

Flipping the Script: Ablaut and Rhyme Reduplication in Lio

This work explores ablaut and rhyme reduplication in Lio, an understudied Austronesian language spoken in Central Flores, Indonesia. Examples of this reduplication are in (1), with the relevant sound alternations in **bold**.

(1)	a.	<i>fanggi langgi</i>	/fa. ^ɣ gi-la. ^ɣ gi/	‘mess around’ (rhyme)
	b.	<i>kanga ranga</i>	/ka. ^ɣ ga-ra. ^ɣ ga	‘rush around’ (rhyme)
	c.	<i>windo wando</i>	/wi. ⁿ do-wa. ⁿ do/	‘resist’ (ablaut)
	d.	<i>guna-gana</i>	/guna-gana/	‘useful’ (ablaut)

Examples of this reduplication have been collected from several sources, including: naturalistic speech from the PARADISEC Collection of Lio Texts (Yanti 2019), as well as from ongoing work with native speakers; examples were also been pulled from Arndt (1933)’s German-Lio dictionary and confirmed with native speakers. Data collection is ongoing, however, preliminary analyses of the 75 examples already added to the corpus suggests some patterns, some of which differ from observations of similar reduplication in other Austronesian languages.

In rhyme (1a & 1b), it is usually only the initial consonant in each constituent that changes, which is consistent with rhyme reduplication in other languages (eg. Kenter 2017 and 2022 for German). Many of the rhyme examples include an /r/ or /l/ in the second constituent, which may suggest a preference for an approximate in this part of the rhyme construction.

In ablaut (1c & 1d), the vowel which changes is almost always the vowel in the penultimate syllable of each constituent. This differs from other Austronesian languages (e.g. Indonesian, Javanese, Balinese, Toba Batak), in which it has been observed that it is usually the ultimate syllable which exhibits a change (e.g. Indonesian *basa-basi* ‘polite chit-chat’) (Wivell et al. 2024). Additionally, while most Austronesian languages prefer a low-high vowel contour (i.e. the ablaut vowel in the first constituent is lower than the vowel in the second constituent; e.g. again, Indonesian *basa-basi*, where /i/ is higher than /a/), Lio prefers a high-low vowel contour (the vowel in the first constituent is higher than the vowel in the second constituent); this supports the suggestion in Wivell et al. (2024) that Lio does not pattern like Western Nusantara languages.

Though discussion of rhyme and ablaut reduplication in the languages of Eastern Nusantara is limited, there is a brief mention of similar reduplication in Baird (2002)’s grammar of Kèò, which in vocalic alternations shows the same preference for an alternation in the penultimate syllable and a high-low vowel contour (e.g. *fingo-fango* ‘dirty, red-faced from crying’) suggesting this may be a feature of Central Flores languages. Interestingly, Bargam, a Trans-New Guinea language, shows the same preference of having the alternation occur in the ultimate syllable as is observed in Western Nusantara Austronesian languages, but shows a high-low vowel contour like Lio and Kèò (eg. *kwasin-kwasan* ‘various edible greens’) (Hepner 2006).

To our knowledge, this is the first in-depth of study of ablaut and rhyme reduplication in an Eastern Nusantara language. However, even preliminary analysis shows that Lio patterns quite differently from better studied languages in Western Nusantara, and perhaps similarly to other Eastern Nusantara languages, thus expanding our understanding of reduplication in the region.

Selected References:

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