

Word-final patterns in Japanese: a mono-stratal approach

Kuniya Nasukawa

Tohoku Gakuin University

In Japanese, words must end with either a vowel or the moraic placeless nasal ν . According to the literature (cf. Block 1946, McCawly 1968, Davis & Tsujimura 1991, Tsujimura 1996), this static distributional regularity works only at the ‘word’-level (whether nouns, adjectives, case markers or postpositions are involved). In the case of verb stems, which are smaller than word-level units, they are permitted to end not only in a vowel (e.g. *ki* ‘wear’, *mi* ‘watch, see’) but also in a consonant (such as *-r*, *-s*, *-k*, *-g*, *-m*, *-n*, *-b*, *-t*, *-w*: e.g. *kir* ‘cut’, *jom* ‘read’). This disparity between the two regularities is often accounted for by appealing to the derivation process (Davis & Tsujimura 1991). For example, at the lexical level verb stems may end in either a vowel or a consonant, whereas at the non-lexical (word) level they can only end in a vowel. The standard derivational approach thus allows different distributional regularities to hold at different levels of derivation.

Allowing both these static regularities to hold is, however, not an option in recent mono-stratal approaches (Scobbie, Coleman & Bird 1996; Harris 2004; Lodge 2009), since these models allow only a single type of static pattern in phonology. In order to investigate the disparity of static patterns in the mono-stratal approach, this paper challenges the widespread view that Japanese exploits consonant-final verb stems (e.g. *jom* ‘read’). Instead, it claims that the actual shape of apparently consonant-final stems is the same as that of non-past forms which end with *u* (e.g. *kiru*, *jomu*), the neutral vowel of Japanese. This has the result of excluding consonant-final stems from the Japanese system — a system which prefers vowel-final forms, and furthermore it unites the two distributional regularities as a single pattern in which only vowels are permitted to appear domain-finally.

In a licensing-based model of phonological structure (cf. Harris & Gussmann 2002), it is assumed that a stem-final *u* is the phonetic manifestation of a melodically empty nucleus. This has the benefit of allowing us to eliminate destructive operations such as *u*-deletion and vowel alternation when operations such as the verb inflection process are analysed in a mono-stratal model. In the case of verb inflection, I posit a morphologically driven process of nucleus-nucleus overlapping at the morphological boundary, where the empty position is simply filled by the suffix-initial vowel (e.g. $jo.m\emptyset jomu + -a.na.i \textit{ anai}$ NEGATIVE $\rightarrow jo.ma.na.i \textit{ jomanai}$). My analysis will also be extended to other mechanisms such as past-tense verb formation in Japanese.

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