The not so self-evident iconicity of reduplicative word-class derivation

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This paper examines the iconic nature of word-class changes by morphological reduplication. For said process – often similar to, yet distinct from, processes like identical constituent compounding (Hohenhaus 2004) –, in which formally a whole word or some specifically circumscribed subpart is repeated, already Sapir (1921: 60) noted its "self-evident symbolism, to indicate such concepts as distribution, plurality, repetition, customary activity, increase of size, added intensity, continuance." This assessment has been variously (re-)formulated in terms of Peircean and Jakobsonian iconicity, one of the most popular versions of the iconic principle of reduplication saying that "[m]ore of the same form stands for more of the same meaning" (Kouwenberg & LaCharité 2005: 534). The formulation crucially highlights a relative (the more pairing) and an absolute (the same pairing) component of reduplicative form-meaning mappings (Dingemanse et al. 2015), ultimately enhancing the iconically grounded salience of reduplication patterns in the world's languages. While this characterization works fine for all sorts of reduplicative plurality and intensity, diminution as another widespread, yet seemingly counter- or non-iconic, function of reduplication presents a well-known difficulty for motivating the process in an analogous way. However, several reasonable proposals exist by now to incorporate diminutive and attenuative meanings into the general iconicity of reduplicative formations (e.g. Fischer 2011).

The function of word-class derivation, in lacking a concretely referential basis, offers a similarly prevalent challenge for reduplicative iconicity, but a much less investigated one. The present contribution expands on previous functional-typological observations (Schwaiger 2017: 102–106) by conceptually integrating a general crosslinguistic asymmetry in transpositional directions via Givón's (2001) semantic criterion of the temporal stability of word classes: Semantically more and most time-stable classes like A(djectives) and N(ouns) are frequently derived by reduplication, while less and least time-stable stat(ive) and dyn(amic) V(erbs) are rarely or never the outcome of derivation (Figure 1). In this way, the at first glance not so self-evident iconicity of reduplicative word-class changes can likewise be subsumed under the more-of-the-same type, for the clear prevalence of an increase in temporal stability (least/less stable > more/most stable) can be interpreted as a more abstract kind of plurality/continuity. Additionally, including in the investigation the more central functions of reduplication, more marginal word classes and special combinations like light verb constructions allows finer-grained typological implications to be advanced and tested (inter alia with respect to apparent counterexamples like N, A > A, V [stat]). The findings reveal an interplay of more obvious as well as subtler aspects of the iconicity principle in reduplication and its cognitive impact on the lexical and grammatical structure of language(s). At the same time, the results provide a case for demonstrating that the proposed difference between linguistic iconicity and systematicity (Dingemanse et al. 2015) is one of degree rather than kind.

most stable	……………………………………………………………………………..			**least stable**
N < A, V	N > A < V	N, A > V (stat)	?	–
N	A	A V (stat)	V	V (dyn)

FIGURE 1. Scale of temporal stability and (im)possible directions of reduplicative word-class derivation

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