

# Repetition avoidance and iconicity of repetition

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Various kinds of repetition are deemed characteristic of human language, especially reduplication and recursion, which have both been claimed to be (near-)universal. However, excess repetition is clearly avoided. Here, I focus on German and show how different kinds of repetition (e.g. Freywald 2015; Kentner 2017; Schindler 1991) encode different iconic meanings. The data below suggest that exact adjacent repetitions (1) are banned from entering the lexicon, i.e. cases of exact adjacent repetition are typically post-lexical in nature. However, across phonological levels, we find lexicalised (or at least lexicalisable) kinds of repetition with either phonological alterations thwarting identity (2), or intervening material thwarting adjacency (3). A synopsis suggests that repetitions with alteration (2) or intervening material (3) on the one hand, and exact adjacent repetition (1) on the other, carry systematically different expressive meanings which are related to the form of the construct and thus iconic. The former types convey 'ludic' semantic flavors such as affection, diminution, disparagement (2ab) and poeticity (2c, 3) – in line with their 'ludic' form involving repetition plus alteration (characteristic traits of all kinds of play). The latter (1) are pure repetitions and iconically encode purity/prototypicality (1a) or intensification of some sort (1b).

- (1) Examples of exact adjacent repetition
  - a. Identical constituent compound: *Reis-Reis* ('rice-rice')
  - b. Unbounded repetition: *sehr sehr schön* ('very very nice')
- (2) Examples of repetition with alterations (including stress alterations)
  - a. Syllable doubling: *Papa, Mama, Pipi*; nicknames: *Jojo, Vivi*
  - b. Rhyme/ablaut reduplication: *Schickimicki, Mischmasch*
  - c. Frozen coordinations: *Hegen, pflegen [und bewahren]*
- (3) Examples of repetition with intervener (linking element or semantically opaque preposition)
  - a. Recursive compounding: *Kindeskind, Freundesfreund*
  - b. Sequential construction: *Tag für Tag, Jahr um Jahr*

In sum, the data strongly suggest an iconic form-meaning relationship: repetition conveys expressive meaning, and depending on the type of repetition (with or without alteration), different kinds of iconic meanings arise.

**References:** • Freywald, U. 2015. Total reduplication [...] in German. *Studies in Language* 39. 905–945.  
• Kentner, G. 2017. [...] reduplication in German morphophonology. *ZS* 36. 233–277. • Schindler, W. 1991. Reduplizierende Wortbildung im Deutschen. *ZPSK* 44. 597–613.