Introduction: Triggers in Morphological Reanalysis

/kimotikatta/ as an alternative to /kimoti yokattta/ (and similarly for other inflected forms) is common in the speech of young people, as shown by internet and survey data. The innovative form appears to have the analysis *[Akimoti-katta], but the existence of an adjective stem *[Akimoti] is unexpected.

No adjective stem ends in a long vowel, so that conservative /kimotiii/ cannot be analyzed as *[Akimotii-i].

As a result of 2, any V-stem suffix not consisting of the corresponding C-stem suffix preceded by r is irregular. If speakers tend over time to eliminate irregular representations from lexical entries, the appearance of innovative r-suffixes is predicted: each results from the application of the rule of 2 to the combination of a V-final stem and a V-initial suffix after there is no longer an irregular suffix alternant to preempt the rule.

Consideration of conservative *[Akimoti] *[i-i] /kimotii/ suggests an explanation. Maintenance of a distinctively trimoraic nucleus /iii/ is expected to present difficulty. If /kimotii/ shortens to /kimoti/, the innovative form, while no longer analyzable as a noun-adjective sequence, is naturally analyzed as *[Akimoti]-i—that is, as the Conclusive form of a stem *[Akimotii].

Innovative Forms in Japanese Verbal Inflection

The paradigm of Japanese (and Northern Ryukyuan) vowel-stem verbs displays a set of innovative suffixes that suggest a fundamental reanalysis of the inherited system. Each innovative suffix consists of the corresponding consonant-stem suffix preceded by r; the most widely distributed examples are Imperative -re, Hortative -roo, Conjunctive -ri, Negative -ran, and Causative -rase.

I adopt the interpretation of these "innovative r-suffixes" proposed by de Chene (1985, 2016), who argues that speakers analyze the relation between C-stem and V-stem suffix alternants as in 1-2.

1 URs coincide with C-stem suffixes
2 Regular V-stem suffixes result from the rule $\odot \rightarrow r / V_{vs} [ _{\emptyset} V$$ _{vs}$]

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An Unexplained Fact

A crucial characteristic of analysis 1-2 is that it locates irregularity in conservative V-stem suffix alternants (Imperative -ro/-yo/-i, Hortative -yoo/-u, Conjunctive -O, Negative -ni, Causative -sase-). It thus predicts correctly that regularization will occur suffix by suffix rather than stem by stem.

Regarding the motivation for the r-epenthesis rule of 2, the fact that that rule inserts r into suffixes means that it must be interpreted as a generalization of the pre-existing r-zero alternation of Conclusive -(r)u, Provisional -(r)eba, and Passive -(r)are-. The alternative hypothesis that the innovative forms are due to influence from r-final stems fails to predict suffix-by-suffix regularization and in addition falsely predicts that V-stem inflection should assimilate to r-stem inflection in forms with t-initial suffixes (*mit-ta ‘saw’ parallel to tot-ta ‘took’).

There is a striking fact about the distribution of innovative r-suffixes, however, that is not explained by analysis 1-2, namely that those suffixes, both in Kyushu dialects and in those of the Kii peninsula, are in complementary distribution with the alternation i/e ~ u that characterizes the bigrade (nidan) conjugations.

Toward an Explanation

The bigrade alternation, that is, blocks the spread of innovative r-suffixes, even when those are well-established for former bigrade verbs that have leveled the alternation (data from Takachiho in Miyazaki Prefecture (Itoi 1961:261)): Concord okiru aguru

The alternative initial suffixes of oki- are the result of the r-epenthesis rule of 2, alternating age/u- cannot be a verb stem, although its precise morphological analysis remains open.

Further, the same must have been the case for the bigrade paradigm throughout history. If so, reanalysis of the alternating vowel as stem-final and concomitant leveling of the alternation was a trigger for the r-epenthesis analysis in the sense defined above—that is, a distinct change that rendered that analysis possible. This hypothesis fits well with what little is known about the time of inception of r-epenthesis.

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