Prosody of Japanese university hypocoristics

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In this paper I will look at the prosodic morphology of hypocoristic (nickname) formation in Japanese, using a corpus of personal and place names, specifically those of Japanese universities. Given the mutability of surface phonology for personal names, as opposed to place names, I will argue for a distinction between two classes of proper nouns. Further, I will propose that despite the fact that both personal names and place names are composed of morphemes, Japanese personal names are recognized for their phonological component, and place names for their semantics.

1. Background

Hypocoristic formation is a common procedure in many languages, often involving truncation of a person’s name, sometimes in addition to a diminutive affix. For example, the English name William is often truncated to Will, and sometimes appears with the English diminutive suffix -y, yielding a possible hypocoristic candidate for the name William, Willy. Hypocoristic formation occurs for a number of reasons, most notably to denote intimacy between two or more people. For example, it would be very natural for a person to refer to his or her child using a hypocoristic, but rather odd to refer to one’s boss by anything but his or her full name and/or title.

Japanese personal name hypocoristics function very similarly to English ones, involving truncation and affixation of the diminutive suffix -chan, such as ryoo-chan from the name ryosuke. Japanese also has frequent occurrences of place name hypocoristics, or truncated forms of place names. One interesting distinction between personal and place name hypocoristics has to do with paucity. Namely, there are a wide variety of possibilities for personal nicknames, but place nicknames seem to allow only one candidate as a hypocoristic. In this paper, I will examine the differences between hypocoristic formation for personal and university names, and give an account for the presence of such differences using prosodic morphology.

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The organization of this paper is as follows. I will first explain the constraints used to analyze prosodic morphology and give examples of minimal prosodic words in Japanese. In section 2 I will describe the formation of hypocoristics from Japanese personal names using prosodic morphology. I will then apply this prosodic analysis to university name hypocoristics in section 3. To account for certain discrepancies between personal and university name hypocoristic formation, I will discuss the distinction between personal and place names on the basis of phonological and semantic identity in section 4.

1.1 Constraints

In accordance with McCarthy and Prince (1995), a minimal prosodic word (MinWd) is a word in a language which most minimally obeys the tenets of prosodic morphology in terms of two constraints, Foot Binarity and the Template Satisfaction Condition. The former requires that in a quantity-insensitive language, i.e. a language that does not recognize the mora as a prosodic unit of weight, the MinWd will be disyllabic, whereas in quantity-sensitive languages, which acknowledge the mora as a prosodic unit, the MinWd will be bimoraic, resulting in surface forms that can be either mono- or disyllabic. Under the Template Satisfaction Condition (henceforth TSC), the MinWd in both language types will replicate its base as much as possible under language-specific conditions, which can alter depending on morphological category and is fundamental to the nature of this paper. McCarthy and Prince further elaborate that morphological processes will alter if necessary in order to conform to the language-specific concept of a MinWd.

1.2 Japanese morae and Minimal Prosodic Word types

Because Japanese is a quantity-sensitive language, the mora is of key prosodic value. Morae are defined as vowels and syllable-final consonants without regards to material in syllabic onsets; a syllable is considered heavy if it has more than one mora. The following bimoraic templates, or Minimal Prosodic Words, occur in Japanese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Morae</th>
<th>Final Morae</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>CVCV</td>
<td>momo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>CVV</td>
<td>sou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C#</td>
<td>CVC</td>
<td>tan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>VCV</td>
<td>aka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C#</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>un</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Personal name hypocoristics

Hypocoristic formation is highly productive in Japanese. Although Japanese names tend to be polysyllabic, hypocoristics consist of a bimoraic stem plus a diminutive affix -chan, as mentioned above. A morphological account of Japanese names is provided
in Section 2.1, and a number of different hypocoristics formed from some names of different numbers of morae are shown in (2).

2.1 Morphology

Many Japanese names are morphologically complex. Consider (1).

(1) Three personal names
   | Full name¹ | Chinese Characters | Literal Meaning       |
   | a. ai.ko   | 愛.子              | love.child           |
   | b. mi.do.ri| 美.土.里           | beautiful.earth.village |
   | c. wa.sabu.roo | 和.三.郎         | peace.three.son     |

The morphological composition of Japanese names is sometimes clear from the way they are written using Chinese characters. Because Chinese characters typically represent whole morphemes, the morphological composition of a personal name is readily apparent. Note that it is not uncommon for Japanese names to be written a number of different ways; this may include alternate combinations of Chinese characters with identical phonetic values, or not in Chinese characters at all. Therefore, the written representation of the names in (1) is not meant to be considered exhaustive.

The conspicuous morphological component of Japanese names is very standard. This is to say that, although several English names are composed of morphemes (as opposed to being monomorphemic), the relationship between a morphologically complex English name and its meaning is often not nearly as accessible as it is in Japanese. For example, when merely reading the English name Benjamin, it is not obvious that the literal meaning of this name is “son of the right hand.” The notion of morpheme boundaries within names is important to consider when determining differences between personal and university name hypocoristics, and will be returned to shortly.

2.2 Hypocoristic prosody

It has been argued in the literature on Japanese that a hypocoristic form must have an even number of mora, or be able to be parsed into bimoraic feet (Poser 1984:220, 1990:84). In forming the hypocoristics, in accordance with Foot Binarity, any even number of morae are taken from the stem and affixed to -chan to form a prosodically acceptable hypocoristic. The TSC ensures that no CV sequence is split. I do not examine the constraints required to account for the various points of the word at which hypocoristic formation can begin. It is, however, important to note that ‘surface mutation,’ or an alteration of the phonology of a word such as vowel lengthening, is permissible (e.g. mii-chan from midori). Also worth noting is that morpheme boundaries can be crossed (e.g. iko-chan from aiko).

¹ A period (.) represents a morpheme boundary.
3. University name hypocoristics

Given the prosodic account for personal name hypocoristics, I will turn my attention to university name hypocoristics using the same prosodic framework.

3.1 Morphology

Similar to personal names, place names display an obvious morphological component. In the case of university names, often the place where the school in question is located is followed by the word for university, *dai.gaku* (lit. big-study). For example, the Waseda University is called *waseda dai.gaku*.

(3) Three university names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full name</th>
<th>Chinese Characters</th>
<th>Literal Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>meiji</em> (<em>dai.gaku</em>)</td>
<td>明治(大学)</td>
<td>bright-governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hiroshima</em> (<em>dai.gaku</em>)</td>
<td>広島(大学)</td>
<td>wide-island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>toohoku</em> (<em>dai.gaku</em>)</td>
<td>東北(大学)</td>
<td>east-north</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Hypocoristic prosody

Just as hypocoristics can be formed from personal names, they can be formed from place names as well. While personal name hypocoristics shorten the name and add a suffix, place name hypocoristics are formed in a somewhat different way. The place name hypocoristics of interest here, i.e. university names, are compounds. The hypocoristic is formed by truncating each piece of the compound to the first bimoraic unit, as illustrated in (4).

(4) University Name Hypocoristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full name</th>
<th>Hypocoristics</th>
<th><em>Beginning</em> of Hypocoristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>too.kyoo</em> <em>dai.gaku</em></td>
<td><em>too</em> <em>- dai</em></td>
<td>*kyoo-dai, <em>too-gaku</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kyoo.to</em> <em>dai.gaku</em></td>
<td><em>kyoo</em> <em>- dai</em></td>
<td>*to-dai, <em>kyoo-gaku</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each university’s hypocoristic is quadra-moraic. In (4), the two initial morae are taken from each word of the compound. In other words, a MinWd is taken from each part of the compound. However, consider the following university hypocoristic in (5):

(5) *ni.ho.n* *dai.gaku* → *nich* *- dai* *nihodai, *nii-dai, *niQ-dai*

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2 Q refers to the first half of a geminate, whose phonology is dependent on the proceeding morpheme. In this case, $aQ$-chan would be /at-tšan/.
Deriving *nichi-dai* from *nihon daigaku* in (5) is anomalous for two reasons. One, a MinWd is not taken directly from the full name and applied to the hypocoristic. Two, new phonological material, the *chi* in *nichi*, appears in the hypocoristic, but is not found in the original name. Let us look at the morphology of the names, and see where morpheme boundaries occur:

(6) University Names

a. 東京 - 大学  b. 京都 - 大学
    *too.kyoo* - *dai.gaku*   *kyoo.to* - *dai.gaku*
    east.capital - big.study   capital.city - big.education
    ‘Tokyo University’  ‘Kyoto University’

c. 日本 - 大学
    *ni.hon*3 - *dai.gaku*
    sun.origin - big.education
    ‘Nihon University’

Each piece of the compound is in fact itself compositional, consisting of two morphemes. The initial morphemes of the first half of each compound word in (4) are bimoraic, which poses no problem for prosody, morphologically or phonologically. However, the initial morpheme *ni* in *nihon* is monomoraic. *nichi*, the form which appears in the hypocoristic, is an alternate reading for the Chinese character ‘sun’. With this difference in mind, there still is not a clear reason for why suppletion is preferable over vowel-lengthening (*nii-dai*).

As stated above, in (5), the initial morpheme of the first half of the compound is monomoraic. *nihao-dai* cannot occur because *ni* and *ho* would be a cross of two morphemes, and truncation involves single morphemes. But why is *nii-dai* or *nid-dai* or *niihao-dai* or *ni-dai* impermissible? *nid-dai* is unacceptable because of a Japanese surface constraint that prohibits voiced geminates, whereas *nihao-dai* and *ni-dai* both violate Foot Binarity, as they have odd numbers of morae. But why is *nichi-dai* a better candidate than *nii-dai*? I turn to this question in the following section, where I compare formation of personal versus place name hypocoristics.

4. Comparisons, speculations and conclusions

I will now summarize my data and use them to draw theoretical conclusions.

4.1 Comparing personal and university hypocoristics

There are some differences between the hypocoristics formed from personal names and those formed from place names. First, while both personal and university names are morphologically complex, each component of a university name is itself composed of two morphemes, while in personal names, the pieces are not

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3 Nihon is the Japanese word for Japan.
morphologically complex. Second, in the personal names, it is not necessary to begin the hypocoristic at the left edge (see the examples in (2)), while the university name hypocoristics always begin at the left edge of each of the full names’ composite morphemes. Third, as noted above, it is possible to create a long vowel in the personal name hypocoristics in (2) (e.g., midori can be truncated to mii as in mii-chan). However, such surface mutation is not possible in place name hypocoristics (hence *nii-dai).

I have summarized these observations in table 2 below.

Table 2: Personal vs. university name hypocoristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Name Hypocoristics</th>
<th>University Name Hypocoristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bimoraic</td>
<td>Bimoraic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC—Syllable Integrity</td>
<td>TSC—Syllable Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC—Start reproduction at any syllable</td>
<td>TSC—Start reproduction at left edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutation is permissible</td>
<td>Mutation is impermissible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An important question regarding university hypocoristics is why is vowel lengthening impermissible? In other words, what differentiates nihon daigaku ‘Nihon University’ from the other hypocoristics?

I speculate the reason for this difference is two-fold. First is a phonological component: the personal names are single morphemes while each piece of the university name is itself a compound. Note that although names like akiko are clearly multi-morphemic (in the case of akiko, bimorphemic) given the Chinese characters used to represent them, it is important to reiterate that names are not necessarily written using such characters, and therefore cues to a name’s internal morphological structure are not always apparent.

This distinction alone, however, does not account for why *nii-dai is impossible. I thus speculate that a second factor is involved, a morphological one of compositionality. I propose that personal names, even if they are historically morphologically complex, are considered to be single units rather than morphologically complex. For instance, the name Akiko comes from ‘fall’ aki plus ‘child’ ko. However, it is simply regarded as a name, with no internal semantics. Place names, on the other hand, have clear internal morphology. I propose that a process like mutation (vowel lengthening) in personal names is possible because these names consist of purely arbitrary strings of sounds, without any internal meaning. The morphology of place names, on the other hand, is visible. Thus, *ni.ho- and *nii-dai are impermissible because they have no meaning. The form nichi-dai is chosen because it consists of two prosodically well-formed pieces without losing the meaning of each morpheme. That is to say, ni means ‘sun’ but is not a MinWd, whereas nichi also means ‘sun’ and is prosodically acceptable.

4.2 Conclusions

To summarize, I have shown the following. First, prosodic form is very important in the formation of hypocoristics of both personal names and place names. Second, I have argued that vowel lengthening in personal names is possible because these names are regarded as semantically opaque. Hypothetically speaking, unless vowel lengthening will produce a different word with the same meaning, it cannot occur. In personal names,
emphasis is placed on their phonological value, and phonological mutation such as vowel lengthening may occur. In the case of university name hypocoristics, vowel lengthening is not found because they are semantically transparent. To take *nichi-dai* from *nihon daigaku* for an example, the *ni* in *nihon* is monomoraic, and in compliance with morpheme boundaries (*ni.ho*), leftmost constraints (*hon-gaku*), and the impermissibility of mutation (*nii-dai*). The bimoraic reading for ‘sun’, *nichi*, is used in the university’s hypocoristic, rendering a nickname that is both prosodically acceptable and semantically identical.

References


