

Tonal change in Nagasaki Japanese

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Nagasaki Japanese (henceforth NJ) is a dialect which is spoken in and around the central part of Nagasaki city. The most characteristic feature of NJ is its tonal pattern. NJ has only two tonal patterns, which is called Type A and Type B, regardless of the mora length of a word. A Type A word has a sharp falling pitch, and a Type B word has no pitch falling in the word. This study reports an ongoing tonal change in NJ.

Findings by previous studies on NJ (Hirayama 1951, Matsuura 2012) are summarized as below. (i) Type A words fall pitch on the second mora. (ii) Although the tonal type of the initial element is preserved in the compound, tonal contrasts are neutralized to Type B when an initial element contains more than two moras. (iii) Tonal pattern of a loanword can be predicted by its corresponding accentuation in Standard Japanese, that is, if a loanword is accented on either initial two mora, the loanword is produced with Type A in NJ, elsewhere these are produced with Type B. Recent literatures on Japanese dialects, however, reports that many linguistic features in traditional dialects are not shared with young speakers who are influenced by Standard Japanese through mass media and education. Kubozono (2007), for example, demonstrates that tonal distribution and rules in Kagoshima Japanese are changed by influence of Standard Japanese. The situation will be the same in NJ, so we conducted a fieldwork experiments on tonal distribution in young NJ speakers and compared with results in middle and old generation.

Analysis of the experiment has yielded several interesting results. First, words which are high pitched on the third or following mora are found in young speakers. The position of high pitched mora corresponds with accentuation of Standard Japanese. This means prosodic system in Standard Japanese affects tonal contrastiveness in NJ. Second, tonal pattern of individual words in young speakers mismatches with old speakers, and mismatch patterns correspond to an accentuation of Standard Japanese. Third, tonal neutralizations in compounds are observed even when the initial element contains less than three moras. This means not only lexical specification of tone but also tonal rules undergo change. It, however, is not clear whether the rule change is a result of influence of Standard Japanese.

References

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