

Shortening of Initial-geminates and Long Vowels in Shuri Okinawan Poetry

Overview: The goal of this study is to investigate the reason why certain types of mora can be deleted for the adjustment to the moraic meter in *Ryuuka* (琉歌), the classic Okinawan poetry written in Shuri dialect. Such morae are: (a) word-initial geminates and (b) long vowels (/ee/ and /oo/). The deletability of word-initial geminates can be explained by Steriade's (2003) P-map hypothesis because the degemination of initial-geminates makes relatively little changes in perceptibility. Long vowels /ee/ and /oo/ can be shortened because the long-short contrast of these vowels is not distinctive in Shuri Okinawan.

Initial Geminates: Geminates in both word-initial position (e.g. *kkwa* "child") and word-medial position (e.g. *ittu* "first") have moraicity in Shuri Ryukyuan, and can be counted as a mora in *Ryuuka*. Kinjo (2012) found that while word-medial geminates are always counted as a mora, word-initial geminates are sometimes degeminated and not necessarily counted as a mora for the sake of the moraic meter in *Ryuuka*. This fact can be explained by Steriade's (2008) P-map hypothesis. According to the P-map, the difference between underlying form and output must be minimal in perceptibility. When it comes to the singleton-geminate distinction, the primary acoustic/perceptive correlate is a difference in constriction duration—closure duration for plosives and frication duration for fricatives. Shuri Okinawan has only voiceless plosive geminates. Since singleton-geminate distinction disappears when they are located at a phonological phrase boundary because the silence before the release does not have any starting point. In contrast, the distinction of the singleton-geminate in closure deletion is always significant in word-medial position. Therefore, the P-map predicts that only word-initial geminates can be degeminated because the singleton-geminate contrast is smaller than word-medial geminates.

Vowel Deletion: Kinjo (2012) also reports the examples where long vowels are shortened for the adjustment to the moraic meter in *Ryuuka*:

- (1) /mee/ "front" → /me/, /samuree/ "Samurai" → /samure/, /mutee/ "flourish" → /mute/
- (2) /oozi/ "fan" → /ozi/, /toohu/ "tofu" → /tohu/, /zjoo/ "gate" → /zjo/

This can be understood as a natural consequence of the Shuri Okinawan phonological system. As (1) and (2) shows, shortened long vowels are limited to /e/ and /o/. Unlike /i/, /a/ and /u/, /e/ and /o/ almost always appear as long form in Shuri Okinawan, hence, they don't have the long-short contrast. Therefore, /ee/ and /oo/ can be freely shortened.

References:

- Kinjo, Kunio (2012). "The Moraicity of Geminates in Shuri Okinawan *Ryuuka* (in Japanese)". *Sophia University Working Papers in Phonetics*. 35-47.
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