Accentual Change in Noto-jima Japanese

The Noto-jima dialects (Ishikawa prefecture) are well known in the field of Japanese comparative accentology from the research of Kindaichi (1954), who cited them to demonstrate how a Kyoto-style accent pattern might shift to a Tokyo-style pattern.

In this paper, I present the results of recent field research on accentual change in these dialects. Kindaichi (ibid.) and many subsequent researchers have argued that the change from [LL...] to [ML...] (and to [HL...]), 'Initial Raising', has occurred in Noto-jima dialects, and that this change is a very common one, repeatedly attested in Japanese historical accentology. However, De Boer (2010) argues that the naturalness of this change is not corroborated by tonal developments in other languages, nor is it unambiguously attested in Japanese dialects. The purpose of this paper is to cite concrete evidence for Initial Raising from both dialect-internal and comparative data.

Table 1 gives the lexical accent patterns for nouns in the Shima-bessho dialect of Noto-jima. This dialect is representative 'pitch accent' language in the strict sense of Hayata (1998). It distinguishes a locus of accent (' * ' in Table 1), which has the effect of lowering pitch to its right. In addition, like the Kyoto Japanese, it has two registers or word tones, as below;

word tone A (' ⌈ ' in Table 1)
    After rising, the high pitch proceeds until the accent and it falls sharply.

word tone B (' ⌊ ' in Table 1)
    The words begin with [ML...] and only the mora with the accent is high.

Table 1: Accent of nouns in Shima-bessho dialect ('-ga' is Nominative particle)

word tone	one-syllable		two-syllable		three-syllable	
A	/ ⌈kaa-ga / 'mosquito'	[HH-H]	/ ⌈sake-ga / '*sake*'	[LH-H]	/ ⌈sakana-ga / 'fish'	[LHH-H]
	/ ⌈ha*a-ga / 'leaf'	[HL-L]	/ ⌈ka*mi-ga / 'paper'	[HL-L]	/ ⌈na*mida-ga / 'tear'	[HLL-L]
			/ ⌈ishi*-ga / 'stone'	[LH-L]	/ ⌈ino*ti-ga / 'life'	[LHL-L]
					/ ⌈musume*-ga / 'daughter'	[LHH-L]
B	/ ⌊kii-ga / 'tree'	[ML-L]	/ ⌊fune-ga / 'ship'	[ML-L]	/ ⌊usagi-ga / 'rabbit'	[MLL-L]
			/ ⌊aame*-ga / 'rain'	[MLH-L]	/ ⌊ichigo*-ga / 'strawberry'	[MLH-L]

A synchronic alternation in verbal accent shows that the initial [ML...] pitch pattern of the word tone B is the diachronic result of Initial Raising. As shown in Table 2, the underlying form of the verb √*mi*− begins with low pitch, as in the surface forms of (c), but when this stem occurs in a context that would give rise to two or more successive low morae, the first of these is raised;

Table 2: The synchronic alternation in verbal accent in Shima-bessho

stem		meaning	phonetic representation	
√*mi−*	a	'(I) look at'	miru	[ML]
	b	'(I) don't look at'	miN	[ML]
	c	'(I) looked at'	mita	[LH]
√*ki−*	a'	'(I) put on'	kiru	[HH]
	b'	'(I) don't put on'	kiN	[HH]
	c'	'(I) putted on'	kita	[LH]

Comparative evidence suggests that the same process, Initial Raising, was the diachronic source of the [ML...] pitch pattern of the word tone B in nouns. The comparative evidence is provided by the Han'nora dialect, which is spoken near Shima-bessho. This dialect attests exactly the forms reconstructed for pre-Shima-bessho in Table 3 –including the long vowel of the first syllable of the words like *aame* 'rain';

Table 3: Accent of nouns in pre-Shima-bessho (the words belonging to word tone B only)

one-syllable		two-syllable		three-syllable	
/ ⌊kii-ga /	⋆LL-L	/ ⌊fune-ga /	⋆LL-L	/ ⌊usagi-ga /	⋆LLL-L
'tree'		'ship'		'rabbit'	
		/ ⌊aame*-ga /	⋆LLH-L	/ ⌊ichigo*-ga /	⋆LLH-L
		'rain'		'strawberry'	

The M pitch of the first mora assimilates to the L pitch of the last mora of the preceding word as shown in Table 4. This fact suggests that the [ML..] pitch pattern is postlexical and also that Initial Raising must have originally occurred in the phrase initial position, rather than in the word initial position. Hyman (1978) argues that tone change can be motivated by phonetic and syntactic boundaries. We see that such is the case with Initial Raising in Noto-jima dialects.

Table 4: The tone assimilation in Shima-bessho

		-*ga* 'nominative'	*naN no*- 'What type of...?'
/⌊fune/	'ship'	[ML-L]	[MLL-**LL**] (not [MLL-**ML**])
/⌈ka*mi/	'paper'	[HL-L]	[MLL-**HL**]

Finally, I show that this initial [ML..] is in the process of becoming lexical in Shima-bessho; /⌈kono-⌊fune/ 'This ship...' appears in the variant forms [LH-**HL** ~ LH-**ML**] in Shima-bessho, while it appears with [LH-**LL**] in Han'nora.

References: De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2010) *The historical development of Japanese tone.* Otto Harrassowitz. Hayata, Teruhiro (1999) "Accent and tone: toward to a general theory of prosody." *Cross-linguistics studies of tonal phenomena, tonogenesis, typology and related topics,* 221-234. Hyman, Larry M. (1978) "Historical tonology." In Victoria A. Fromkin (ed.) *Tone, a linguistic survey,* 257-269. Kindaichi, Haruhiko (1954) "Toozai ryoo-akusento no chigai ga dekiru made." *Bungaku* 22(8): 63-84.