Word final nasal /m/ reduplications and irregularities: Case study of Tamil

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This paper is aimed to give an optimality theoretic account for the emerging asymmetrical patterns resulted from reduplication of words involving word final nasal /m/ in Tamil, a language belonging to Southern Dravidian Family.

Reduplication has been a hotly debated topic in pre-OT (Wilbur, 1973, Marantz, 1982, McCarthy 1983, McCarthy and Prince 1986, Shaw 1987, Uhrbach 1987, Striade 1988), and the trend has been continued in OT, as well (McCarthy and Prince, 1994, Kager 1999, (Inkelas, 2008, Alderete et al., 1999, Blevins, 2003). Most of these sources have attested the contributive factor of Correspondence Theory, and significantly contributed to the advancement of knowledge in the field. But, none of this has ever corroborated reduplications from Tamil.

Total reduplication and partial reduplication involving various consonantal segments in Tamil are well-noted for exhibiting systematically organized phonological behavior. However, words ending with nasal /m/ tend to behave differently from reduplicative words ending with other consonantal segments. This significant difference is maintained between reduplicants and reduplicative bases involving same morphological word classes and identical phonological constituents, given in (1).

1) a) *maatam + maatam > maataamaatam* 'every month'

   vaaram + vaaram > vaaraavaaram 'every week'

   b) *tinan + tinam > tinantinam* 'every day'

   naalum + naalum > naalunnaalum 'every day'

   c) *perum + perum > perupperum* 'every big…'

   perum + perum > perumperum 'every big…'

   d) *panam + panam > panampanam* 'money money'

Note that none of the harmonic output in the precursor examples experienced identical phonological changes; in contrast, each one of them involved exclusive morphophonological processes (bolded); (1a) shows evident overapplication involving chain reaction, in which deletion (/m/→Ø) preceded vowel lengthening (/m/→Ø)→(V→V:)), (1b) shows place assimilation (/m/→/n/_m#.#t_); and (1c) illustrates deletion and addition(/m/→Ø/Ø→/p/) (another option shows no changes). The last one, (1d), demonstrates natural reduplicative behaviour. Among them, bases of (1a) and (1b) belong to same morphological class, temporal nouns. Yet, they withhold apparent morphophonological contrasts.

Such unusual predicaments involving very same segments are research worth material for two reasons. Firstly, they present an analytic difficulty to some extent, and secondly they frequently appear in Tamil. The present paper, which is set on Correspondence Theory (McCarthy and Prince, 1994) would investigate phonological and morphological motivation including, the effect of emergence of the unmarked, TETU instigating such unusual activities in reduplication linking to word final nasal /m/ in Tamil.