available via the Distributed Little Red Hen Lab (redhenlab.org). Both databases were searched exhaustively for words starting with <shm> or <schm>. Instances of *shm*-reduplication were semi-automatically identified by calculating edit distances between each keyword and the two preceding words (to take compounds as in 1b into account).

Two predictions are tested: The first is that the construction is often accompanied by a dismissive gesture such as a member of the *away* gesture family (Bresse & Müller 2014), thus qualifying as a multimodal construction in the sense of e.g. Steen & Turner (2013), Zima (2014), or Cienki (2017). The second prediction is that the construction tends to occur turn-initially, taking up cues from the interlocutor's previous utterance. According to a preliminary pilot study using the TV News Archive data (N = 54), the first hypothesis is substantiated by the data: In the vast majority of all cases, the *shm*-reduplication construction is accompanied by a dismissive hand movement or head gesture. As for the second hypothesis, however, the data show that matters are more complex: Seemingly prototypical usage cases such as (2a) are rare. Instead, *shm*-reduplication tends to occur in what could be called “fictive quotes”, adopting the concept of fictivity put forward by e.g. Talmy (2000) and Pascual (2014), among others: An attitude ascribed to a person, e.g. Donald Trump in (2b) and (2c), is conveyed by a quote attributed to said person either via a quotative (2b) or without an overt quotation marker (“zero quotative”, see e.g. Mathis & Yule 1994) as in (2c).

- (2) a. that's the principle. >> principle, shminciple. (Jimmy Kimmel Live)
b. donald trump says debate shmebate. (Action News at 6:00 AM)
c. there they [= Donald and Melania Trump] are. look how happy. stormy daniels shmormy daniels. (Jimmy Kimmel Live)

In many ways, then, the pattern is a prime example for a creative and “extravagant” (Haspelmath 1999) construction that is strongly connected to specific communicative contexts and characterized by a fairly complex set of discourse-functional properties. A closer investigation of this and other expressive constructions can help understand the social and interactional aspects of constructions in more detail. In addition, a multimodal perspective can help us understand how gestures emphasize and enhance the “extravagant” character of such constructions.

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