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Japanese Sequential Voicing - Rendaku

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Rendaku

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Language Background
Japanese is spoken by the entire population of Japan, roughly 121 million speakers. There are some language communities in Hawaii, South America, and North America.

Japanese Phonology
Japanese has sixteen consonants in its phonemic inventory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiovelar</th>
<th>Dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Postalveolar</th>
<th>Palatal/?</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Nasal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of Articulation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retroflexion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is Rendaku?
Rendaku is a morpho-phonological process present in both historical and modern Japanese that involves the voicing of a morpheme-initial voiceless obstruent.

- This process occurs when the affected obstruent is followed by a vowel (and optional glide [j]) and is preceded by either a vowel or a nasal. [-sonorant] → [+voice] /[-cons] (i) [-cons] or [-sonorant] → [+voice] / [+nasal] (i) [-cons]

- The following are some examples of Rendaku occurring in Japanese:
  - [oten] + [kutsu] = [otenbutsu] nosebleed
  - [hata] + [kutsu] = [hatabutsu]

Lexical Categories
What categories of words are affected by this process?

Word compounds consisting of noun, adjective, and verb combinations have the potential to portray Rendaku.

Nouns
Noun + noun

Adjective + noun

Verb + noun

Adjectives
Adjective + adjective
[ad] blue + [chii] white = [adchii] pale/face

Noun + adjective

Verb + adjective
[taba] eat + [tsu] difficult = [tabardatsu] difficult to eat

Verbs
Noun + verb

Adjective + verb
[waka] young + [kai] return = [wakagai] to look young

Conditioning Factors
What determines when it occurs?

There are numerous factors that try to determine the conditions under which Rendaku can and cannot manifest. A few more of the major are Lyman’s Law, Right Branch Conditioning, Native vs. Non Native, and Repetition.

Lyman’s Law
In order for Rendaku to occur, there can be no voiced obstruent in the second constituent of a word compound. If this condition is met then the voiceless obstruent of the second constituent in the word compound is voiced.
[hairu] + [kutsu] = [hiruku] entrance

Right Branch Conditioning
Right Branch Conditioning deals with compounds that have more than two elements and states that Rendaku can take place unless the affected element is a right branch constituent.

Conditioning Factors Cont.
Native vs. Non Native
Words affected by Rendaku must be of native Japanese origin, and not of Sino-Japanese or western origin. However, non-native words can trigger Rendaku in native words.

Repetition
Word repetition in Japanese can trigger Rendaku.

[cito] person + [cito] person = [cito] people

Conclusion
Irregularity in the process
Despite numerous conditioning factors that attempt to determine or lend some kind of discernable pattern to Rendaku, there is none, and the process is fundamentally sporadic.

This can be seen in the following examples, which despite abiding by conditioning factors, still resist Rendaku.

(soko) bottoms + [tsu] oil = [sokotsu] sub soil

References
