

## On the Morphological Restriction in the Japanese Subject Honorifics\*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this squib is to show that a certain instance of the morphological restriction between the honorific passive morpheme *-rare* and the potential morpheme *-rare* can be derived from the phonological principle, which is found in various languages. In recent years, it has been shown in the literature that some combinations of syntactic constituents and morphemes are constrained by the phonological principle, often called as Obligatory Contour Principle (OCP). In this paper, I examine two forms of subject honorifics in Japanese: the subject honorific (SH) form *o-V-ni naru*, such as *o-nomi-ni naru*, and the honorific passive (HP) form, such as *nom-are-ru*, and demonstrate that the morphological restriction cannot be attributed to syntactic or semantic violations. Finally, I briefly observe the cooccurrence restriction between HP and the passive morpheme *-rare*. I show that the same morphological restriction can be seen, and thus the restriction can be captured by the phonological principle.

### 1. Introduction

It has been noted that there is a principle across languages that adjacent identical elements is prohibited. In the literature, the principle has been called the obligatory contour principle, the OCP (Leben (1973), Goldsmith (1976), McCarthy (1986)). The effects of this principle not only can be observed in autosegmental phonology and feature geometry (Leben (1973), Goldsmith (1976), McCarthy (1986), Myers (1987), Yip (1988), Pierrehumbert (1993), among many others) but also can be found in morphology (Menn and MacWhinney (1984), Mohanan (1994), Golston (1995), Yip (1995, 1998), Brentari (1998), Tang (2000) among many others). Furthermore, Bošković (2002) argues that the same effects can be found in PF, observing that in multiple wh-fronting languages such as Romanian and Bulgarian, the lower copy of the wh-phrase can be pronounced because of the constraint that the two homophonous elements cannot be adjacent. Based on this, Niinuma and Maki (2004) propose that the same analysis can be extended to case particles in Japanese, arguing that the pronominal *no* in Japanese is deleted when it is adjacent to the genitive *no*.

In this squib, we observe a new set of data in which the potential morpheme *-rare*

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cannot cooccur with the honorific passive (HP) *-rare* in Japanese, arguing that the principle can account for them. Thus, it constitutes additional evidence that the principle that can be seen in various languages is applicable to Japanese morphology.

The organization of this squib will be as follows. In the next section, I will present a new set of data that shows the cooccurrence restriction in the Japanese subject honorifics. In section 3, I will show that the principle can explain the cooccurrence restriction observed in section 2. In section 4, I will further show that the principle will prevent the cooccurrence of HP from having the passive *-rare* next to it. Section 5 will be a summary of this squib.

## 2. Data

In this section, I focus on the two types of subject honorific forms, which are exemplified in (1):<sup>1</sup>

- |     |    |                              |          |                  |
|-----|----|------------------------------|----------|------------------|
| (1) | a. | Tanaka sensee-ga             | hon-o    | o-yomi ni nar-ta |
|     |    | Prof. Tanaka-Nom             | book-Acc | read-SH-past     |
|     |    | ‘Prof. Tanaka read the book’ |          |                  |
|     | b. | Tanaka sensee-ga             | hon-o    | yom-are-ta       |
|     |    | Prof. Tanaka-Nom             | book-Acc | read-HP-past     |
|     |    | ‘Prof. Tanaka read the book’ |          |                  |

Note that these sentences above have the same meaning, and the subject can be regarded as a ‘socially superior to the speaker’ (SSS) (Harada (1976)). Thus, we would expect that these forms behave the same way syntactically and these forms are interchangeable.

The following sentences show that the subject honorific form *o-V-ni nar* (SH, hereafter) can cooccur with the potential *-rare*.<sup>2</sup>

- |     |    |                                     |          |                    |
|-----|----|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|
| (2) | a. | Tanaka sensee-ga                    | hon-o    | kai-ta             |
|     |    | Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-past         |
|     |    | ‘Prof. Tanaka wrote the book’       |          |                    |
|     | b. | Tanaka sensee-ga                    | hon-o    | kak-e-ta           |
|     |    | Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-can-past     |
|     |    | ‘Prof. Tanaka could write the book’ |          |                    |
|     | c. | Tanaka sensee-ga                    | hon-o    | o-kaki-ni nar-e-ta |
|     |    | Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-SH-can-past  |
|     |    | ‘Prof. Tanaka could write the book’ |          |                    |

Let us now consider how the potential *-rare* can interact with HP.<sup>3</sup>

- |     |    |                  |       |               |
|-----|----|------------------|-------|---------------|
| (3) | a. | Tanaka sensee-ga | hon-o | kak-(ar)-e-ta |
|-----|----|------------------|-------|---------------|

- |                                     |          |                    |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-can-past     |
| 'Prof. Tanaka could write the book' |          |                    |
| b. Tanaka sensee-ga                 | hon-o    | kak-are-ta         |
| Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-HP-past      |
| 'Prof. Tanaka could write the book' |          |                    |
| c.*Tanaka sensee-ga                 | hon-o    | kak-e-rare-ta      |
| Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-can-HP-past  |
| 'Prof. Tanaka could write the book' |          |                    |
| d.*Tanaka sensee-ga                 | hon-o    | kak-are-(ra)-re-ta |
| Prof. Tanaka-Nom                    | book-Acc | write-HP-can-past  |
| 'Prof. Tanaka could write the book' |          |                    |

The unacceptable sentences in (3c) and (3d) indicate that the honorific passive *-rare* cannot cooccur with the potential morpheme *-rare*. Notice that this cooccurrence restriction is not due to semantics, since it is possible to say 'Prof. Tanaka can write the book' with SH, as in (2c).

To sum up, the position where the potential *-rare* can appear with the subject honorific sentences is so restricted, in that the potential *-rare* must attach to *nar* in the

<sup>1</sup> SH subject honorific morpheme (*o-V-ni nar*), HP honorific passive (*rare*). I assume that *o-* and *-ni nar* in SH are a circumfix. See Niinuma and Maki (2005, 2006a) for the detailed discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Kikuchi (1994) notes that the potential morpheme *-rare* must attach to SH. (i) shows that the potential morpheme cannot attach to V in SH, and thus the sentence is not acceptable.

- (i) \*Tanaka sensee-ga hon-o o-kak-e ni nar-u  
 Prof. Tanaka-Nom book-Acc write-can-SH-pres  
 'Prof. Tanaka can write the book'

<sup>3</sup> The potential *rare* and HP are homophonous. However, in modern Japanese, *ra* in the potential *rare* can be optionally dropped, as demonstrated in (i)

- (i) a. John-ga sakana-o tabe-rare-ru  
 John-Nom fish-Acc eat-can-pres  
 'John can eat fish'  
 b. John-ga sakana-o tabe-re-ru  
 John-Nom fish-Acc eat-can-pres

On the contrary, *ra* in the honorific passive *-rare* cannot be omitted:

- (ii) a. Tanaka sensee-ga sakana-o tabe-rare-ta  
 Prof. Tanaka-Nom fish-Acc eat-HP-past  
 'Prof. Tanaka ate fish'  
 b. Tanaka sensee-ga sakana-o tabe-re-ta  
 Prof. Tanaka-Nom fish-Acc eat-HP-past

*o-V-ni naru* form. Furthermore, HP cannot cooccur with the potential *-rare*. This shows that there is a clearly difference between SH and HP.

### 3. Two Occurrences of *-Rare*

In the previous section, I have presented the data that the potential *-rare* cannot cooccur with HP in Japanese. The question is why they are not acceptable. The relevant examples are repeated below :

- (4) a. \*Tanaka sensee-ga      hon-o      kak-e-rare-ta  
       Prof. Tanaka-Nom      book-Acc      write-can-HP-past  
       ‘Prof. Tanaka could write the book’  
    b. \*Tanaka sensee-ga      hon-o      kak-are-(ra)re-ta  
       Prof. Tanaka-Nom      book-Acc      write-SH-can-past  
       ‘Prof. Tanaka could write the book’

Note that it is not the case that the potentials cannot cooccur with the subject honorific forms in Japanese, because the sentence becomes acceptable if SH, instead of HP, is used in the sentence.

- (5) a. Tanaka sensee-ga      hon-o      o-kaki-ni nar-e-ta  
       Prof. Tanaka-Nom      book-Acc      write-SH-can-past  
       ‘Prof. Tanaka could write the book’  
    b. Yamada sensee-ga      sono hito-ni (yotte)  
       Prof. Yamada-Nom      that person-by  
       o-nagur-are-ni nat-ta.  
       hit-passive-SH-past  
       ‘Prof. Yamada was hit by that person.’

Therefore, the unacceptability of the sentences in (4) cannot be attributed to the semantic conditions.

It seems that syntactic analysis cannot account for the unacceptability of (4), either. It has been often noted that the potential *-rare* appears above vP in Japanese (see Koizumi (1994, 1998), Niinuma (2000), Takano (2003), among others). Furthermore, Niinuma and Maki (2006b) argue that HP is located at T in Japanese, and that the structure for (4a) is possible under our analysis. Thus, it is expected to be acceptable, contrary to fact.

- (6) [TP      [vP      potential] HP]

I propose that the sentences in (4) are not acceptable because of the principle that the two homophonous elements cannot be adjacent. For instance, in multiple *wh*-fronting languages, such as Romanian and Bulgarian, it is not the case that all *wh*-

phrases are fronted, as illustrated in (7). Assuming the phonological condition that two homophonous elements must not be adjacent, Bošković (2002) argues that one *wh*-element must be pronounced in a lower position in order to avoid forming a sequence of homophonous elements.

- (7) a. Ce precede ce?  
       What precedes what  
       ‘What precedes what?’  
       b. Ce ce precede?  
 (8) a. Kakvo obuslavlja kakvo?  
       What conditions what  
       ‘What conditions what?’  
       b. \*Kakvo kakvo obuslavlja?

(Bošković (2002))

The same analysis can be applied to the sentences in (4) above. The unacceptability of the sentences in (4) is attributed to the fact that the phonetically identical elements are next to each other. In the case of HP, in order to avoid the sequence of homophonous *-rare*, the different subject honorific form, namely, SH, must be used. If this is on the right track, it constitutes additional evidence for the universal constraint that two homophonous elements must not be adjacent.

#### 4. Passive *-Rare*

Shibatani (1976) notes that not only the deep subjects, but also the derived subjects can license subject honorification, as shown in (9):

- (9) Yamada sensee-ga sono hito-ni (yotte)  
       Prof. Yamada-Nom that person-by  
       o-nagur-are-ni nat-ta.  
       hit-passive-SH-past  
       ‘Prof. Yamada was hit by that person.’

(Shibatani (1976))

This sentence in (9) is very important, since it tells us that the passive *-rare* can occur with SH.

The question that immediately arises is whether HP can also cooccur with the passive *-rare*. The following examples illustrate that they cannot appear in the same sentence:

- (10) a. \*Yamada sensee-ga sono hito-ni (yotte)  
       Prof. Yamada-Nom that person-by  
       nagur-are-rare-ta.

hit-passive-HP-past

'Prof. Yamada was hit by that person.'

b.\*Yamada sensee-ga sono hito-ni (yotte)

Prof. Yamada-Nom that person-by

nagur-are-rare-ta.

hit-HP-passive-past

'Prof. Yamada was hit by that person.'

This unacceptability is not due to semantics either, since the sentence becomes acceptable if we replace HP with SH.

The distribution of the passive *-rare* also illustrates that there is a clear contrast between the subject honorific forms. It would be surprising if we consider that the properties of SH and those of HP are identical.

The unacceptability of (10) is also accounted for by the principle that the two homophonous elements cannot be adjacent, as discussed in the previous section. As in the case of the potential *-rare*, in order to avoid forming the sequence of two phonetically identical elements, SH must be used, instead of HP.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this squib was to consider the cooccurrence restriction of the potential *-rare* with the honorific passive *-rare*. I have proposed that the potential *-rare* and the honorific passive *-rare* cannot cooccur in the same sentence, since the principle circumvents forming the sequence of two phonetically identical elements. I have also shown that the same analysis can be extended to the sentences in (10). This finding implies that the morphological restriction in Japanese is constrained by the principle observed across languages, and thus we do not need to assume a language-specific rule to prevent it.

It is well-known that there are four different usages of *-rare* in Japanese: honorific, potential, passive, and spontaneous. In this squib, I have only observed that the cooccurrence restriction of honorific with potential and passive. It would be more interesting to consider whether the same principle can be applicable to other cases, such as potential and passive, potential and spontaneous, etc. It seems to me that the universal principle is also applied to the following sentences.

(11) a.\*Taro-ga sono hito-ni (yotte)

Taro-Nom that person-by

nagur-are-(ra)-re-ta.

hit-passive-can-past

'Taro can be hit by that person.'

b.\*Taro-ga sono hito-ni (yotte)

Taro-Nom that person-by

nagur-are-(ra)-e-rare-ta.

hit-can-passive-past

'Taro was hit by that person.'

Obviously, the detailed investigation of the cooccurrence restriction of the four usages of the morpheme *-rare* in Japanese will be necessary. However, it will not be surprising if the universal principle can give a reason for the unacceptability of other combinations of the morpheme *-rare*.

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