There is a common phenomenon in Chinese, from Old Chinese through modern dialects, where a monosyllabic word phonologically and semantically corresponds to a disyllabic word. This phenomenon is actually related to a type of reduplication that I called fission reduplication. I have done research on reduplication of this type in Old Chinese, and this paper will only focus on its modern form. Two aims have been set up to be achieved: one is to construct a description of fission reduplication in modern Chinese dialects, and the other one is to develop a generative theory of morpho-phonological interaction to account for the formation of this reduplication pattern.

This paper will present plenty of firsthand materials, collected, mainly by myself, from more than ten dialectal spots, to show what fission reduplication looks like and how this pattern is phonologically modified and semantically motivated. Look at instances below.

a. ʨʰ yan³³ ‘circle’ ]=> ʨʰ y³³ yian³³ ‘(go for) a round’ (Xin’an Mandarin in Henan)

b. tsa³¹ ‘mixed’ ]=> tsaⁿ³ la⁰ ‘pig’s tripe and chitterlings’ (Xin’an Mandarin in Henan)

c. xwo¹¹ ‘mix’ ]=> xu¹¹ lwo⁰ ‘bring together’ (Gaoyupu Mandarin in Hebei)

d. kən³³ ‘footpath in the fields’ ]=> kən³³ laⁿ⁵³ ‘slope between fields’ (Pingyao Jin dialect)

e. paŋ⁵² ‘(a classifier)’ ]=> (ham⁳¹) paⁿ³ laⁿ¹ ‘all, completely’ (Xinhui Yue dialect)

f. kʰia³³ ‘frame’ ]=> kʰia³³ la³³ ‘small frame’ (Liancheng Kejia dialect)

g. kʰie²¹⁳ ‘stick up’ ]=> kʰie¹¹ lie²¹³ ‘to place upside down’ (Fuzhou Min)

With a careful examination of the materials of this kind, it is found that this reduplication pattern is determined by both phonological and morphological components. From a phonological point of view, a monosyllabic word is fissioned into two syllables, in which the first part corresponds to the onset of the base syllable and the second corresponds to the rhyme. In addition, the first syllable of the disyllabic form has a rhyme similar to the original syllable in terms of segment or distinctive feature, and the second syllable consistently presents a fixed segment (the liquid initial .setAutoInitial). As an attempt to achieve a formal analysis, I will formulate the phonological alternation to make this process phonologically more predictable. Phonological discrepancies between dialects will also be taken into consideration. From a morphological point of view, the meaning produced by this process is "specialization", and it is just this meaning that motivates the operation of fission reduplication.
A theoretical account for this morphological process is advanced with two principles involved. One principle is "One syllable/one meaning principle" (OOP), a language-specific principle, and the other is "Sonority sequencing principle" (SSP), which is best characterized as a universal tendency rather than an absolute universal. Here is the argument that I have developed. Owing to symbolic (iconic) properties, the language employs reduplication to signify the meaning "specialization", forming a form of two identical syllables on the basis of a monosyllabic word. However, under the effect of OOP, the form of two identical syllables is forced to be modified. In order to reconcile the incompatibility with OOP, the initial of the second syllable is replaced with the liquid l-, resulting in the raising of the sonority level. This process can be illustrated as follows (taking "a" above as example):

![Diagram of syllable structure]  

The raising of the sonority level between the two sonority peaks (each syllable has one sonority peak) could obscure the distinction between the two syllables. As such, the two syllables will sound somewhat like one syllable, and thus OOP will be satisfied, to some extent. As for the simplification of the rhyme of the first syllable, its realization is due to the pressure from the reduplication system.

Fission reduplication has never been found in any other languages rather than in Chinese. The description about this pattern presented in this paper is hopefully to enrich our reduplication literature, and the theoretical account advanced here is to enable us to see how morphology and phonology have interacted with each other during this process.