

The historical relevance of isolated Gairin dialects: An inquiry via compound accent

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The dialects of the Tōkyō Gairin subtype are widely separated, from Tōhoku to Kyūshū. Yet they have strikingly similar pitch accent patterns and many other commonalities. Further, most of the Gairin zones are remote, rural areas. It is known from cross-linguistic typology that isolation can preserve archaic features, but that it can also cause distinctive innovations (Trudgill 1989). Gairin dialects have thus the potential to aid historical investigation, but it's necessary to distinguish possible historical remnants from local developments.

One promising avenue for this goal is compound accent. A fascinating and well-known fact is that Tōkyō and Kyōto-type dialects normally have the same accent position in compounds—even though they differ on the accent of each component. For example, Tōkyō-type has 火打ち *hiuchi* “strike fire” without accent, and 石 *ishí* “stone” accent-final; while Kyōto-type has *híuchi* and *íshi* both accent-initial. Yet the compound 火打ち石, “flint”, is exactly the same for both: *hiutí-ishi*. Such matches happen too regularly to be a coincidence, suggesting that the compounds have preserved ancient accent positions (Wada 1942).

Kyōto-type and most of Tōkyō-type also agree on which compounds are unaccented, which depends on the accent class of the second component. Tōkyō Gairin, however, has a very different rule: Compounds that *start* with an unaccented word are wholly unaccented. This leads to many other questions: Do Gairin accented compounds agree in position with other dialect types? If not, what are their own rules? Do the different Gairin dialects agree between themselves on compound accent position? Could the Gairin dialects trace back to a single source? And what is their relationship with Heian-era Middle Japanese tones?

We are a team documenting the pitch accent of Gairin dialects to answer such questions. One widespread trait of these dialects is a late accent position: The accent moves to the next vowel if it's open or mid (*íta*→*itá*). This must be an innovation; namely an accent shift towards the end of the word, a typologically common development (Hyman 2007). This change has also been observed in progress, e.g. by Shibata (1966). This implies that the areas without the shift may be generally more conservative. In this presentation I report our results so far for Tōhoku Gairin dialects, concentrating on the unshifted areas of East Shimokita (Aomori) and the Rikuchū coast (Iwate). Preliminary data suggests that these conservative areas indeed show unusual compound accent positions. The extensive fieldwork presented by Uwano (2006) on Aomori city and by Tanaka (2003) on Miyako (Rikuchū) shows that in those nearby areas, too, compound accent can differ from the more well-known Tōhoku patterns, with phenomena like accent-initial compounds (松茸 *mátsutake*) and accented compounds whose first component is unaccented (七夕 *tanabatá* < 棚機). Our results are congruent with those reports, and I discuss their possible historical interest.

References

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