

**Reconsidering Higgledy Piggledy Constructions:
Morpheme-level Sonority-based Constraints are a No Go, but Analogical Extension is Handy Dandy**

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English exhibits three major types of templatic reduplication: echo reduplicants (e.g., *din-din* ‘dinner’), ablaut reduplicants (e.g., *dilly dally*, *flim flam*), and rhyming reduplicants (e.g., *hodge podge*, *hocus pocus*, *willy nilly*). The third type has been referred to by many names, Higgledy Piggledy (HP) among them, and is the focus of the current study.

In his 2002 dissertation, *Quantifying the Sonority Hierarchy*, Stephen Parker argues that HP forms¹ are governed by morpheme-level sonority-governed phonological constraints where higher sonority segments are preferred in initial conjunct onsets and lower sonority segments are preferred in second conjunct onsets. Parker supported this claim by performing an experiment where he elicited speaker preferences and corresponding judgment strengths for nonce rhyming reduplicative conjunct pairs.

Until recently, Higgledy Piggledies have been described by a conglomeration of individual scholarly observations and documented by predominantly by compiling extensive lists. Many reduplication scholars noted sound patterns present in HP forms, two of which were repeatedly noteworthy. The first is the disproportionate frequency with which initial /h/ in conjunct A occurs (Morawski 1927, Abraham 1950, Marchand 1969, Campbell and Anderson 1976); second is the preponderance of initial labial consonants in conjunct B (Marchand 1969, Cooper and Ross 1975, Campbell and Anderson 1976, Drachman 1977). There exists a gap in the literature, however, as it lacks a systematically undertaken overall description of the (morpho)phonotactics of the construction. Which onsets occur in HP pairs? Which don’t? Do some phonemes or other natural classes occur most or least frequently? Do some pairs not co-occur at all? Does conjunct A pattern differently than conjunct B?

To answer such questions, I assembled a corpus of approximately 3000 attested HP forms, and analyzed their distributional characteristics as a whole and in comparison to those of general English. My analysis suggests that there is no need to appeal to morpheme-level sonority based phonological constraints, and that doing so would be descriptively inadequate. The invocation of a sonority scale that makes no reference to place of articulation fails to capture striking generalizations that can be made about HPs. For example, if sonority rank determines well-formedness, but major place does not, we would expect the glides to be distributed relatively proportionally as conjunct B onsets. The attested distribution is much more imbalanced; /w/-initial conjuncts occur 3.97% of the time, compared to /j/ at 0.98%. Additionally, the sonority-based analysis makes incorrect predictions with regard to which onsets should and should not co-occur. I propose that instead of relying on a set of empirically unmotivated morphological constraints, speakers judge the well-formedness of HPs by analogically extending salient patterns present in the HPs they’ve already encountered.

¹ Parker refers to construction as *the roly-poly phenomena*, but the distinction is purely terminological.

Tables and Selected References

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		B																					
A	V	h	w	i	r	l	m	n	x	z	f	s	j	θ	b	d	g	ɔs	p	t	k	tʃ	
V			9				2		1		3				6	7	3	2	17	1	3		54
h	3		2		1	2	16	3	1		2	1			16	17	17	11	26	12	12	1	143
w						1		2							5	1	1		4	5	1		20
i																							0
r		1					1		2		1				6	10	2	2	6	12			43
l			2								2				3	2			2	1			12
m			2	1							4				3	1	1		4	1	2		18
n			4			1			1						1	1	1		6				15
x																							0
z																					1		1
f			3		2	1	2	2							1	3	1						15
s			2			1					4				2	4	1		2				15
j			1			1											1			1			4
θ					1	1																	2
b	2		6		1		1														1		11
d			1		1						1	3			2						2		10
g			3		1										1				1				6
ɔs			2								2				2				4		1		9
p	2	1	17		2	2	1	2			2				2					1	1	1	32
t	4		19		3	8	7		1		2				2		1		1				46
k	1		13		1	4	11	3				1			4	2							40
tʃ	1		3		1	2									2				2				11
	13	2	89	1	10	24	44	13	6		17	3	2		50	53	28	17	75	36	22	2	507

Table 3.6 Onset Co-occurrence Frequencies in HP forms by Phoneme and Sonority Rank²

	lab	cor	dor	lar	V	
lab	51	33	7	1	4	96
cor	96	57	9	1	5	168
dor	34	12	0	0	0	46
lar	63	48	29	0	3	143
V	38	10	6	0	0	54
	282	160	51	2	12	507

Table 2 Onset Co-occurrence Frequencies in HP forms by Major Place of Articulation

	V	H	W	R	L	N	Z	S	D	T	
V	0	0	9	0	0	2	1	3	18	21	54
H	3	0	2	1	2	19	1	3	61	51	143
W	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	7	10	20
R	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	20	18	43
L	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	5	3	12
N	0	1	7	0	1	0	2	3	6	13	33
Z	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
S	0	0	6	2	3	6	0	4	12	3	36
D	2	0	12	1	2	1	0	4	5	9	36
T	8	1	52	6	15	26	1	1	13	6	129
	13	3	90	10	24	57	7	21	147	135	507

Table 3 Onset Co-occurrence Frequencies in HP forms by Sonority Rank

² Conjoint A onsets run down the left-most column, and onsets of conjoint B runs along the top-most row in each. Bold lines delineate steps of the sonority hierarchy.
