

A Semiotic Study of Reduplicative Words in Selected American Slang Expressions

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Abstract

This study explores the semiotic aspects of American slang, specifically focusing on the phenomenon of reduplicative expressions in informal speech. Despite the extensive research on American slang, limited attention has been given to the cultural and mythical meanings embedded within reduplicative expressions. To address this gap, the study investigates how these expressions convey denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings within casual American discourse. The objectives of the study include: 1. To what extent does Barthes' semiotic model hold potential for application in this study? 2. How are reduplicative slang expressions widely used in everyday American life? 3. To what extent do qualitative and quantitative methods have significance for this study? The methodology combines qualitative analysis, involving an in-depth examination of selected reduplicative expressions, with quantitative analysis to measure their prevalence and usage in informal speech. Barthes' semiotic framework encompassing denotation, connotation, and myth forms the theoretical foundation of the study. The findings reveal that reduplicative slang expressions not only carry literal meanings but also embody rich cultural and social connotations, reflecting key aspects of everyday American life. These expressions enhance interpersonal communication and serve as markers of cultural identity within informal discourse. The implications of this study lie in its contribution to understanding the intersection between language and culture, providing insights for future research on semiotics and its application in linguistic studies.

Keywords: American slang, semiotics, reduplicative expressions, Barthes' model, cultural connotation.

1. Introduction

This research paper examines reduplicative idioms in American slang from a semiotic perspective, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore their linguistic and cultural significance. Reduplicative expressions, such as "chit-chat" and "zig-zag," are characterized by repeated or similar elements, creating unique slang terms that carry cultural and social connotations beyond their literal meanings. While reduplication has been studied in various linguistic contexts, its role in American slang remains underexplored, particularly regarding its semiotic and sociolinguistic functions.

Using Barthes' semiotic model (1972), which analyzes signs through denotation, connotation, and myth, this study seeks to understand how reduplicative slang expressions convey deeper cultural meanings within informal American discourse. The research employs a mixed-methods approach: qualitative analysis focuses on identifying the denotative and connotative meanings of these expressions and exploring how these meanings shape cultural interactions, while quantitative analysis measures their prevalence and frequency of use in everyday American life. The study also examines the potential myths embedded in these slang terms to uncover their broader cultural and ideological implications.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this research contributes to the fields of semiotics and cultural linguistics by highlighting the importance of understanding reduplicative slang terms as vehicles of cultural expression. This dual approach enriches our comprehension of American informal discourse and its socio-cultural dynamics, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these idioms function as linguistic tools in casual communication.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 American Slang Language

American slang is a distinctive element of informal communication, contributing to the construction and reinforcement of social identity and group cohesion within society. From a sociological perspective, slang serves two opposing functions: it unifies individuals within a group and differentiates them from outsiders. Eble (1996: p.11) emphasizes that slang helps establish or reinforce social identity within specific groups or in line with prevailing trends in society. Sharing the same slang vocabulary aids individuals in gaining acceptance within groups and strengthens group solidarity (Munro, 1997).

On a broader social level, slang functions as a tool to communicate on the same level as one's audience, fostering social interaction and promoting friendliness and intimacy. Conversely, slang is also used for contrasting purposes, such as marking social distinctions, resisting authority, or concealing private information from outsiders (Allen, 1998; Eble, 1996). This is especially evident among specific social subgroups, like teenagers or certain marginalized groups, who use slang to distance themselves from older generations or to keep their discussions private.

Linguistically, slang is understood as the use of ordinary words in unconventional senses or of extraordinary words in ordinary senses. Slang often defies standard language rules in its word formation and provides creative renaming and complex descriptions of everyday objects, making it an evolving and experimental language (Sornig, 1981:p.2o).

From a lexicographic perspective, dictionaries typically define slang as informal and transient vocabulary associated with distinct social subgroups. It encompasses new or repurposed meanings for existing words and is often considered below the level of standard formal speech (Mattiello, 2005).

Given the experimental and dynamic nature of American slang, linguistic features like repetition play a key role in shaping the language. Repetition, as seen in compound words like "chit-chat" and "zig-zag," exemplifies how slang uses this technique to create a more impactful and expressive effect in a playful and attention-grabbing manner. This repetition not only serves to convey emotion or enhance communication but also reflects a distinctive style that reinforces the identity of its speakers. It showcases the creativity and cultural expression inherent in American society.

Reduplication, a specific form of compounding, involves the repetition of a word's root or stem, often resulting in words that possess a rhythmic or melodic quality. Otto Jaspersen (1965:p.174) describes reduplication as a form of "reduplicative compounds," where two or three elements are combined and exhibit phonological similarity (the repetition of sounds).

Reduplication is common in both standard English and slang, but it is particularly noticeable in forms like rhyming slang. In rhyming slang, exact or non-exact reduplication is frequently used. These expressions often carry a playful or humorous effect, sounding witty or even childlike. The rhythmic and melodic nature of reduplication contributes to the playful essence of slang, giving it a musical or "rap-like" vibe.

In American English, rhyming slang based on reduplication enjoys greater popularity, whereas other forms of cryptic rhyming slang, such as those involving back-clipping (where parts of a word are shortened or clipped), have not gained as much traction. Ultimately, the rhetorical effect of reduplication is to make the language more engaging, lively, and memorable.

2.2 Review of Related Studies

The application of semiotics in linguistic studies has evolved significantly, with foundational works by Barthes (1972) and Saussure (1916) shaping the field. Recent studies, such as Chandler (2007) and Zhao & Zappavigna (2020), have expanded semiotics to include digital communication, emphasizing its relevance in modern contexts. While these studies provide a robust theoretical framework, they overlook the cultural and linguistic nuances associated with reduplicative expressions in American slang.

Similarly, research on reduplication has primarily concentrated on its morphological and phonological aspects (Rubino, 2005). However, the socio-cultural implications of reduplicative slang terms remain underexplored. Studies like Jeresano (2022) and Vacalares et al. (2023) highlight the role of slang in digital media but lack a semiotic perspective that integrates both denotation and connotation

2.3 Semiotics: Delimitation and Definitions

Semiotics is defined as 'the study of signs', however notable semioticians have varying perspectives on its scope. Umberto Eco defines semiotics broadly, stating that it encompasses everything which can be seen as a sign, (Eco,

1997, p.7). Semiotics studies everything that stands for something else, not just 'signs' in everyday speech. Semiotic signs can be expressed using words, images, sounds, gestures, or objects. Semioticians today investigate signs as part of larger 'sign-systems', such as mediums or genres. They investigate how meaning is constructed and reality is represented, (Chandler, 2007).

Semiotics as a discipline of philosophy dates back to ancient times (Todorov, 1982), with John Locke's Essay Concerning 'Human Understanding,' (1690) making the first explicit mention to the subject. Contemporary semiotics has two main traditions, founded by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Saussure coined the term "sémiologie" in his 1894 manuscript. The first edition of his 'Course in General Linguistics', released in 1916, states that:

"It is . . . possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeion, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science," (Saussure, 1916, p. 15–16).

2.4 Barthes' Semiotic Model and Its Application

According to Roland Barthes (1972, p.98), Saussure's conception of the sign prioritized denotation over connotation. Subsequent theorists, like Barthes, relied on Hjelmslev to address this crucial aspect of meaning. Barthes maintained in 'The photographic message' (1961) and 'The rhetoric of the image' (1964) that connotation and denotation in photography can be differentiated analytically. According to John Fiske (1982, p.91), "photography captures both denotation and connotation. However, in photography, denotation is prioritized over connotation."

'Denotation' tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obvious or common-sense meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what the dictionary attempts to provide. For the art historian Erwin Panofsky, the denotation of a representational visual image is what all viewers from any culture and at any time would recognize the image as depicting (Panofsky, 1970, p.51–3).

The term 'connotation' refers to the sign's socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.). These are often based on the interpreter's class, age, gender, and ethnicity. Connotation is context-dependent. Connotations of signs are more susceptible to interpretation than denotations, making them 'polysemic'. Denotation is sometimes considered a digital code, while connotation is an analogue code (Wilden, 2001, 224).

Connotation and denotation are often described in terms of levels of representation or levels of meaning. Roland Barthes adopted from Louis Hjelmslev the notion that there are different orders of signification (Barthes, 1972). The first level of signification is denotation, where a sign consists of a signifier and signified. Connotation is a type of signifying that combines the denotative sign (signifier and signified) with an additional signified. Connotation is derived from a denotative sign's signifier that stands as the second level, resulting in a chain of connotations. A signified can become a signifier on multiple levels. Signs can have several meanings despite appearing to imply only one thing. Barthes himself later gave priority to connotation, noting in 1971 that it was no longer easy to separate the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the literal (Barthes, 1991).

Gender discourses are key examples of cultural myths, as they shape societal understandings of gender roles and identity. According to semiotic theorists, myths in this context do not necessarily refer to false beliefs, but rather to widely accepted narratives that define cultural norms. Barthes (1972) argued that myths are formed when connotative meanings accumulate over time and become part of a larger cultural narrative, serving to justify social ideologies.

For instance, in gender studies, myths about femininity or masculinity may reinforce stereotypes and societal expectations. These myths help structure the way individuals perceive gender roles, often unconsciously aligning with deeper societal values, including ideas of power, behavior, and identity. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested, these myths serve as metaphors that organize people's experiences and understanding of gendered behavior, just as connotation organizes meaning.

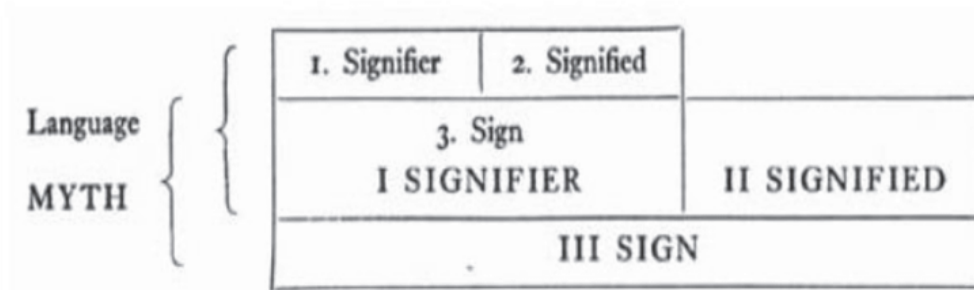


Figure 1. Barthes' Semiotic Model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze reduplicative idioms in American slang. The qualitative approach focuses on exploring the deeper meanings of these expressions, their cultural connotations, and their social functions. The selection of the qualitative method is grounded in its ability to handle diverse forms of data, including text, images, and other cultural artifacts, which is essential for understanding the complexities of language use in informal communication.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research involves collecting data in various formats such as documents, interviews, audiovisual materials, and observations, allowing the researcher to interpret and group data into themes and categories that reflect the social and cultural implications of the linguistic expressions. While the quantitative approach is used to identify and measure the frequency and distribution of these expressions in different conversational contexts.

This study emphasizes that language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for constructing and reinforcing social identity. By applying qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researcher aims to delve deeper into the symbolic significance and social meanings conveyed through reduplication in American slang.

3.2 Research Method

Qualitative Method: Semiotic analysis will be used to analyze the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings of reduplicative expressions in American slang, based on Roland Barthes' semiotic model (1972). This method will allow the researcher to interpret the deeper cultural and ideological layers embedded in these slang terms.

Quantitative Method: The study will also involve statistical analysis of the frequency of reduplicative idioms within selected conversations. This will help identify the most commonly used expressions and their contextual significance in everyday speech.

3.3 Materials

The data for this study will be sourced from a selection of 16 idiomatic expressions from David Burke's "Street Talk" (1991), which include various reduplicative expressions commonly used in American informal conversations.

3.4 Research Instrument

Qualitative Instrument: A coding framework will be developed based on Barthes' semiotic model, which includes categories for denotation, connotation, and myth. Each expression will be analyzed within these categories to uncover both surface-level meanings and the cultural significance behind them.

Quantitative Instrument: In this study, a manual tabulation method will be employed to calculate the frequency of each reduplicative expression in the data set. A spreadsheet table will be used to record and organize the expressions and their frequencies. The expressions will also be categorized based on the conversational context in which they appear, allowing for a clearer understanding of their usage patterns. The manual approach ensures that the expressions are carefully reviewed within their specific context before determining their frequency.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

- 1) Selection of Conversations: 10 idiomatic expressions from the book "Street Talk" by David Burke (1991) will be selected for analysis. The focus will be on informal conversations, as they reflect everyday language use and provide a clearer view of idiomatic expressions in common speech.
- 2) Transcription and Segmentation: The chosen conversations will be transcribed into written form. The relevant idiomatic expressions will be identified and segmented for further analysis, ensuring clarity in context and usage.
- 3) Sampling: A mix of informal conversational settings will be selected to examine how these idiomatic expressions function in everyday interactions, such as Casual Street.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative Analysis:

Each selected idiomatic expression will be analyzed for its denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings based on Barthes' model. For example, the expression "chit-chat" may have a literal meaning related to informal talk but can carry connotative meanings of casual interaction or societal norms of communication. Cultural and social implications of each expression will be explored, including how these expressions reflect the values, beliefs, and social structures of American society.

Quantitative Analysis:

The frequency of each reduplicative idiomatic expression will be calculated. This analysis will include a count of how often each expression appears within the conversations and its distribution across different settings (e.g., street talk, daily interactions). Data visualization techniques such as frequency tables will be used to present the distribution and patterns of reduplicative idioms in the conversations.

3.7 Adopted Model

To analyze the reduplicative expressions in American slang, this study utilizes Roland Barthes' semiotic theory (1972) as a framework. Barthes' semiotic model focuses on the interaction between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the meaning), with particular emphasis on both denotation (the literal meaning) and connotation (the deeper, culturally and socially imbued meaning). Barthes asserts that signs carry a complex interplay of both aesthetic and ideological elements that influence their interpretation. This dual-level analysis helps to uncover the cultural and societal contexts that inform how language is used within a specific group or community. Barthes further suggests that these meanings can evolve into myths—widely accepted social truths that are propagated through language.

In this study, Barthes' approach will be applied not only to analyze individual words but also to explore how those words, particularly through reduplication, carry both explicit and implicit messages. By considering the mythological dimension, we can better understand how these expressions reflect broader social and cultural values within American society.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data for this study consists of sixteen idiomatic expressions selected from the book *Street Talk* by David Burke (1991), which contains a range of contemporary American slang. These idioms are examined using Barthes' semiotic model, focusing on how each expression operates on both a denotative and connotative level. Each expression is broken down to reveal the surface-level meaning (denotation) as well as the underlying cultural, social, and ideological connotations (myth).

The data analysis will highlight patterns in the use of reduplication in these expressions, looking at how the repetition of sounds or words serves to intensify meaning, create humor, or reinforce social bonds. Additionally, the study will explore how these expressions reflect the identities and values of the groups that use them, contributing to the construction of social norms and cultural myths.

By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, this study will offer a comprehensive understanding of reduplicative idioms in American slang, revealing their linguistic, cultural, and social significance.

➤ Conversation 1

Earl: Did you see this **knick-knack** I found?

Anne: Where did you get that'?

Denotative:

Knick-knack: Refers to a small, decorative object with little practical value. The term is characterized by sound repetition, adding a musical or emotional effect to the phrase. The auditory repetition (*knick-knack*) makes the term appealing and engaging, reflecting a sense of lightness and humor. It expresses the idea of finding something unexpected or insignificant yet attention-grabbing.

Connotative:

The term *Knick-knack* carries multiple connotations:

Emotional and nostalgic: These small objects are often associated with personal or emotional memories, even if they appear insignificant to others.

Playful and informal nature: The sound repetition gives the term a casual and spontaneous tone, reflecting the whimsical nature of these items.

Searching and cleaning: Contextually, the term is linked to the act of searching or cleaning a house, where unexpected items are found.

Anne's Reaction: "Where did you get that?" might indicate a mix of curiosity and implicit judgment, reflecting a cultural perspective that highlights the contrast between the sentimental value and the material reality of such objects.

Myth:

Cultural and Social Values: Consumerism and personal identity: The term represents the human tendency to find joy and meaning in simple things, reflecting a consumerist culture that assigns value to personal symbolism.

Family values and nostalgia: "Knick-knacks" can symbolize preserving family bonds and memories.

The contradiction between value and reality: The text expresses the tension between the low practical value of such items and their emotional and cultural significance. This contrast reflects humanity's inclination to hold onto memories, even through trivial objects.

The role of language in shaping perception: The auditory repetition in "knick-knack" reinforces its playful and informal nature, highlighting how language shapes our perception of these objects. The phrase conveys a social message about how language ties to values like simplicity and nostalgia.

➤ Conversation 2

Earl: In this box of **bric-a-brac** your mother's been saving. What a **mish mash** of junk. For a person who likes everything **spic-and-span**, she sure did let everything get dirty.

Denotative:

The text includes several expressions: *Bric-a-brac* Refers to a collection of miscellaneous items, often with low material value. *Mish mash* denotes a chaotic mixture of things. *Spic-and-span* describes an ideal state of cleanliness. These literal meanings form the foundation for understanding the text within its specific context (the mother's box filled with various items).

Connotative:

Bric-a-brac and mish mash: They connote disorder and randomness while simultaneously reflecting emotional and nostalgic attachment to these items. This signifies the human tendency to preserve mementos, even if they appear disorganized. They suggest a blend of the good and bad, where "insignificant" items symbolize the act of retaining memories.

Spic-and-span: Represents an idealized standard of cleanliness associated with pride in maintaining the home and the American social values of order and tidiness. In context, the contrast between this expression and the state of "dirty items" highlights the realities of daily life, where ideals are not always achieved. The informal use of these expressions reflects the linguistic evolution within American culture. Additionally, the casual nature of these phrases signifies linguistic and cultural dynamism.

Myth:

The contradiction between ideal values and reality: The text embodies a contrast between ideals of cleanliness (*spic-and-span*) and the real-life situation of the mother's "chaotic box." This tension represents the clash between societal ideals and personal realities.

Nostalgia versus practicality: The "box of bric-a-brac" reflects a cultural myth tied to preserving the past and memories through objects, even at the expense of practicality and tidiness.

Cleanliness as a cultural and moral value: The expression "spic-and-span" reinforces the myth associating cleanliness with societal respect and moral virtue. Cleanliness is perceived not only as a personal matter but also as a social standard contributing to the "ideal image" of the American family.

Language as a cultural mediator: These expressions serve as a link between language and American culture, highlighting beliefs and societal values such as the importance of order and cleanliness, while also showcasing the informal and evolving nature of American slang.

➤ Conversation 3

Anne: Look! Here's my old **ping-pong** paddle! And my grandfather's watch! I haven't seen that in years. I always liked the **criss-cross** pattern on the back. Listen, it still works! Hear it going **tick-tock**? It's still in **tip-top** shape. I'm so excited that my grandparents are coming here next week. I know they're going to love their new grandchild.

Earl: I just hope they have the energy to play with him.

Anne: Oh, they're both full of **vim-and-vigor**. They absolutely love the **pitter-patter** of little feet around the house, too.

Denotative:

Ping-pong paddle and grandfather's watch Objects representing tangible items with specific uses and designs. *Tick-tock*, *tip-top* onomatopoeic expressions indicating functionality and condition of the watch. *Vim-and-vigor*, *pitter-patter* Phrases describing energy and liveliness, particularly in children and older adults. *Criss-cross* pattern Refers to a specific design detail on the watch, highlighting its aesthetic.

Connotative:

Tick-tock and *tip-top* Evoke nostalgia and appreciation for enduring objects, symbolizing familial continuity and sentimental value. *Criss-cross* pattern: Reflects attachment to memories and small details, symbolizing the emotional connection to family heritage. *Pitter-patter* of little feet: A metaphor for the joy and liveliness brought by children, symbolizing hope and continuity.

Vim-and-vigor Connotes admiration for active grandparents, breaking stereotypes about aging and reinforcing their role in family life. Emotional resonance The conversation's informal tone and choice of reduplicative phrases (e.g., tick-tock, pitter-patter) enhance its nostalgic and lively undertones, showing the cultural dynamism in language.

Myth:

The Ideal Family Life: The conversation reflects the myth of a harmonious, multi-generational family where grandparents are actively involved in family dynamics.

Heirlooms as Legacy: Objects like the watch and paddle transcend utility, symbolizing the preservation of family history and emotional connections across generations.

Children as the Future: The "pitter-patter" reinforces cultural narratives about children being symbols of hope and joy, integral to the family's continuity.

Cultural Identity: Family history and shared values are key components of American ideals, where heirlooms and traditions reinforce a sense of belonging and personal identity.

Language as Cultural Expression: The use of playful, reduplicative phrases reflects linguistic creativity and serves as a bridge between language and cultural beliefs about family and tradition.

➤ Conversation 4

Earl: In every period of transition this **riff-raff**, which exists in every society, rises to the surface.

Ann: This **riff-raff** is waiting for the cheap seats.

Denotative:

Riff-raff: Refers to people considered to be of low social status or undeserving, often associated with societal outcasts or troublemakers. The term is used to indicate individuals who are seen as socially inferior or disruptive. *Cheap seats:* Literally refers to the least expensive or least desirable seats in a venue, such as in theaters or sports events. It denotes a lower status, where those who are considered less important or marginalized are placed.

Connotative:

Riff-raff: An insulting term used to refer to people who are considered socially unacceptable or of lower status. This term carries strong negative connotations, expressing disdain or contempt for the group it describes. It emphasizes social inferiority and reflects an underlying class division.

Cheap seats: In the context of "riff-raff," this term symbolizes a lower social position. It suggests that these individuals are relegated to a position of little importance, serving as mere spectators rather than active participants in society. It highlights social exclusion and marginalization.

Myth:

Class Distinction: The conversation exemplifies the cultural myth of class division, where "riff-raff" are seen as occupying an undesirable, lower position in society (the "cheap seats"). This reinforces the myth of a societal hierarchy, where certain individuals are considered less valuable or important than others.

Social Transition: Earl's reference to "periods of transition" connects to the myth of social upheaval, where certain marginalized or lower-class groups are perceived to rise in prominence, but are often viewed negatively during such times of change. This reflects a societal fear of disorder and instability during periods of social transformation.

➤ **Conversation 5**

Earl: What did you talk about?

Ann: Oh, it was just **chit-chat**.

Denotative:

Chit-chat refers to informal, casual conversation about trivial matters. It is typically understood as a light social exchange without significant substance.

Connotative:

Chit-chat: This term carries connotations of superficiality and informality, implying communication that is socially acceptable but not serious. It reflects a cultural tendency to value substantive conversation over casual or light exchanges. The use of the term also suggests a hierarchical view of communication, where casual conversations are often perceived as less meaningful or significant. Barthes' idea that connotation creates the illusion of denotation suggests that the distinction between trivial and important conversations is not inherent but socially constructed, influenced by cultural expectations of what constitutes valuable communication.

Myth:

Trivialization of Communication: The term "chit-chat" embodies the myth that meaningful conversations must be profound or intellectual. This reinforces the cultural bias that casual or informal interactions are less valuable than serious, goal-oriented ones. By elevating intellectual discourse, society diminishes the perceived importance of lighter, more casual exchanges.

Social Function of Communication: At the same time, "chit-chat" also reflects the myth of communication as a social tool, maintaining relationships regardless of depth. It suggests that even superficial interactions serve an important function in social bonding, reflecting the cultural belief that language is not just about content but also about maintaining social connections.

➤ **Conversation 6**

Earl: without it, the risk is that companies **flip-flop** between different strategies and unconnected organizational designs in endless rounds of reorganization or, conversely, mistakenly maintain the status quo and fall behind competitors in the rapidly changing marketplace.

Ann: Another activity cycle is the so-called **flip-flop** cycle, which implies that the activity on either hemisphere shifts from one side to the other.

Denotative:

Flip-flop: Refers to a sudden change or shift between two different states or positions. In the context of the conversation, it describes the repetitive switching between different strategies or decisions, implying confusion or hesitation in making choices.

Connotative:

Hesitation and Instability: The term "flip-flop" carries connotations of hesitation or instability, suggesting repeated changes between two different states. These switches imply an inability to make stable or firm decisions.

Weakness in Leadership or Strategy: The term often connotes inefficiency or weakness in leadership or decision-making. It hinders the ability to move forward in an organized manner, indicating a lack of clear direction.

Confusion and Constant Change: "Flip-flop" indicates a lack of coherence or clarity in plans or policies, where decisions seem to change frequently without a stable direction.

Risk in Business: In the context of business, the analysis highlights how "flip-flop" may symbolize the risks of constantly switching between different strategies or organizational designs. This can lead to instability and falling behind competitors in the rapidly evolving market, emphasizing the need for consistent and stable decision-making.

Myth

Myth of Constant Change as Failure: In the cultural context, "flip-flop" is associated with the idea that constant change or switching between positions is a sign of failure or weakness, as society values consistency and decisiveness in decision-making. The term reflects the idea that continuous change leads to instability, which is culturally seen as a failure.

Change as a Source of Confusion: Constant switching between strategies or policies may be viewed as a symbol of confusion and chaos. This reinforces the cultural notion that frequent changes lead to failure or disorder.

➤ Conversation 7

Earl: The book is **Clip-Clop** by Catherine Hnatov. What is this animal on the cover?

Ann: That's a horse. When he trots about, his hooves on the ground sound like this--clip, clop, clip, clop. Let me hear you say **clip-clop**. Very good! They can tap their thighs if they like.

Denotative:

The term "*clip-clop*" literally refers to the sound made by a horse's hooves when trotting on uneven terrain. It is an onomatopoeic word that imitates the rhythmic pattern created by hooves striking the ground, often used to represent the sound of a horse in motion.

Connotative:

Rhythmic and Repetitive Sound: The term evokes a sense of regularity and continuity, implying stability and a natural flow. It suggests calmness and balance, with the rhythmic repetition enhancing this feeling of consistency.

Childhood and Play: "Clip-clop" is often associated with children's games and songs, linking it to innocence, fun, and childhood memories. It becomes a playful, engaging sound that invites interaction, emphasizing the joy and simplicity of early life experiences.

Nostalgia and Connection to Nature: The sound also evokes images of rural life, tradition, and connection to nature. Horses, often seen as symbols of freedom and pastoral life, connect the sound to simpler, more peaceful times in the past, when horses were central to daily life in rural communities.

Myth

Symbol of Simplicity and Rural Life: The repetitive sound of "clip-clop" is a symbol of rural simplicity, evoking a pastoral, agricultural life. The horse's sound represents the unhurried pace and stability of life in the countryside, where horses were essential for work and transport.

Timelessness and Tradition: "Clip-clop" also symbolizes timelessness, linking it not only to the present moment but also to tradition and heritage. The sound carries cultural meanings that connect it to a pre-industrial, agrarian past, highlighting the enduring connection between humanity and the natural world.

Conversation 8

Earl: Now that **Yik Yak** is making a comeback, and appears to have the same essential functionality, we will explore the dangers of the Yik Yak app and what parents and caregivers need to know to protect their children.

Ann: The app was particularly popular on high school and college campuses when it launched in 2013, and was often used to share gossip, jokes, and other content related to school life.

Denotative:

"*Yik Yak*" refers to a social media app used for informal interaction within local communities or student groups, especially on high school and college campuses. The term implies spontaneous and unregulated communication, where users share gossip, jokes, and school-related content in an environment lacking accountability or structure.

Connotative:

Spontaneous and Unmonitored Communication: "Yik Yak" suggests a mode of communication that is free, unorganized, and often superficial, with users engaging in informal chatter and sharing lighthearted content

without any form of scrutiny. It reflects the chaotic and unstructured nature of digital interactions, where users connect in a casual, unrefined manner.

Casual and Playful Nature: The name "Yik Yak" carries a quirky, informal rhythm, which emphasizes the app's playful and lighthearted nature. This kind of communication is often associated with fun and carefree moments, especially in the context of youth culture.

Myth:

New Forms of Social Interaction: "Yik Yak" also mirrors the modern shift toward valuing informal, unregulated forms of social interaction. It represents a cultural departure from traditional, formal communication and embraces the fluid, evolving nature of online relationships.

➤ **Conversation 9**

Earl: Our restaurant is ideal for group bookings or **tete-a-tete**

Ann: Our last **tete-a-tete** didn't go so well for me

Denotative:

"*Tête-à-Tête*" is a French expression meaning "head-to-head," commonly used to describe an intimate or private conversation between two people, typically in a quiet and secluded setting. It refers to a personal and direct interaction between two individuals, where deep or private matters are shared without external interference.

Connotative:

Intimacy and Emotional Connection: "Tête-à-Tête" connotes a sense of intimacy, emotional closeness, and personal connection. It is associated with private, deep conversations that often reflect personal matters or feelings.

Emotional Struggle: In the context of the conversation, Ann's comment about her previous "tête-à-tête" not going well suggests that this term also holds connotations of emotional discomfort or conflict, indicating that such private moments can sometimes lead to tension or misunderstanding.

Privacy and Individuality: The term symbolizes a private exchange between two individuals, emphasizing the importance of privacy and individuality in communication. It implies a level of exclusivity and intimacy that is distinct from public or group conversations.

Myth:

Cultural Myth of Personal Connection: "Tête-à-Tête" reflects the cultural ideal of personal communication and intimacy between individuals. It portrays the idealized vision of private conversations as a means of building closeness and emotional ties. However, it also alludes to the vulnerability inherent in such interactions, highlighting that intimacy can sometimes lead to conflict or misunderstanding.

Intimacy as Vulnerability: The term can be viewed as representing both the strength of private communication and the potential for emotional vulnerability. The ideal of closeness can be disrupted when personal conversations don't go as expected, which reflects the tension between the desire for intimacy and the reality of interpersonal struggles.

➤ **Conversation 10**

Earl: I also had a difficult time with '**Ship Shape**' when I first played it and it would really get me worked up, with me even rage quitting a few times and I rarely lose my cool with games.

Ann: so do I

Denotative:

"*Ship Shape*" refers to something in excellent condition or well-organized, originally derived from nautical terminology where a ship must be kept in perfect order for safety and efficiency.

Connotative:

The term carries connotations of neatness, perfection, and orderliness, suggesting an ideal state where things are properly arranged or functioning smoothly. In the context of the conversation, "Ship Shape" also implies frustration, as Earl expresses getting "worked up" and even rage quitting. This connotation hints at the tension between the desire for perfection (ship shape) and the challenges faced when trying to achieve it, especially in a competitive or stressful gaming setting. From an ideological perspective, the term relates to the myth of childhood, which serves as an ideological justification for prevailing beliefs about the role of children in society. Barthes viewed modern cultural myths as ideological narratives, not merely collections of connotations.

Myth:

"Ship Shape" reflects the myth of striving for perfection, which suggests that achieving perfect order, whether in games or life, can be both aspirational and a source of frustration when things don't go as planned. The term also fits into the cultural narrative that associates order and discipline with societal values, portraying an idealized view of life that emphasizes the need for structure and control.

4. Discussion of the Results

This study explored the concept of reduplicative idioms in American slang through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic model, addressing the research questions posed. First, the findings confirm the applicability and potential of Barthes' semiotic framework—denotation, connotation, and myth—for analyzing linguistic phenomena such as reduplicative idioms. The model effectively revealed the layered meanings these expressions carry, extending beyond their literal interpretations to deeper cultural and social connotations.

Second, the analysis demonstrated the extensive use of reduplicative expressions in American everyday language. Idioms such as "tick-tock" and "chit-chat" are widely employed in casual conversations to describe familiar objects, sounds, or actions, often adding rhythm and playfulness to speech. Additionally, expressions like "riff-raff" and "flip-flop" convey social or cultural meanings, reflecting societal attitudes, critiques, or shared values.

Third, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies proved significant in providing a comprehensive understanding of these idioms. The qualitative analysis using Barthes' model unveiled their semiotic richness, while the quantitative analysis, summarized in the frequency table, highlighted patterns in their usage across different contexts, such as informal conversations, business discussions, and cultural critiques. This analysis is encapsulated in the following table:

Table 1. Reduplication Expression Analysis in Conversations

Conversations	Reduplication Expression(s)	Frequency	Context
1	knick-knack	1	Refers to a small decorative object discovered in a box
2	bric-a-brac, spic-and-span	1	Describes a collection of miscellaneous items And the need for cleanliness.
3	ping-pong, tick-tock, vim-and-vigor, pitter-patter	1	Describes familiar objects and sounds, such as a ping-pong paddle, clock, and footsteps
4	riff-raff	1	Refers to disreputable or undesirable people in society.
5	chit-chat	1	Refers to casual, trivial conversation.
6	flip-flop	2	Refers to indecision or constant changes in business strategies.
7	clip-clop	1	Describes the sound of a horse's hooves while trotting.
8	Yik Yak	1	Refers to the social media app that is making a comeback.
9	tete-a-tete	1	Refers to a private conversation or meeting between two people.
10	Ship Shape	1	Refers to something being in good order or well-organized.

Total Frequency: 13, Most Frequent Expression(s): flip-flop (2 occurrences).

Overall, the study concludes that reduplicative idioms serve not only as linguistic tools but also as cultural signifiers. They enrich interpersonal communication by reflecting American values, evoking emotional resonance, and encapsulating societal ideologies. These findings underline the importance of further studies exploring the semiotics of language in shaping cultural identity and social interactions.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the concept of reduplicative idioms in American slang through the lens of semiotics. Reduplicatives, such as "chit-chat," are words formed by repeating or altering parts of a root word, creating rhythm and emphasis. This linguistic phenomenon has been widely studied in various fields, including morphology, phonology, and cultural linguistics, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Semiotics, as applied in this study, proves to be a valuable tool for analyzing how language encapsulates cultural and social meanings. The findings reveal that reduplicative idioms in American English function as more than colloquial terms. They serve as cultural signifiers, reflecting informal, playful, or nostalgic tones and offering insights into American values and ideologies.

Visual and auditory semiotics were also highlighted as essential aspects of Barthes' framework, expanding the analysis beyond textual meanings. For instance, the rhythmical nature of reduplicatives (e.g., "clip-clop," "tick-tock") conveys a musicality that enhances the emotional resonance of speech.

By examining idioms such as "flip-flop" and "tick-tock," this study demonstrates that American slang is deeply rooted in cultural practices. It not only facilitates casual interaction but also conveys broader social meanings, such as critique (e.g., "flip-flop" as a metaphor for indecisiveness) or cherished traditions (e.g., "clip-clop" symbolizing childhood memories).

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