

“On the origins of Japanese *dakuon* obstruents: evidence from Korean”

**ABSTRACT:** Japanese possesses two categories of obstruents: *seion* ‘clear’ and *dakuon* ‘muddy’ obstruents. *Dakuon* obstruents are distinctively voiced in modern Japanese, but there is a consensus that *dakuon* were prenasalized and developed out of nasal-obstruent clusters (Frellesvig, 2010). I argue that *dakuon* obstruents derive not only from nasal-obstruent clusters (\*nC, \*mC) but also from liquid-obstruent clusters (\*rC), drawing on two sources of diachronic evidence: alternations between *dakuon* and /r/ in Japanese, and lexical comparisons with Korean. Unlike some other novel proposals on the origin of *dakuon* such as Whitman (1985), I accept the consensus that *dakuon* as a phonologically distinct category emerged out of prenasalization (Frellesvig, 2010). Instead, I propose that proto-Japanese (pJ) \*r merged with the nasal /n/ in syllable-final position:

pJ \*r → \*n / \_\_ \$

I argue for this based on their articulatory similarity, the ease of [nC] clusters over [rC] clusters, and the cross-linguistic observation that nasal codas are universally less marked than liquid codas. This merger then enabled the prenasalization of obstruents in pJ \*rC clusters that led to *dakuon*. Evidence for this hypothesis can be found in some irregular compounds and competing forms, where we fail to see an expected /r/ and instead see a *dakuon* obstruent:

\*narpe > \*nanpe > *nabe* ~ *narabe* ‘arrange, be in a row’  
\*surka > (\*sunka 駿河) ~ *suruga* ‘Suruga (place name)’  
*tori* + *tati* > *tortati* > \*tontati > *todati* ‘birds flying up’  
*tori* + *pusa* > *torpusa* > \*tonpusa > *tobusa* ‘branch for worshipping *kami*’

*Rendaku* alone fails to explain the lack of /r/ surfacing; instead, these data suggest that \*rC combinations may be surfacing as *dakuon* obstruents in Old and Middle Japanese. Furthermore, comparisons of Old Japanese (OJ) lexical items with possible cognates in Middle Korean (MK) show that \*rC (in addition to \*nC and \*mC) is a possible source of *dakuon* in Japanese:

OJ *ago/agi* ‘jaw’ < \*ankir < \*arkir ~ MK *elkwul* ‘face’  
OJ *nugu(p)*- ‘remove’ < \*nunku- < \*nurku- ~ MK *nwulu*- ‘suppress’ < \*nwulGu-  
OJ *taga(p)*- ‘different’ < \*tanka- < \*tarka- ~ MK *talo*- ‘different’ < \*talGo-  
OJ *naga* ‘long; old’ < \*nanka < \*narka ~ MK *nolk*- ‘old’

By showing how Japanese *dakuon* obstruents could derive from pJ \*rC clusters through a sound change of \*r → \*n, this proposal broadens our view of the origins of *dakuon* without rejecting the consensus of scholars. Moreover, reconstructing \*rC clusters in proto-Japanese helps explain how Japanese could be related to a phonotactically complex language such as Korean.

#### SELECTED REFERENCES:

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