

From South Asian Echo Formation to Cantonese Phonetic Repetition*

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Abstract

This paper identifies a unique reduplicating aspect of Cantonese morphology. The Cantonese lexical paradigm shows salient iconic feature and pragmatic function. Iconicity in the selected morphology is expressed in reduplication. These Cantonese idiomatic expressions appear in a three- or four-syllable structure with two identical sound segments in the former; or within a pair of reduplicated sound segments respectively in the latter. The intensified meaning is expressed in the reduplication of the Cantonese syllables. This meaning-form relationship exemplifies quantity iconicity in Cantonese morphology.

Key words

Cantonese, Reduplication, Iconicity, Applied Cultural Pragmatics, Idiomatic Expressions, Echo Words

Introduction

An attempt to identify the particular lexical paradigm in Cantonese with the South Asian echo words is proposed in this paper. There is a particular Cantonese lexical paradigm, which shows similar structural and denotative function in South Asian languages. To pave the way for the discussion of Cantonese echo formation I invoke the South Asian echo word. Both Indian and Cantonese echo formations manifest similar structural and semantic attributes.

The discussion begins with a passing remark on Cantonese in the general linguistic map and the significance of Cantonese in the context of Malaysian communication. The data comprise Cantonese idiomatic expressions expressed verbally in an echoic or repetitive manner. An analysis of the structures is presented in order to categorise the morphological configuration, which is of a [base-echo] prototype.

Focusing on the linguistic peculiarity of Cantonese echo words, an account of quantity iconicity in Cantonese idiomatic expressions is explored. The basic semantic focus in this Cantonese lexical paradigm is a semantic extension and intensification of individual lexical items upon elaboration by an echoing repetition. Under the iconic-repetitive lens, the semantic designation of the Cantonese base word is extended by a motivated phonetic repetition. The sound reiteration is seen to be a bipartite of a base and echo. This phonetic repetition concurs with quantity iconicity or in Givon's terms, the principle of quantity in isomorphic coding of grammar. To sum up the discussion, some pragmatic observations are made.

* For my grandma (*po po*, who is pushing 90s), without whom, there would be no Cantonese comprehension in me. Her unstinting love transforms my tantrums into tears of humility, heals the pores of anger, and rescues the lonely child in me with lanterns, soups, toys, stories, prayers, praises, advice, laughter, cakes and more...

Cantonese

Cantonese is a variant of Yue dialects (Norman, 1988:214). It is most widely spoken in Hong Kong and Guangdong (Canton). According to Ramsey (1989:98), 86 percent of Chinese-American identify themselves to the Cantonese origin. Consequently, Cantonese becomes the most common Chinese dialect characteristic of many Chinatowns around the world such as those in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, New York, San Francisco, Singapore, Sydney and Vancouver.

Among all the Chinese dialects available in Malaysia, Cantonese remains the most widely spoken Chinese dialect especially among the Chinese communities in Kuala Lumpur, Kampar, Kelang, Ipoh and Seremban. Though the speakers may not be of Cantonese ethnicity, Cantonese is the lingua franca of face-to-face communication in these areas among the Chinese. Evidence of Cantonese as the most dominant Chinese dialect in Malaysia can be proven by the number of Chinese television programmes using Cantonese as the medium of communication.

Apart from the Chinese national news, which is read in Mandarin, Cantonese is the standard Chinese tongue used in most of the variety shows and weekly series on Malaysian television. Additionally, a large amount of the advertisements are also broadcast in Cantonese. While the speakers are well at ease with the language, especially the usage of the particular idiomatic expressions, little did they know that these expressions exemplify a fair deal of iconicity which is contradictory to the general linguistic notion that language is an arbitrary system (cf. Landsberg, ed. 1995, and Sew, 1998a for a review of Landsberg). The following sections provide the terminological, structural, semantic and pragmatic explanations to these Cantonese idiomatic expressions.

Cantonese Echo Words

As pointed out by So and Harrison (1996) there is a particular type of idiomatic Cantonese expression not often mentioned in the analysis of Cantonese morphology. So and Harrison use the phrase 'trisyllabic phrases with reduplicative intensification' in their paper for the Cantonese lexical item in question. Some of their examples (So and Harrison, 1996:47-8) include:

gwong (1) *caang* (4) *caang* (4) 'bright'

gwui (6) *laai* (4) *laai* (4) 'tired'

jau (1) *lam* (6) *lam* (6) 'greasy'

On the other hand, Matthews and Yip (1994:162-5) name this kind of expressions as reduplication of adjectives and identify the existing AAB and ABB patterns in Cantonese. These idiomatic expressions seem to be a fundamental characteristic of colloquial Cantonese, inherent with an ethos of Chinese culture par excellence. An emigrant once expressed the nostalgia about Hong Kong with the following idiomatic expressions in a radio interview (Matthews and Yip, 1994: 166):

Y'uhjagwai *yit-laaht-laaht heung-pan-pan*

fried-doughnut warm-hot-hot [ABB] fragrant-smell [ABB]

cheui-bok-bok

crispy-crispy [ABB]

'The doughnuts are piping hot, appetizing and crispy.'

Limiting her studies to colour terms, Mok (1997) identifies the ABB patterns of Cantonese morphology, which denotes certain spectrum as Cantonese ideophones. In her analysis, the head is the first word (A), which combines with the additional repetitive segments (BB) to form an ideophone. The formation is said to be sound symbolic (Mok, 1997:4).

I propose the term Cantonese echo words to the idiomatic expression as it enables a satisfactory inclusion of this morphology, which comes in three- and four-syllable variants. Echo word provides a wider capacity of linguistic denomination. By adopting this term, I could relegate the above three syl-

lable variant (So and Harrison, 1996) of the Cantonese lexical items as a subset of Cantonese echo words. Let me elaborate what I meant by Cantonese echo by introducing the South Asian echo word.

Echo words in South Asian languages are originally a reduplicated lexical category in languages of South Asian. Abbi (1992:20) defines it as:

...a partially repeated form of the base word - partially in the sense that either in the initial phoneme (which can be either a consonant or a vowel) or the syllable of the base is replaced by another phoneme or another syllable. The replacer (phoneme/syllable) sound sequences are more or less fixed and rigid.

D'souza (1991:291) cites Khateed's definition of South Asian echos as:

...a partially repeated form of a base word- partially in the sense that either the initial phoneme or the initial syllable of the base word is substituted for a new one; and an echo construction is a construction in which the base word is followed by the echo word. The echo word generally has no individual occurrence of its own."

Based on the above quotations, it is clear that in South Asian languages, echo words are a [base-echo] association in which the echo is a partially reduplicated segment of the base word. One might wonder how could Cantonese be related to Tamil or any other South Asian language as each belongs to a different language typology altogether. But if one is willing to capture the structure of echo-formation as defined above one could see the similar echoic pattern of the Cantonese lexical paradigm in relation to the South Asian Echos. There are many features of this Cantonese lexical item which are relatable to the South Asian prototype. The existence of a base word in the assumed Cantonese echo formation turns out to be the first similarity with the South Asian echo, which has a base word.

Secondly, the reduplicated segment of the echoic word in South Asian languages is comparable to the repetitive segment of the Cantonese variant. Though not a partial reduplication, but rather a complete repetition of a new sound segment and/or the base word in the Cantonese echoic expression, the phonetic reiteration in the Cantonese echo, nevertheless, holds a semantic function similar to that of the South Asian echo words. This repetitive phonetics of Cantonese echo elaborates on the meaning of its base word, which is the principal semantic focus in the bipartite.

The morphological prototype of echo formation be it Cantonese or Indian is a [base-echo] association. It would be useful at this point of discussion to introduce and compare a South Asian echo word with a Cantonese counterpart. (For more examples of South Asian Echos see Tiwary, 1968:33 and Abbi, 1992):

South Asian Echo

deslai-oslai

(match-box, etc.)

Cantonese Echo

woo(1) seuh(4) seuh (4)²

(ignorant; completely in the dark of something)

The whole expression of the Cantonese echo above describes the ignorance of a character, who remains oblivious to an occurrence. The whole semantic configuration takes on a connotation of foolishness though the principal word woo (1) actually means gloomy with respect to illumination. The pragmatic function of the echo-formation is hence obvious. By using this expression a speaker is able to imply his intention but at the same time remains polite conforming to the values of Asian culture, which prefer the indirect manner of hinting rather than spelling out the reality explicitly.

Comparatively speaking, one could see that both the South Asian and Cantonese echoic paradigms have a principal meaning designated by the base word. Both lexical items are followed by phonetic reiteration in the form of echo formation that intensifies or extends the semantic range of the principal meaning. The echo formation in South Asian is partially reduplicated whereas in Cantonese it is re-

¹ Each number in the brackets indicates a particular Cantonese tone in ordinal fashion. Cantonese has six basic tones (Lau, 1977) classifiable as high falling (1), middle rising (2), middle level (3), low falling (4), low rising (5), low level (6). All the Cantonese characters transcribed into roman letters in this paper will be followed by their respective tones in brackets.

peated completely. Neither of the echoic segments in South Asian Languages nor Cantonese have independent existence which corresponds to the definition of echo-formation.²

The Cantonese Echos and its structural analyses

I list out the first set of my Cantonese echos, which are a [base-echo] bipartites. The lists of Cantonese echos are based on the principal words as the semantic focus and their meanings followed by the echo-formations and the new meanings. In this first set of my data, the Cantonese primary word bases are mainly adjectives (cf. Matthews and Yip, 1994 who use adjective reduplication for the lexical items). However, a few nouns are noticeable as base words as well. All the echo words listed are to be taken as adjective bases, unless explicitly identified as otherwise.

Cantonese Repetitive Echo Words	Meaning
hung(4)	red
hung(4) dong(1) dong(6)	very red
hak(1)	black
hak(1) ma(1) ma(1)	pitch black
wong(4)	yellow
wong(4) kam(4) kam(4)	as yellow as the ripening grain
am(3)	blur
am(3) cham(4) cham(4)	very very gloomy
baak(6)	white
baak(6) suet(3) suet(3)	snow-white
chin(1) (noun)	thousand
chin(1) maan(6) maan(6)	ever so many
dung(3)	cold
dung(3) bing(1) bing(1)	very cold
fa(1) (noun)	flower
fa(1) baan(1) baan(1)	multicoloured
fa(1) luk(6) luk(6)	variegated
fei(4)	fat
fei(4) tan(4) tan(4)	oily

² The Cantonese echoic morpheme, which is meaningful independently, becomes semantically opaque upon reduplication.

gap(1)	hasty
gap(1) mong(4) mong(4)	in a great hurry
gwong(1)	bright
gwong (1) chaang(4) chaang(4)	extremely bright
haam(4)	salty
haam(4) lang(3) lang(3)	over-salty
hei(3) (noun)	breath
hei(3) heuh(4) heuh(4)	be short of breath
ho(2)	good
ho(2) dei(6) dei(6)	with nothing wrong, in normal condition
juí(3)	drunk
juí(3) fan(1) fan(1)	dead drunk
laan(6)	torn
laan(6) yung(4) yung(4)	worn out
ling(4) (noun)	zero
ling(4) sing(1) sing(1)	trivial, miscellaneous
lui(4) (noun)	tears
lui(4) wong(1) wong(1)	tearful
mung(4)	blurred
mung(4) cha(4) cha(4)	ignorant, silly
ngaan(5) (noun)	eye
ngaan(5) ding(6) ding(6)	stare with astonishment
ngong(6)	stupid
ngong(6) gui(1) gui(1)	foolish
no(6) (noun)	anger
no(6) chung(1) chung(1)	be in great rage

nuen(5)	warm
nuen(5) nap(1) nap(1)	extremely warm
saang(1)	alive
saang(1) boot(6) boot(6)	full of life or vitality
sam(1) (noun)	heart
sam(1) yuk(1) yuk(1)	desire
san(1)	new
san(1) chuk(1) chuk(1)	brand new
suen(1)	sour
suen(1) dam(1) dam(1)	very sour
suk(1)	stale
suk(1) hang(1) hang(1)	stale, musty
taam(5)	tasteless
taam(5) mau(4) mau(4)	very insipid
wan(4)	dizzy
wan(4) toh(4) toh(4)	very dizzy
woh(4)	together(ness)
woh(4) muk(6) muk(6)	friendly, agreeable
woo(1)	blur
woo(1) ma(1) ma(1)	very dark/black
woo (1) seuh(4) seuh(4)	ignorant, completely in the dark about something
yit(6)	hot
yit(6) laat(6) laat(6)	sweltering hot
yuen(4)	round
yuen(4) luk(1) luk(1)	roundish

There is always a principal word, which is the focus of meaning in Cantonese echo-formation. The concept of principal word as the independent free morpheme followed by secondary word, which is a

bound morpheme, is also a linguistic phenomenon in Malay pair-words. This Malay lexical paradigm has been studied by Tham (1979), who points out that the structural configuration of a Malay pair is a focus-elaboration bipartite as in terang-benderang very shining, bukit-bukau ranges of hill, kayu-kayan various kinds of wood, and sayur-mayur different kinds of vegetables in which the terang, bukit, kayu, and sayur are the bases followed by benderang, bukau, kayan and mayur as the elaborating nonces. All these echoic nonces are bound morphemes, which have no independent existence.

Such bipartite structure is also visible in the Cantonese echos. The focus of meaning is always elaborated by the echos, which are nonce duplication. In contrast with the fixed association of Malay pair-words analysed, which always have the focus preceding the elaboration, I observe that the Cantonese echo words allow the focus to be preceded by the elaboration as in my second set of data. The direct opposite structure of this second set of Cantonese echos are: [Echo + Base] listed as follows:

Cantonese Echo Words	Meaning
geuk(3)	leg; foot
ngan(3) ngan(3) geuk(3)	enjoy life
sui(3)	fragments
sap(1) sap(1) sui(3)	trivial
chui(3)	crispy
ngok (1) ngok(1) chui (3)	very crispy

The third category of echo words observable in Cantonese is the reduplication of both base and nonce. In this structure the phrase is a four-syllable expression, which is commonly found in the echoic Cantonese idiomatic expressions.³ This [Reiterated Base + Reiterated echo] structures are as below:

Cantonese Echo Words	Meaning
chung(1)	rush
chung(1) chung(1) mong(4) mong(4)	in a great hurry
dim(2)	drop
dim(2) dim(2) dik(6) dik(6)	drop by drop
faan(1)	overturn
faan(1) faan(1) fuk(1) fuk(1)	vacillate; change frequently
ngam(4)	mutter
ngam(4) ngam(4) cham(4) cham(4)	grunt, grumble
poh(4)	grandmother
poh(4) poh(4) ma(1) ma(1)	hesitant, indecisive

³ One of the reviewers prefers reduplication to echo-formation. I prefer to see it as the echo-formation par excellence, where both base and nonce are replicated to accentuate phonetic repetition as a pragmatic force in verbal communication. The base is no longer a prototypical single syllable or word as in X elaborated with the echoic YY; or YYX when the echo precedes the base. The base is an atypical XY, a bi-syllabic compound and becomes a XXYY formation upon echoing.

sai(3)	generation
sai(3) sai(3) doi(6) doi(6)	from generation to generation
sap(1)	wet
sap(1) sap(1) sing(1) sing(1)	trivial; odds and ends
woh(4)	together
woh(4) woh(4) hei(3) hei(3)	peaceful, friendly

With this category my data have extended the scope of XYX into XYXY.

One final category in Cantonese is a combination of reduplicated base word with a nonce echo: [Reiterated Base + echo]. Though not very productive, nevertheless, the category exists as in the following:

Cantonese Echo Words	Meaning
chui(1)	urge
chui(1) chui(1) gung(3)	keep urging
chui(4)	follow; accord with
chui(4) chui(4) hong (6)	everywhere in town
mong	silly
mong mong pai	silly

From the above data, I observe four categories of basic Cantonese echos, which have the prototype of [base + echo]. From this prototypical structure four canonical variants could further be derived: [base + echo-echo], [base-base + echo], [base-base + echo-echo] and [echo-echo + base].

Iconic Pragmatics in Cantonese Echos

Many linguists have tested the arbitrariness of language vigorously. The discussion on cognitive metaphor in conjunction with semiotic iconicity is documented in the 1994 edition of *Journal of Pragmatics* 22(1). This special issue contains a collection of papers presented at the 15th International Congress of Linguists at University of Laval in Canada. In the first paper of the focused discussion, Hiraga (1994) reiterates the controversy in Plato's *Craytylus* on which the dispute over nature versus convention between the language form and its content was initiated. Hiraga reminds us of Jakobson's critique on Saussure's notion on linguistic arbitrariness by applying the Peircean iconicity. The discussions on syntactic iconicity published in Landsberg (ed., 1995) is another important turning point for the study of semantics, in which syntactic iconicity is studied from the standpoints of linguistics, literature, psychology, sign language and philosophy. The phonetic repetition in echo formation manifests an aspect of linguistic iconicity.

This particular syntactic iconicity in this discussion of Cantonese echos is a type of diagrammatic iconicity (Sew, 2005) and it could be further classified under quantity iconicity (Hiraga, 1994) described as an iconic relation between the quantity of form and the quantity (strength, degree) of meaning. James H-Y Tai (1993:159) divides iconic motivations in Chinese into order motivation, distance motivation, separateness motivation, juxtaposition motivation and reduplication motivation. The iconic Cantonese echos that manifest quantity iconicity could be further categorised as repetitive motivation (see Sew 2007 for a similar discussion on Malay verb reduplication). Simply by adding more forms to

the Cantonese base word saang (1) boot (6) boot (6), of which boot (6) boot (6) become the added echo-formation, the quantity of the meaning is increased. More accurately, the information designated is less predictable with the semantic extension namely from 'alive' (san) to 'full of live and vitality' (san boot-boot). The widening of the semantic scope parallels with the additional coding, which concurs with Givon's quantity principle of isomorphic coding (1994:49):

- (a) A larger chunk of information will be given a larger chunk of code
- (b) Less predictable information will be given more coding material

Another version of Cantonese echo word synonymous to san boot boot is san gwau gwau (sprightly alive), which is again an intensified designation to the meaning of the base word. Both echoes of san show, either a semantic increase, extension or both; are accountable by the principles of quantity iconicity above. This particular aspect of quantity iconicity is also observed by Hovdhaugen (1990:98) in Samoan for example ao /head/ > aoao /supreme/ and fili /pick out/ > filifili /choose/. In Amele, a Papuan language, there is a structural similarity between one of its reduplications with the fourth category of the Cantonese echos. The reduplicated nominal often functions as an adjective or adverb (Robert, 1991:122) such as these examples bi? tail > bi?-bi? like a tail e.g. bi?-bi? nue? to go backwards, and gemo middle > gemo-gemo through the middle, e.g. gemo-gemo ?obo? to walk through the middle.

The Cultural Pragmatics of Echoism

It is interesting to note that according to Tiwary (1968:36) the South Asian echo words, especially the Bhojpuri echo, performs certain sociocultural functions:

'It [Bhojpuri echo word] is quite commonly used by elders persuading others, and, especially, by parents in cajoling and coaxing their children. Talking advantage of the sentiment linguistique, one would like to maintain that it is an extremely subtle and flexible technique of advising, persuading and negotiating. If the attempt at persuasion, advising, and bargaining succeeds, it succeeds with all the charm of a colloquial style in conversational mode and touch of the personal, and with none of the impersonal character of decisions imposed from above, or the tension of the hard-driving bargaining.'

Along this vein, other social (mis)conducts are negotiated through the idiomatic expressions. Though smoking, for example, is considered bad manners in South Asian societies, one could hide such intention by using an echo word. Thus by asking for deslai-oslai match-box, etc. in the presence of elders, one could be implying for cigarettes as the match-box is associated with smoking (Tiwary, 1968: 37). I attribute such interaction as a form of power pragmatics skillfully crafted by those who know how to mince one's intention with words (Sew, 1997). Along this line of thought, idiomatic expressions open up a world of languaculture crucial to the analysis of applied cultural linguistics that has implication for second language acquisition (Sew, 1998b, 2008).

From the pragmatic viewpoint, the Cantonese echos, similar to the South Asian echos, has its illocutionary functions. This particular aspect of repetition is a gramaticalised illocutionary device, which reflects an aspect of cultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 1986:307). Wierzbicka states that the Italian clausal repetition is the antithesis of understatement and a manifestation of emotional overstatement. Although her data are in Italian, the phonetic repetition is considered a means of semantic operation, which parallels the South Asian echos. By means of phonetic repetition, the potential semantic configuration of a lexeme is extended. This is the case for English as mentioned by Bolinger (1972:90), who states that repetition can be used in English as a means of *intensification*, analogous to words such as *very* or *extremely* in examples like, *it was a big big bear*.

This discussion suggests that the Italian cultural pragmatics is identifiable from Cantonese echos, which is a significant part of applied cultural linguistics to Cantonese speakers. The phonetic repetition in the Cantonese echo-formation exaggerates intention (cf. Ramsey, 1989:105-107, for examples of clausal repetition in Cantonese). At certain points of communication such applied cultural linguistics is indeed needed. Illocutionary devices such as echo words can be important indices in verbal communication and sustain an added influence in persuasive discourse.

At a micro level, the repetitive-clustering elements such as phonetic repetition in Cantonese echos can be regarded as collocating indices (Thor May, 1993: 82-3). They form lexical items through varying concatenations. With no *a priori* assumptions, Thor May understands repetition as a central organis-

ing phenomenon. It is attributed to the cohesion of discourse, 'while repeating entities...work beyond conscious reach, cohesion is a quality that carries direct interpretive significance for each of the communicating parties' (1993: 86).

Functionally, both paradigms are productively used in daily communication. For the pragmatic validity of South Asian echoes, one could refer to Abbi (1992) and Tiwary (1968). As for the currency of Cantonese echos, I quote So and Harrison (1996:41):

'Observation in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau, shows that these XYYs (tri-syllabic phrases with reduplicative intensification) serve informal uses and enliven everyday speech. For their number, probably less than 175, XYYs have great semantic range; are frequent in conversation; show structural simplicity; when not used alone XYYs mostly function to modify nouns...but can qualify verbs too...'

The Cantonese echos are, primarily, a set of idiomatic expressions commonly used as an important communicational means among the speakers. This lexical paradigm can express the intention of the speaker and at the same time retain some politeness as the meanings transpired from Cantonese echos operate indirectly within the semiotic boundary of cultural linguistics. Take for example by employing the term chung(1) chung(1) mong(4) mong(4) 'in a great hurry' towards somebody, the speaker is able to express an intention for a more committed attention to the listener without being vocal or explicitly frank. This is a term commonly used to tease the addressee for staying too short a time. While longing for a longer period of companionship but without wanting to impose an obligation the speaker could resort to this form of indirectness via echo word. Under the power pragmatic lens, this is a good example of indirect empowerment at the speaker's dispense in a face-to-face communication (cf. Sew, 1997).

Another example of Cantonese echo commonly employed for pragmatic purposes is poh(4) poh(4) ma(1) ma(1), which designates one's hesitance or indecisiveness. While being angry and impatient with some vacillating souls, a person can use this term to imply the discontent without being too outspoken. But before one is eager to try poh poh ma ma freely, I would like to caution that this term may be pejorative to a male's ego as the first reiterated pair actually means grandmother and the second doublets denote mother (if the tones are altered accurately). In Ng Bee Chin and K. Burridges' article (1993) on gender and Chinese radicals the term *popomama* is said to designate *long winded and ineffective* reflecting the sexist perception on women as illogical and unproductive thinkers. The term is also used derogatorily against men. It is by such sound symbolic association the meaning of indecisiveness is coined in this Cantonese echo.

Interestingly So and Harrison (1996:50) notice that the most common tone patterns over an extensive data (130 items) of XYYs and its selected choice (50 items) are tone 1 and tone 4. The next two most common tone combinations in XYY are 4, 1 and 6, 1. Although my database is not large enough to lend any empirical support to these observations, a passing counting of the frequencies of my echoic data supports the tone tendencies outlined by So and Harrison. Furthermore, this discussion is in agreement with Mok (1997:9) that there is an additional expressivity in the phonetic repetition of Cantonese echo words whether the idiomatic expressions denote colours or other references. The expressivity of these repetitive lexical items might be equated with Wierzbicka's point that Italian reduplication such as *bella bella* (very beautiful) has an emotional component in its semantics (1986:309). This discussion suggests that the Cantonese echoic formations are characteristic of Cantonese expressive euphemism exemplifying the semiotics of common Cantonese talk in everyday life.

Summary

In this paper I try to introduce the term Cantonese echo words with similar linguistic features to the South Asian echoes. For this lexical paradigm, I have outlined four different categories of Cantonese Echo words, namely: [Base + Reiterated Echo], [Reiterated Echo + Base], [Reiterated Base + Reiterated Echo] and [Reiterated Base + Reiterated Echo]. Based on these structural subcategorisation, a tri-syllabic Cantonese morpho-semantic expression is a subset of Cantonese echo words as it is the first of the four subsets in the paradigm. Whether the Cantonese echo is of the first, second, third or fourth subcategory it functions expressively in a focus-elaboration, or elaboration-focus bipartite where the base word is always the semantic reference of the echo word.

This form of Cantonese phonetic repetition could be echoed in a three- or four-syllable structure. The former consists of two identical syllables or sound segments echoing a base word whereas the latter is a pair of repeated sound segments. Both express an intensified meaning through phonetic repeti-

tion. As a result, semantic motivation is exemplified in these Cantonese morphemes. By pointing out the existence of Cantonese echo words the discussion provides additional support to quantity iconicity or the principle of quantity in iconicity. Like the South Asian echo words, the Cantonese counterpart is an indispensable colloquial form of pragmatic device in verbal communication.

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