Pitch Patterns of Japanese Traditional Verses

Shiho Yamamoto (University of Arizona)

In this paper, I propose that native Japanese speakers have particular tendencies in terms of pitch pattern when reading 5-7-5 mora poetic-structures, as seen in *haiku* poetry. I investigate pitch patterns from two different types of verses: comparison between a 5-7-5 mora poetic-structure and regular prose containing the exact same wording, The results shows that Japanese speakers have particular tendencies in reading 5-7-5 poetic-structure verses. Each person selects their preferred pitch template, especially when reciting nonsense verses. Moreover, when the preferred pitch template and meaningful words are combined, the reciter has to compromise and find a comfortable pitch pattern without violating the phonological rules of the Japanese language.

While there are many studies of poetry, verses and songs in the field of literature, there are relatively few such studies in the field of linguistics. The study of prosody is mainly concerned with the placement of stress (e.g., *iambic pentameter* in Shakespeare). Even though there are some studies on Japanese prosodic structure, the main focus is usually on rhythm and not pitch. At present, Honma (1991), Bekku (1977) and Cole & Miyashita (2006) have proposed that *haiku* are recited with approximately equal duration for every mora. Yet there is still a need for an investigation of Japanese poetic pitch patterns, since the pitch of *haiku* has not been explored at all, to the best of my knowledge.

This study contributes to the current understanding of prosodic structures in the field of linguistics, especially regarding non-stress languages. It will be of particular interest to phonologists to know that pitch is a part of poetic recitation. This analysis reveals the diversity in speakers' recitations of Japanese poetic-structure verses. Furthermore, by investigating the differences among various poetic forms, a generalization of poetic recitation performance among human languages is generated.