

7. CONCLUSION

Repetition, either as a lexical feature or as a productive morphological process, is a common characteristic of the set of East and South-east Asian languages represented in the corpus. In this chapter, a final analysis of repetition in the set of languages from this geographical area will not concentrate on details of form, since pertinent formal similarities and dissimilarities have already been sufficiently covered in earlier chapters, but it is mainly conducted by presenting the languages of the corpus in the light of the set of common meaningful repetitive categories under which the repetitive structures at hand have been subsumed. Observations to be made concern both fixed repetitive lexemes and outputs of repetitive processes, with emphasis on the latter. At the end of the chapter, in connection with final remarks on history, there is an evaluation of the future development of duplication in Vietnamese and a general assessment of the function of repetition in the languages of the corpus.

Compositional structures and connotation, with separate chapters under nominal lexemes (2.1.2, 2.1.3), will not be commented on, since they are considered to have been adequately covered in the respective chapters. Moreover, denotations are usually taken to be primary in linguistics in respect to connotations, presumably because a connotation implies denotation but not the other way round, i.e. the object referred to by a lexical unit may cause personal or communal negative or positive sentiments which may become a part of the semantic make-up of the unit, and even though a lexeme itself as an object may also provoke emotive reactions due to its phonetics, there is no denying the fact that it still retains its denotative function with reference to entities in the non-linguistic real or imagined world. Consequently, the few remarks to be made in the next paragraph on non-retrievable repetitive vocabulary, as defined in the context of the study, concern relative distribution of nominal repetitive lexemes between denotative sub-categories, principally of Sinitic and Vietnamese items, since other languages are meagrely represented in this respect compared to these two.

When going through the listed nominal entries, it is easy to observe that besides kinship terms in the Sinitic corpus, repetitive nominal lexemes of other denotative categories – terms referring to people and parts of the body (2.1.1.2), animals and plants (2.1.1.3), necessities and natural phenomena (2.1.1.4) and diminutives (2.1.1.5) – are rather evenly distributed among all Sinitic dialect groups represented in the study, with however, north-western and south-western Mandarin being definitely the most numerous groups, especially with reference to the sets of

terms in 2.1.1.4 and 2.1.1.5. They also provide, with the Wu dialects, the majority of children's language items in 2.1.2.1. On the Mon-Khmer side, it is especially nouns referring to animals and plants, as well as the partially overlapping set of generic terms, which constitute the majority of Vietnamese fixed repetitive nominal lexemes in the total corpus. Considering the size of the Tai corpus as a whole, the set of inseparable repetitive nominal lexemes with reference to animals and plants and to necessities and natural phenomena contained therein, is not negligible (2.3). The Tibeto-Burman sub-corpus contains a set of repetitive kinship terms and a solitary lexeme interpretable as an instance of generic meaning, overlapping with its overt affiliation as a member of the category of necessities and natural phenomena (2.2).

There is one common semantic category shared by all language groups partaking of the nominal corpus, thus constituting an areal feature, namely distributivity. It is a regular characteristic of these languages that if a noun denoting people, collectives, time or place is repeated, the result is a form with a distributive meaning, with its implication of two or more referents that are taken separately (2.1.1.6, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6).

Other 'nominal' semantic categories with a wider distribution of tokens among the language groups of the corpus are the one with the implication of diversity of the referents (2.1.1.7, 2.2, 2.3), which is characterized by considerable structural homogeneity, especially between Sinitic and Tai groups, and the cases subsumable under emphatic meaning, which, contrary to the previous category, is marked by heterogeneity of the descriptive context, with the inclusion of syntactic conditioning in the data on Tibeto-Burman languages, mainly concerning repetitive nominal lexemes as subjects, and the possibility of an alternative semantic interpretation of a particular form (2.1.1.8, 2.2, 2.3).

Besides listed repetitive generic nouns in Vietnamese, the Tibeto-Burman sub-corpus includes instances of an apparently productive repetitive process with a concomitant generic semantic content (2.2), specifically in Jingpo, and generally, lumped together with other semantic functions, in Tujia. Expression through nominal repetition of indefinite plurality in Jingpo and that of alternativity in Burmese are depicted in the relevant sources as being conditioned by syntactic factors (2.2) without giving, however, any possible rationale for the relationship between attributive function and indefinite plurality, for instance.

As already noted above, distributivity is one of the semantic results of the repetition of pronouns and measure words, being clearly the most dominant category of meaning with the latter type of words in the corpus (3). The only exception to this regular distributivity of duplicated measure words can be found in the Jingpo material, where the meaning of a repeated classifier is claimed to be dependent on its syntactic function. Meanings other than distributivity allegedly engendered by the relationship between repetition and syntax in Jingpo with the kind of words in

question are indeterminate plurality and plurality, of which the latter is the regular feature of repeated interrogative pronouns in this Tibeto-Burman language.

Another more extensively distributed category of meaning in chapter 3 is emphasis, with exclusive restriction to pronouns in the corpus and most numerous-ly represented by instances from Jingpo, but also making a stray appearance in the dialect of Xi'an (north-western Mandarin) of the Sinitic group as well as in Li, a language of the Tai group. In Vietnamese, a duplicated interrogative pronoun may imply indefiniteness. The most interesting result of pronominal repetition is offered by Tangut, an extinct Tibeto-Burman language, argued as consisting of expansion in attributive scope, whereby an indefinite pronoun extends its 'non-repetitive' scope from nominal modification to include also the modification of verbs in its 'repetitive' scope.

In describing adjectival repetition, with its emphasis on productive duplication, it could be noted that the meaning of the output of various repetitive processes was not entirely predictable in terms of the iconicity principle, which states that more of linguistic form corresponds to more of semantic content, i.e. more intensity in the present context, as measured according to the values of a bi-polar intensity continuum. Violations of the iconicity principle are not evenly distributed among the repetitive patterns of the language groups in the corpus, but on the other hand, within the present data, Tai and Miao-Yao adjectival duplication (4.3, 4.6) offer exceptionless instances of diagrammatic iconicity in the respective sub-corpora, but this may, of course, be due to the size of the corpora in question, as a more comprehensive data base could prove this neat regularity to be an illusion.

Though emphasis as a meaningful adjectival repetitive category is second only to intensity as far as the extent of distribution between different language groups is concerned, it is meagre in content by comparison with the latter if measured in terms of referential consistency and frequency of occurrence, consisting only of a few isolated and even vague remarks (see 4.1.2. Huojia [northern Mandarin], 4.1.6. Cantonese [Yue], 4.6. Miao [Yao?] [Vietnam]) complemented, fortunately, by clearer instances of its functions, of which references to the coincidence between the emphasis and subject of a sentence, even with adjectives (4.2. Jingpo [Tibeto-Burman]), and the purported connection between the emphasis and continuity of a property (4.5. Bru [Mon-Khmer]), are examples.

Other semantic categories in the adjectival repetitive corpus, shared with the nominal data, are distributivity (4.3. Li [Tai]) and alternativity (4.2. Burmese [Tibeto-Burman]), of which the latter occurs in an identical context with 'nominal' alternativity. It is also claimed by the sources that frequency constitutes one semantic function of adjectival repetition (4.2. Jingpo [Tibeto-Burman]). Interestingly enough, repetition is directly involved in the formation of questions derived from adjectives in Yi, a Tibeto-Burman language (4.2). Expression of plurality through duplicated lexical forms with a qualitative reference is presumably not a universally

rife phenomenon, but this is exactly the function attributed to certain repetitive adjectives in Pacoh and Taoih, two Mon-Khmer languages (4.5). Finally, reciprocity can be conveyed by repeated adjectives in Bru, a Mon-Khmer language (4.5).

The two most common meaningful categories resulting from repetition of verbs, and finding expression in all language groups of the corpus, are delimitativeness/tentativeness and continuity (5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6). The latter term here represents a synthesis of all such terms used in the sources for the description of verbal repetition, as clearly have continuity of the action expressed by a verb as the principal semantic component. Thus the terms evoked by Gan (1993) for Standard Chinese, i.e. 'sustained aspect', 'durative-inducive aspect' and 'repetitive aspect' fit the description and can be subsumed under the concept of continuity. Naturally, 'frequentative', 'frequency' and 'progressive' are also terms conceptually compatible with the notion of continuity. Intensification as a semantic effect, though usually connected with adjectival repetition, can perhaps somewhat surprisingly be attested in the characterizations of the meaning of repetitive forms in the verbal data concerning four language groups, namely Sinitic (Standard Chinese 5.1.1, the dialect of Luoyang [northern Mandarin] 5.1.2, that of Kunming [south-western Mandarin] 5.1.2, Taiwanese, the dialects of Haikou and Putian [Min] 5.1.3, Dai [Tai] 5.3, Biaomin [Miao-Yao] 5.4 and Vietnamese and Katu [Mon-Khmer] 5.5, 5.6).

Of the verbal repetitive forms marked as being emphatic in meaning, it is the data on Jingpo (5.2) which make the most thorough analysis of them, tying them up with a syntactic function (subject, predicate, attribute), while the source on the dialect of Haikou (Min) settles for a mere mention of the emphatic meaning of a repetitive output (5.1.3). The author on Miao [Yao?] (Vietnam) mentions a case where an 'emphatic' repetitive verb form is derived from an adjectival base, while in Biaomin (Miao-Yao) attributive usage of monosyllabic verbs should make repetition imperative (5.4).

The meaning of reciprocal action is achieved by verbal repetitive processes in Pumi, a Tibeto-Burman language, as well as in Taoih and Katu of the Mon-Khmer group (5.2, 5.6). Repetitive expression of completed action, i.e. perfectivity, is restricted to the Sinitic group in the corpus. In addition to the infixal pattern of Standard Chinese (5.1.1), consecutive repetition of a verb within a syntactic environment may apparently induce a perfective interpretation of an action in the dialects of Kunming and Yongkang (Wu) (5.1.2, 5.1.3). Besides repetition, these speech forms share the feature of the repeated verb having an object in a complex sentence, topicalized in the case of Yongkang. Since at least in Kunming a disyllabic repetitive verb as such may be interpreted in the delimitative meaning as well, the assumption of the importance of the type of context just cited for the differentiation of the two meanings is not far-fetched. In Burmese (5.2), consecutive repetition of verbs, like that of nouns and adjectives, can function as a marker of subordination, expressing

alternativity. Indefiniteness is another meaning induced by a subordinate context for a repetitive verb form in Burmese.

Generic meaning is not only a property of nominal repetitive forms, but is also found with repeated verbs in Katu and Pacoh, both Mon-Khmer languages, while causativity as a semantic result of verbal repetition is attested exclusively in Katu in the entire corpus (5.6). In connection with Cantonese (Yue) of the Sinitic group (5.1.3) and Wa of the Mon-Khmer group (5.6), verbal repetition is argued as being implemented for rhetorical purposes. Instances of verbal repetition characterized as implying carelessness, casualness or unwillingness make a strong impression of being connotative in character, which under the present circumstances renders their further analysis unnecessary, of course. In one context, though, casualness was seen as a component of a semantic configuration equivalent to delimitativeness/tentativeness (see 5.4).

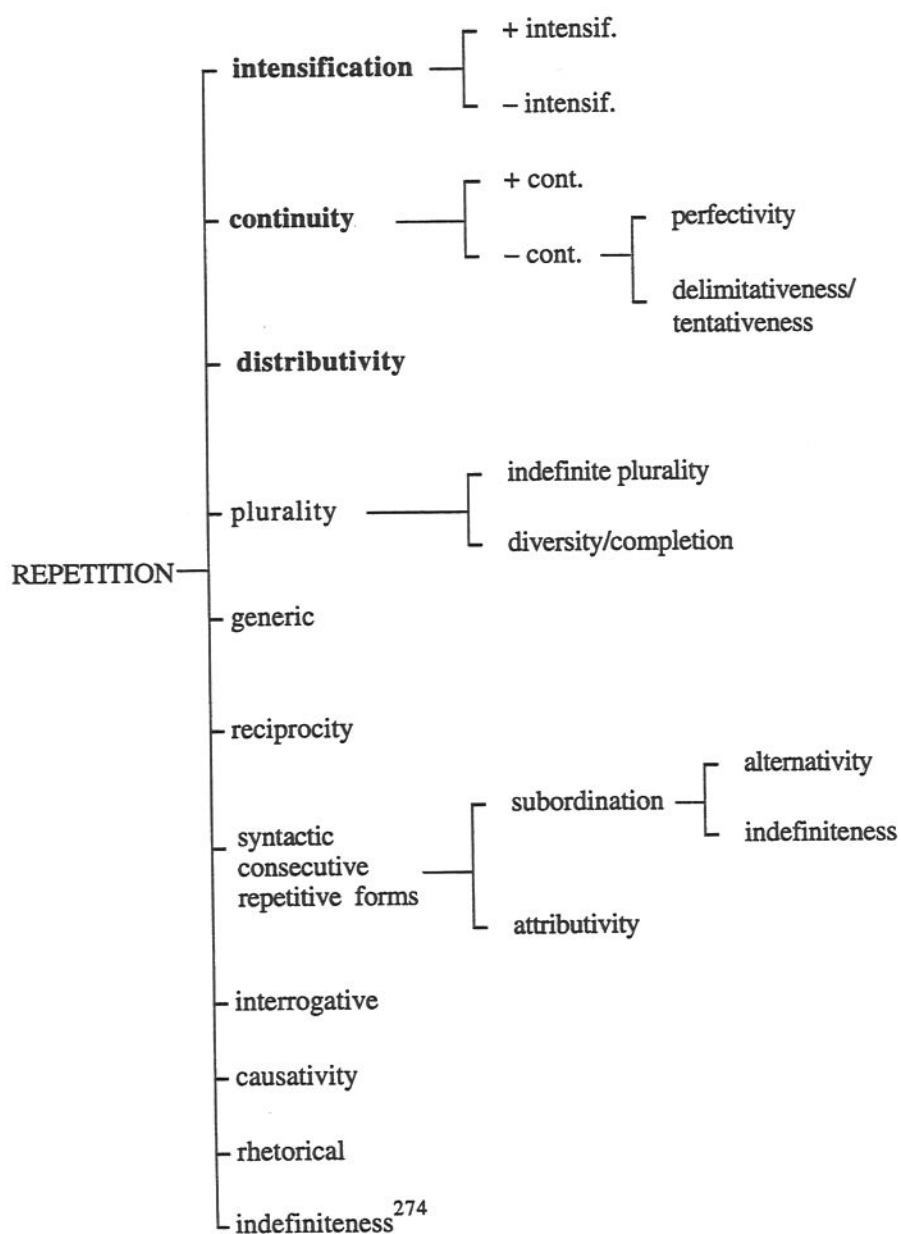
The array of repetitive meaningful categories introduced in the previous paragraphs makes a somewhat miscellaneous impression and consequently one wonders whether there is room for conceptually acceptable generalizations which would reduce the number of categories so far established.

Some rationalization in this respect was already done in connection with verbal categories on the previous page, but it is further proposed that, in addition to such obvious cases as the subsumption of indefinite plurality as well as of diversity/completion as special subtypes under plurality and besides de-intensification (/moderation) being considered the negative value of intensification, emphasis be regarded as synonymous to a sufficient extent with intensification, provided that Matthews' definition (1997: 181) of the derivationally related metalinguistic term 'intensifying' as adding emphasis to a sentence or some element in it be accepted as valid.

It is also quite within the confines of rational thinking to treat perfectivity and delimitativeness/tentativeness as two different types of negative values of continuity, and there should not be rationally insurmountable objections to the setting up of a repetitive category called 'syntactic consecutive repetitive forms' with two sub-categories, namely 'subordination' – divisible into 'alternativity' and 'indefiniteness' – and 'attributivity'.

Finally, one category is constituted by the admittedly rather vague instances simply labelled as 'rhetorical' without any detailed elucidations as to the grounds for such a denomination in the sources. Such general characterizations of the term 'rhetorical' as being concerned with the effective use of language (e.g. Matthews 1997: 321-322) hardly add to our understanding of how rhetorical repetition is fundamentally different from other types of repetition.

In any case, the figure on the following page summarizes a suggestion for a reduced set of meaningful repetitive categories extractable from the data available for this study. Categories with exponents in each language group under at least one word class (N, Adj. or V), i.e. the most common ones, are typed in bold:



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As far as the term 'indefiniteness' is concerned, redundancy in the figure is unavoidable due to the participation in two hierarchies on different hierarchical levels, of a category representing forms interpreted as indefinite in meaning in the sources. Indefiniteness as the name of a first level hierarchical category in the figure refers to the repetition of an indefinite pronoun in Vietnamese (ch. 3.).

In the short and rather sketchy chapter on history, repetition was treated within the larger framework of the linguistic history of the two quantitatively most copious speech forms in the data, namely Chinese and Vietnamese. It was noted how the two have undergone an identical development: simplification of syllabic structure and the consequent drive toward lexical disyllabism, and how repetitive vocabulary fits this process. A specific feature presumably shared by both is the origin of repetitive lexemes in the disintegration of initial consonant clusters and the function of the constitutive consonants as initials of the resulting syllables in a disyllabic rhyming lexical item. In Vietnamese, however, this development occurred much later than in Chinese.

This similarity in historical development has been counterbalanced by a distinction in the type of repetition favoured in the course of history. Vietnamese has been consistent in focusing on partial repetition, while on the Sinitic side, it is complete repetition which has become dominant despite the alleged supremacy of partial repetition in Old Chinese. At this point it is interesting to note that Chu (1998: 58) has argued that in modern Vietnamese, repetition, understood, as is usual in the Vietnamese linguistic tradition, as involving a close and varied relationship between phonetics and meaning, should be gradually losing ground to other means of word-formation, unspecified by the author. The reason for such a tendency is suggested by Chu as residing in the phono-semantic conditioning of the repetitive process, while in compounding, for instance, it is only the semantic compatibility which is at issue, making the latter less costly in terms of cognitive effort, provided aspiration to greater ease in this respect is accepted as a possible cause for linguistic change. By analogy, it is proposed that the loss of partial repetition in the history of Chinese can quite plausibly be seen as at least partly induced by the type of factors just cited as effective in modern Vietnamese.

Finally, in reference to Chinese, attempts at explaining the causes for a shift from monosyllabism to disyllabism from a functionalist, social and prosodic angle were briefly introduced with the presupposition that on the condition that they are meant to be universal, they are applicable to Vietnamese, or to any language, for that matter.

According to the evidence provided by the data available for this study, it seems that repetition in the languages of the defined area, beside sharing many structural types and coinciding in meaning, is primarily a word-forming device, though the syntactic environment for the interpretation of consecutive repetitive forms has been considered relevant by some authors in the corpus, not to forget Yi in which the formation of a question can be a function of inflectional morphology instead of syntax. An interesting piece of information supplied by the data is the existence of a productive partially repetitive process in a Sinitic speech form (Teng-xian). Perhaps this will be paralleled by other comparable finds in Chinese dialectology. On the basis of Chinese and Vietnamese evidence, it seems justifiable to

make the tentative suggestion that if and when repetition as a morphological process is exposed to loss in the history of a language, it is from the partial end of the repetitive continuum that it starts losing ground. It would be interesting to compare the results of this study with repetitive structures in languages outside the defined area, but that is another task.

Future research, besides carrying on further synchronic and diachronic investigations of the formal and semantic characteristics of repetition in East and Southeast Asian languages, would do well if it also made an attempt at clearing up the reference of the metalinguistic terms frequently used in the field, so that their application might add in a more precise way to our understanding of the phenomenon, instead of detracting from it.