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Experimental evidence for the productivity of total reduplication in Japanese ideophones and ordinary vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

This paper empirically examines possible differences in the productivity of total reduplication in the ideophonic versus prosaic lexicon in the Japanese language, through use of a ‘wug’ test. The finding reveals that the distributional fact that reduplication in the prosaic lexicon does not occur as frequently as in the ideophonic lexicon is not clearly parallel to the true productivity of ideophonic and prosaic reduplications. Productivity of ideophonic reduplication in the context of enhanced intensity was not significantly different from the productivity of prosaic reduplication in the contexts of plurality and distribution. By characterizing the relative roles of type frequency and other derivational options in determining degrees of the productivity of reduplicative processes, this paper provides an attenuated version of the Network Morphology-based account for the current result.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This paper reports an experiment that investigates native Japanese speakers’ intuitions about the productivity of total reduplication in mimetic versus prosaic (i.e., non-mimetic) vocabularies in Japanese. Mimetics (also known as ideophones or expressives) are words that depict sensory imageries, such as *gata-gata* ‘clattering’, *yobo-yobo* ‘wobbly’, *ira-ira* ‘nervously’ (Hamano, 1998; Akita, 2009; see Dingemanse, 2012 for a cross-linguistic overview of this lexical class). The pursuit of experimental evidence of a possible difference in the productivity of reduplication¹ between the two lexical strata has not received serious attention in the literature, given the apparent distributional fact that reduplication in the prosaic lexicon does not occur as frequently as in the mimetic lexicon (Hamano, 1998; Akita, 2009). However, distributional evidence does not always straightforwardly reflect speakers’ generalizations of morphological schemas, which are abstractions that have emerged from recurring form-meaning connections across lexical stems, as it often fails to distinguish fossilized patterns from viable ones that are accessible to speakers (Bauer, 1988: 61; Bybee, 2001: 13). Notwithstanding this concern, several experimental studies have confirmed that the number of occurrences of the (inflectional or derivational) morphological

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¹ Reduplication is used as shorthand for total reduplication for the remainder of this paper.

patterns in the lexicon, i.e., type frequency, plays a major role in determining their productivity (Baayen and Lieber, 1991; Eddington, 1996, 1998, 2004; Albright, 2002; Ernestus and Baayen, 2003; Hayes and Londe 2006; Zuraw, 2010).

Proceeding from the earlier experimental studies, this study addresses the question of whether the clear difference in type frequency between mimetic and prosaic reduplications indeed brings about a difference in their true productivity. Using a ‘wug’ test (Berko, 1958), we examine the ability of native speakers to apply prototypical total reduplicative processes in mimetics and ordinary vocabulary to nonce (mimetic versus ordinary) words. The schemas of the questions include CVCV-based reduplicative adverbial forms associated with the meaning of iteration (e.g., *pati-* ‘snapping once’ > *pati-pati* ‘clapping repeatedly’) or intensification (*bosa-* ‘being idle’ > *bosa-bosa* ‘being idle to a greater degree’; *gura-* ‘shaking’ > *gura-gura* ‘shaking vigorously’; *guta-* ‘being limp’ > *guta-guta* ‘being totally exhausted’, Kakehi et al., 1996)² for mimetic reduplication. For prosaic reduplication, the schemas include CVCV-based reduplicative nominal forms associated with the meaning of plurality or distribution (e.g., *kami-gami* ‘gods’ < *kami* ‘god’, *hito-bito* ‘each person; people’ < *hito* ‘person’, *kuti-guti* ‘every mouth’ < *kuti* ‘mouth’, *tokoro-dokoro* ‘here and there’ < *tokoro* ‘place’, etc.³; Martin, 2003[1975]: 151). – To note, prosaic words are distinct from mimetic counterparts in that they do not possess sensory semantics, which is a cross-linguistically recurring characteristic of sound-symbolic words (Dingemanse, 2012). They are also structurally different from each other in that prosaic CVCV-based roots can appear in bare forms, whereas CVCV-based mimetic roots cannot (Hamano, 1998; Usuki and Akita, 2015; see also Section 3.1 for details). While most nonce-probe tasks hold meaning constant and test for the productivity of form, the innovation of this work is that several different meanings are represented in the task and the goal is to determine the productivity of the forms relative to the meanings expressed.

The experimental results reveal that mimetic reduplication is more productive than nominal reduplication only when it is associated with iterative meanings. The quantification over the four categories of existing Japanese data in Section 2 does not fully predict their productivity. Importantly, apart from reduplication, the Japanese mimetic system conventionally employs voicing of initial obstruents (*kira-kira* ‘twinkling’ vs. *gira-gira* ‘glaring’) or creatively uses the lengthening of a vowel in the second syllable (*pikaQ(-to)* ‘flashing’ > *pikaaQ(-to)* ‘flashing intensively’) and/or gemination (*piQkaaQ(-to)*), or partial reduplication (*pikapikaQ*) to connote intensification (Hamano, 1998; Akita, 2009). Similarly, it utilizes partial reduplication (*zabuQ* ‘splashing vigorously’ > *zabuzabuQ* ‘splashing vigorously two or more times’) or repetition of a stem (*tiraQ* ‘taking a glance at’ > *tiraQ tiraQ* ‘glancing repeatedly’) to add iterative meanings (Hamano, 1998). Options (other than reduplication) available for the readings of plurality and distribution in the prosaic nominal context include suffixation of plural markers, such as *-tati*, *-ra*, and *-domo*, which optionally attach to [+animate] nouns (e.g., *hito* ‘person’ > *hito-tati* ‘people’; *inu* ‘dog’ > *inu-ra/-domo* ‘dogs’)⁵, and a distributive marker *-zutu*, which attaches to a phrase containing expressions that refer to a number (e.g., *hitori-zutu* ‘one person each’) or to a limited quantity (e.g., *sukosi-zutu* ‘a little each’) (Martin, 2003[1975]). With respect to *-zutu*, however, none of the current experimental stimuli in the nominal-distribution category contain the relevant expressions, and thus its use is not expected.

Factoring in those optional derivational devices, we argue that the complicated pattern of productivity of mimetic and prosaic reduplications is attributable to the derivational options being unequally available across stimulus categories. To be more precise, the availability of morphological options plays a secondary role and interferes with productivity levels that are determined primarily by type frequency. This successfully accounts for the finding: The productivity of mimetic reduplication associated with enhanced intensity did not exceed the productivity of prosaic reduplication associated with plurality and distribution. This may be because the former is significantly confounded with several other productive derivational devices, such as obstruent voicing, gemination, vowel lengthening, and partial reduplication, compared to the rest.

With the results in hand, it can be said that this study makes two contributions to the field. First, the study empirically demonstrates that only certain form-meaning associations in mimetic reduplication show higher productivity than prosaic reduplication. Second, it characterizes the relative strengths of other available derivational options (i.e. other than reduplication) that affect the role of frequency in determining the degrees of the productivity of reduplicative processes.

1.2. Previous studies on the productivity of reduplication in Japanese

As in many other ideophone-rich languages, total reduplication frequently occurs in Japanese ideophones (mimetics, in a language-specific term) (Hamano, 1998; Akita, 2009; Dingemanse, 2012, 2015; Nishimura, 2013; Kwon, 2015) occupying

² Following Key (1965: 90) and Kajitani (2005: 98)’s definitions of an intensity function in reduplication, intensification in this paper indicates an increase of degree in some properties of states (e.g., *guta-* ‘being limp’ > *guta-guta* ‘being totally exhausted’) or some aspects of events (e.g., *gura-* ‘shaking’ > *gura-gura* ‘shaking vigorously’); both evoke the meaning of ‘to a greater effect’ (Moravcsik 1978: 321).

³ In most prosaic reduplications, surface reduplicant forms appear to diverge from their corresponding bases, due to the obligatory application of sequential voicing, referred to as “rendaku” (Vance, 2015). That is, the initial consonant of the reduplicated morpheme is voiced if the medial obstruent of the morpheme is voiceless. Their bases and reduplicants are otherwise fully identical at an underlying level. Therefore, *kami-gami*, *hito-bito*, etc. are considered as examples of total reduplication in this paper.

⁴ Q represents the first half of a geminate cluster or a glottal stop.

⁵ Interestingly, young Japanese speakers playfully use *-tati* to express the plurality of [-animate] things too, as in *kyookasyo-tati* ‘textbooks’ and *kotoba-tati* ‘words’ (Kimi Akita, p.c.).

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