

## **Monosyllabic and disyllabic roots in the diachronic development of mimetic expressions**

Shoko Hamano

*The George Washington University*

Japanese mimetic (or sound-symbolic) roots can be classified into two types: those based on more iconic, monosyllabic (CV or CVN) roots and those based on less iconic, disyllabic (CVCV) roots. This classification is correlated to the semantic classification of mimetic roots into phonomimes, phenomimes, and psychomimes, which broadly line up on the scale of iconicity from the more iconic to the less iconic (Akita 2013).

The classification of mimetic roots into monosyllabic and disyllabic roots is not new. In the traditional approach, the distinction between the two types of roots has been captured as the contrast between Type A and Type AB roots (Suzuki 2007, Yamaguchi 2002) and has long been utilized in order to describe a vast array of mimetic vocabulary in orderly manners.

However, the significance of the distinction goes beyond its usefulness in orderly descriptive presentation of mimetic words. Various morphological, phonological, semantic, and syntactic properties of mimetics can be revealed and explained only if the distinction is articulated first. This paper demonstrates that the distinction has also been relevant in the diachronic development of Japanese mimetic expressions. Specifically I will focus on the history of the coda nasal /N/ and morpheme-initial /h/ in the mimetic system.

The coda-nasal /N/ seems to have existed in monosyllabic mimetic roots long before it began to appear affixed to disyllabic mimetic roots. Evidence exists that indicates that Old Japanese (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> century) monosyllabic mimetic roots allowed the structure CVN even though the canonical syllable structure in Old Japanese was CV. Yamaguchi (2012) points out that, as the overall syllable structure of the regular lexical stratum underwent critical changes, a number of methods to represent /N/ were experimented in Early Middle Japanese (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>) and were soon applied to /N/ in monosyllabic mimetic roots as well. Suzuki (2013) shows that /N/ spread to disyllabic mimetic roots in Late Middle Japanese (12<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century). It appears that /N/, which originally had the iconic meaning of ‘resonance’, eventually underwent semantic abstraction and obtained the status of a quasi-aspectual suffix.

A similar account is possible for the development of root-initial /h/. In this paper, I present some evidence that suggests that /h/ in monosyllabic mimetic roots existed long before /h/ developed in disyllabic mimetic roots.

The distinction between monosyllabic and disyllabic mimetic roots is thus relevant diachronically. Monosyllabic mimetic roots of the type CV(C) seem to have been highly iconic and constant over time, while disyllabic mimetic roots have been constrained more strongly by general phonological and morphological properties of the regular lexical stratum. It would not be too far-fetched to speculate that this observation has universal implications.