



## Reduplicative Shmeduplicative

The other day my wife Kristi, my music partner Lou, and my sister Susannah got together with Michelle, who was one of our first and most supportive bartenders when Lou and I started playing music weekly at the old Club de Wash in November of '77.

Michelle's nickname is Mimi. There is a tavern a few blocks from the Club de Wash location called the Echo. Another bartender who often worked with Mimi was called Ray-Ray. One day we mentioned from stage that Mimi and Ray-Ray used to be called Mi and Ray before they got jobs at the Echo.

This joke, if you can call it that, is based on what are linguistically called REDUPLICATIVES. Why they are not called DUPLICATIVES is a mystery to me, but I'm no linguist. Or as my wife, whose nickname is Kiki, would say, I might be an armchair linguist but I'm not a *linguist* linguist. Which is a reduplicative, as is *Kiki*.

*Linguist* linguists, according to Wikipedia, list six different types of reduplication. They are EXACT reduplication (*mama*), RHYMING reduplication (*artsy-fartsy*), ABLAUT reduplication (*flim-flam*), SHM- reduplication (*fancy-shmancy*), COMPARATIVE reduplication ("His face got *redder and redder*"), and CONTRASTIVE FOCUS reduplication ("Do you eat process cheese or *CHEESE cheese?*").

Not being a *linguist* linguist, but just an armchair linguist, I feel free to simplify that list. To me, there are basically THREE types of reduplication:

- EXACT (ding ding).
- RHYMING (wing ding). Vowel stays the same; consonant changes.
- ABLAUT (ding dong). Consonant stays the same; vowel changes).

SHM-reduplication (*linguist shmin-guist*), in my book, would be a subgroup under RHYMING. Comparative reduplication ("This column gets

*dumber and dumber*") would be grouped under EXACT. Same with Contrastive Focus Reduplication ("Is that an e-book or a *BOOK book?*").

Incidentally, the word "ablaut" is really too specific to use the way it's used here, according to definitions I've found. It means "A vowel change that accompanies a change in grammatical function; for example, *i, a, u* in *sing, sang, sung*." That rules out such word combos as *wishy-washy* and *flim-flam*, wherein the vowel change doesn't involve grammatical function. Besides, who has ever heard of the word "ablaut"? Not me, but then I'd never heard the word "reduplicative" until this morning.

So if it's okay with you I'll call these three types the **dingding**, the **wingding**, and the **dingdong**.

I goofed around with a bunch of **wingdings** in *Whither Zither* (which itself is a **wingding**, by the way) of November 2011. However the ones I came up with (nerd utensil = *dork fork*; Spam = *sham ham*; Thunderhead = *loud cloud*), with one word modifying the other word, is a subgroup of the **wingding** which some people call a *Stinky Pinky*, from a word game of the same name. To play the game, one person says a clue like "thief drool" and the other has to come up with the rhyme "robber slobber." I had no idea then that I was messing with things with the fancy-shmancy name of reduplicatives.

Anyway, what I'm getting around to, in this purported music column, is that reduplicatives are used in songs all the time. Woody Guthrie used **dingdings** in his kids' songs, like Let's go Ridin' in the Car-Car and Jig Along Home (*Jigalong, jigalong, jigalong home*.) In This Old Man, there's the **dingdong** of "*Knick-knack paddy whack*." Harry Belafonte sang "*Mama look at Boo-Boo*." There's "*Boom Boom, ain't it great to be crazy*" and Old MacDonald with his "Everywhere a *quack quack*."

And I remember rock songs from my younger days that were reduplicative-rich, like the **wingding** "My Baby Does the *Hanky-Panky*," and the **dingdong-dingding-dingdong** "...*ting-tang, wella-wella bing-bang*" of

Witch Doctor. There was "*Spish splash I was takin' a bath*." There are a million "baby baby" songs to this day, and were plenty of reduplicative band names like *Sha-Na-Na* and *Duran Duran*. And these days of course, *Lady Gaga*.

There were **dingdings** in the Tin Pan Alley songs and other pop songs of bygone days that my folks used to sing, like Toot Toot Tootsy Goodbye, Chattanooga Choo-Choo, Barney Google with the Goog-Goog-Googly Eyes, Goody Goody, and Side by Side.

Traditional and traditional-sounding folk songs are loaded with reduplicatives, like the Yiddish song Dona Dona, whose chorus ends with "*Dona dona dona dona, dona dona dona doe, dona dona dona dona, dona dona dona doe*." Foggy Foggy Dew has a **dingding** title. Then there's the song with the **dingding** plant name, Way Down Yonder In the Paw-Paw Patch. Dylan has "*jingle jangle mornin'*," a **dingdong**, in his Mr. Tambourine Man. Pete Seeger threw a stack of reduplicatives at a Bible passage and ended up with Turn! Turn! Turn! Could this be a retriplicative, or a **dingdingding**?

Keep your ears peeled, they're everywhere. In art (*dada*), culture (*hip hop*) dance (*go-go, cha-cha*), dress (*muu-muu, tutu, pom-pom, flip-flop*), food (*snack-pack, ho-ho, squeeze cheese, tic tac*) and general human behavior (*hush-hush, so-so, mishmash, picky picky, chit chat, easy peasy, as-is, hubba hubba, yadda yadda, loosey goosey, namby pamby, kissy kissy, teeter totter, hobo, ta ta*).

I had written this far in *Whither Zither* and took a trip with our dog Sadie to the dog park for a break. My friend Mr. Setter was talking about a construction project he was working on, where he said today the electrician got hit in the head by a bat. Were they playing baseball? No, turns out he was referring to the flying mammal kind of bat. My friend Ms. Collie said, "Oh, a *BAT* bat." A contrastive focus **dingding!**

Suddenly I'm hearing reduplicatives everywhere. I think I'm going bats. Bye bye!

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