A Look Back at Rosen's Rule

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Eric Rosen, in his University of British Columbia doctoral dissertation (Rosen 2001) and an article based on it that appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* (Rosen 2003), made what is arguably the most original contribution to rendaku research since Benjamin Smith Lyman's famous article (Lyman 1894).

Rosen referred to a native noun morpheme that typically appears with rendaku as a "rendaku lover" and to one that typically appears without rendaku as a "rendaku hater." He treated rendaku-immune morphemes as a separate category. Of course, these labels only apply to morphemes that begin with a voiceless obstruent when they occur word-initially, since rendaku would otherwise be impossible. Any morpheme containing a medial voiced obstruent is also beside the point, since Lyman's Law predicts its immunity to rendaku. Rosen based his claims on small samples of compounds that he collected systematically using dictionaries.

Rosen's most important claim is that in non-coordinate, two-element compounds in which both elements are native Japanese nouns and at least one of the two is three moras or longer, rendaku is predictable. He calls this generalization the prosodic size factor, but I'll refer to it as Rosen's Rule. To state the claim more explicitly, in a compound A+B that meets these criteria, as long as B begins with a voiceless obstruent as a word on its own and isn't immune to rendaku, A+B will have rendaku. If this claim is correct, all native noun morphemes that are three moras or longer are either immune to rendaku or show rendaku consistently; the distinction between rendaku lovers and rendaku haters is relevant only to one-mora and two-mora elements. Not only that, if A is three moras or longer and B isn't rendaku-immune, then A+B will have rendaku regardless of whether B is a lover or a hater.

Rosen's Rule isn't actually quite as ironclad as he suggests, but it's a very strong tendency, even if we expand the database to include compound elements that are morphologically complex and/or Sino-Japanese. I'll show how remarkably well Rosen's Rule holds up by testing it against some representative examples. First, I'll look carefully at a few native noun morphemes, including rendaku lovers like /fune/~/bune/ 船/舟 'ship, boat', rendaku haters like /taka/~/daka/ 鷹 'hawk', and intermediate items like /ki/~/gi/ 木 'tree; wood'. Then I'll look at the behavior of compounds containing Sino-Japanese binoms and mononoms.

Finally, I'll consider the explanation that Rosen proposed, which rests crucially on the notion of the foot. He assumed that foot boundaries have to coincide with morpheme boundaries, and that a prosodic word contains at most two bimoraic feet. Consequently, a compound with a long first or second element is too big to fit into a single prosodic word, and the second element will therefore be at the beginning of a prosodic word. Rosen then argued that the "marked" [+voice] feature (i.e., rendaku) is permitted more freely in a prosodically strong position — the left edge of a prosodic word in this case. Leaving aside the mechanics of Rosen's OT implementation of this idea, the question that arises, of course, is whether it's reasonable to claim that [+voice] is marked in the environment V—V or N—V.

References

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