

Japanese Innovative Verbs as a Morphological Construction

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There are a number of innovative verbs in Japanese that are formed based on nouns of various sources including loan words, mimetic words, and proper names. Examples of denominal innovative verbs in the present tense form are shown in (1).

- (1) a. (non-Chinese) loanword based: *kopiru* (<copy), *kaferu* (<café), *teroru* (<terrorism)
b. Sino-Japanese-based: *kokuru* (<kokuhaku “confession”), *jikoru* (<jiko “accident”)
c. mimetic-based: *nikoru* (<nikoniko: for smiling), *chibiru* (<chibichibi: for little by little)
d. proper name-based: *makuru* (<McDonald’s), *sutabaru* (<Starbucks)

There is a cluster of properties shared by these denominal innovative verbs, and each of these properties is not predictable from component parts, which meets the definition of a construction (Goldberg 1995).

First, a noun undergoes clipping to form a verbal root, but the clipping must result in a root that ends with a vowel, excluding moraic nasal. For instance, in attempting to derive a verbal root based on *pingpong*, *pinpo-ru* would be natural but **pin-(r)u* or **pinpon-(r)u* would not: the latter two roots, which are ill-formed, end with moraic nasal. Such segmental restriction is not predictable from the Japanese verbal morphology since there are native Japanese verbal roots that end with moraic nasal (e.g., *sin-* “die”, *yom-* “read”). Second, a clipped root must be at least 2-mora long. This length requirement, however, is not a common pattern of Japanese verbal system, and there are verbal roots that are 1-mora long (e.g., *ni-* “boil”, *mi-* “see”, *ne-* “sleep”). Third, while the verbs in (1) appear to be vowel-ending, leading to the morphological analysis of *kopi-ru*, *niko-ru*, and *sutaba-ru*, their past tense forms behave as if their roots include /r/ so that they follow the conjugation pattern of consonant-ending roots by showing germination, a characteristic of roots ending /r/ in the past tense: *kopitta*, *nikotta* and *sutabatta*. That is, /r/ is always epenthesized to a root, leading to the consonant-ending inflection. This obligatory epenthesis is not expected of a native verbal root. Furthermore, the vowel-ending inflection, which is available to native verbs, is not an option for denominal innovative verbs. Fourth, regardless of the location of the accent in an original noun, the accent of the verbal root invariably falls on the root-final mora. This is shown in the gerund forms of denominal verbs since the gerundive suffix *-te* does not influence the location of the accent in verbal roots: *kopitte*, *nikotte* and *sutabatte*, all of which have the accent on the vowel before the final geminate, i.e., the root-final position. Again, the unique accentuation pattern is not expected based on the location of the accent in base nouns, which demonstrate a wide variety of accentuation possibilities. Finally, the use of these denominal innovative verbs is restricted in that they are casual in style, bear a broad sense of “playfulness”, or are sometimes slang-like, none of which is a general property of base nouns or the category of native verbs. Furthermore their semantic and pragmatic properties share those of “contextuals” in the sense of Clark and Clark (1979) in having three critical characteristics: (i) they have a number of potential senses, (ii) their meaning is dependent upon context, and (iii) cooperation is called for between the speaker and the listener for successful communication.

