
**“Chaos theory, *shmaos* theory”:
Creativity and routine in English *shm*-reduplication**

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In this talk, we investigate an “extravagant” construction at the interface of morphology and syntax: English *shm*-reduplication, a pattern in which a word is immediately repeated, but the initial consonant or consonant cluster is either replaced by /ʃm/, or /ʃm/ is added to the beginning of a word if it begins with a vowel (McCarthy & Prince 1996), as exemplified in (1) (example from ENCOW16AX).

- (1) Chaos theory, schmaos theory. When the universe is this much on your side, you literally cannot lose.

So far, research on *shm*-reduplication has mainly focused on its phonological properties (but see Mattiello 2013). The present study adds a semantic and a multimodal perspective, drawing on data from computer-mediated communication as well as on video data. By applying semantic vector-space analysis to data from the web corpus ENCOW16AX (Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012), we took a closer look at the semantic domains to which the base words in the construction belong. In addition, we extracted an exhaustive set of attestations of the *shm*-reduplication construction from the *TV News Archive*, and tested two predictions based on the multimodal data. Firstly, we predicted that the construction is often accompanied by a dismissive gesture, thus qualifying as a multimodal construction. This hypothesis was borne out by the data. Our second prediction was that the construction tends to occur turn-initially, usually taking up cues from the interlocutor’s previous utterance if occurring in a conversation. Here, the results indicate that matters are more complex and that *shm*-reduplication tends to occur in what could be called “fictive quotes” (Pascual 2014): An attitude ascribed to a person is conveyed by a quote attributed to said person either via a quotative or without an overt quotation marker. In many ways, then, the pattern is a prime example for a creative and “extravagant” construction that is strongly connected to specific communicative contexts and characterized by a fairly complex set of discourse-functional properties.

References: • Mattiello, E. 2013. Extra-grammatical morphology in English. Abbreviations, blends, reduplicatives, and related phenomena. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. • McCarthy, John J. & Alan Prince. [1986] 1996. Prosodic morphology. • Pascual, E. 2014. Fictive interaction: the conversation frame in thought, language, and discourse. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins. • Schäfer, R. & F. Bildhauer. 2012. Building large corpora from the web using a new efficient tool chain. In C. Calzolari et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of LREC 2012*, 486–493.