

Accent loss in verbs forms in phrase final position: A common origin in Tokyo and some Kyoto type dialects?

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Verbs in Tokyo Japanese are divided into two main accent classes, class A and class B. Class B has an accent fall after, or within the stem, and class A has accent on the final syllable of the verb form. Because accent in Japanese is followed by a drop to low pitch, such a word-final accent is only audible when enclitic particles are attached (cf. non-past *noru'-kara* [LH-LL], infinitive *ake'-wa (sinai)* [LH-L]), *ageta'-no-ni*.¹

In Tokyo, merging of accentual phrases is common if the first phrase is unaccented, or if the accent in the first phrase is in phrase-final position. In that case there is no mora to carry the low pitch after the accent, and the accent is suppressed. Such phrases then get treated as if they lacked an accent underlyingly as well, and merge with a following phrase. Compare *otoko' ga | kima'sita* [LHH-L | LMLL]² with *otoko kima'sita* [LHH HHLL].

Verbs that are used attributively are never followed by clitics, so they are always in phrase final position. The final-accented verbs of class A therefore lose the accent, when modifying a noun: Compare *noru hiko'oki* [LH HHLL] with *noru'-kara* [LH-LL]. There are, however, also dialects with a Kyoto type tone system (where the accent regularly occurs one syllable earlier in the word than in Tokyo) that show similar behavior (Uwano 2006). They also cancel the accent in verbs of class A when these modify a noun. See the Aikawa dialect of Sado Island compared with the dialect of Tokyo (Uwano 2006:9):

	Non-past		Past	
	<i>ageru</i>	<i>ageru toki</i>	<i>ageta</i>	<i>ageta toki</i>
Aikawa	[LH'L]	[LHH H'L]	[H'LL]	[H'MM M'L]
Tokyo	[LHH']	[LHH HH']	[LHH'] ³	[LHH HH']

As word-final accent becomes inaudible in phrase final position, the reason behind the accent loss in verbs of class A in Tokyo is clear. In Aikawa, on the other hand, the penultimate accent loss makes no sense. Unless we assume that at an earlier stage in the history of the dialect, the accent in Aikawa occurred one syllable later in the word, just as in Tokyo. The loss of accent in Aikawa then, can be reconstructed as a remnant from that period.

References

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- Uwano Zendō. 2006. 'Nihongo akusento no saiken' *Gengo kenkyū*; 130, 1-42
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¹ In the non-past, the accent may be an innovation in Tokyo, Kagawa, Toyama, Sado Island and other places, as in Middle Japanese the *rentaikei* form (from which the modern non-past derives) was atonic for verbs of class A. As the level pitch of the *rentaikei* of class A was an anomaly in Middle Japanese (Yanaike 2004:51) the accent may have developed as result of analogy.

² After an accentual drop, downstep lowers high pitch in a following minor phrase [H > M].

³ The more archaic form *age'ta*, which has been preserved in many Tokyo type dialects, stands in regular correspondence to the word-initial accent on *a'geta* in Aikawa. As the accent of *age'ta* was not originally in word-final position, this explains why the accent was not lost in Aikawa.