

The Prosodic Domains of Wh-questions in the Showamura Dialect of Japanese*

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1. Introduction

- We examine the Showamura dialect of Japanese.
- Showamura is a small town located in the Aizu region of Fukushima prefecture.
- We recorded data from 26 Showamura residents; average age was 77.5.
- We showed participants sentences in standard Japanese and asked them to say them in their dialect.
- We had participants ask questions about drawings.
- Data are available online:
 - <http://www.osaka-kyoiku.ac.jp/~jginsbur/AizuBenDatabase/Showamura1.html>
- Richards (2010) proposes that there is no need for wh-movement in languages in which a wh-phrase and an associated question particle can appear in the same prosodic domain.
- This proposal can account for why a wh-word does not need to move in languages such as Japanese.
- Some of the evidence for this proposal comes from Tokyo and Fukuoka Japanese, in which a wh-phrase and an associated complementizer appear to be in the same prosodic domain.
- Research Question: **What is the form of the prosodic domain that contains a wh-phrase and an associated question particle in the Showamura dialect?**

2. Tokyo Japanese

(1) *Naoya-ga nanika-o nomiya-de nonda.*
 Naoya-NOM something-ACC bar-LOC drank
 'Naoya drank something at the bar.' (Ishihara 2003:52)

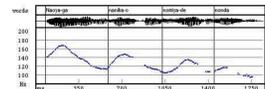


Fig. 1: Pitch track for (1), from Ishihara (2003:53)

(2) *Naoya-ga nani-o nomiya-de nonda no?*
 Naoya-NOM what-ACC bar-LOC drank Q
 'What did Naoya drink?' (Ishihara 2003:52)

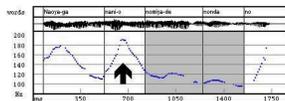


Fig. 2: Pitch track for (2), from Ishihara (2003:53)

- In Fig. 1, there is a slight peak on *nanika* 'something'.
- In Fig. 2, there is an elevated peak on *nani-o* 'what' (compare with *nanika* 'something' in Fig. 1) and there is pitch compression after *nani-o* 'what' (pitch is more reduced than in Fig. 1)
- Richards (2010: 145): "there is a domain, starting with the *wh*-phrase and ending with the *wh*-complementizer".

3. Fukuoka Japanese

(3) *Imanishi-ga doyoobi aomushi-ni yarareta to.*
 Imanishi-NOM Saturday caterpillar-by was done PRT
 'Imanishi was affected by caterpillars on Saturday.' (Smith 2013:98)

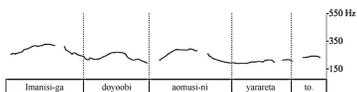


Fig. 3: Pitch track for (3), from Smith (2013:98)

(4) *Dare-ga doyoobi aomushi-ni yarareta to?*
 who-NOM Saturday caterpillar-by was done PRT
 'Who was affected by caterpillars on Saturday?' (Smith 2013:98)

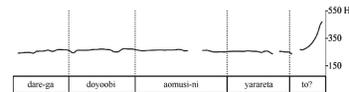


Fig. 4: Pitch track for (4), from Smith (2013:98)

- The pitch accents in the statement in (3) disappear in the wh-question version (4). Pitch remains flat until the final rise.
- Smith examines Kubo's (2001, 2005) generalization that "the wh element triggers accent deletion on all words inside the wh prosody domain (Smith: 2013:98)".
- Smith finds there is variation "within and between speakers" that isn't completely consistent with this generalization (Smith 2013:97).

4. Showamura Japanese

(5) *Jiichan-ga nanika-o nagashi-de kutta yo.*
 grandpa-Nom something-Acc kitchen-Loc ate Emph
 'Grandpa ate something in the kitchen.'

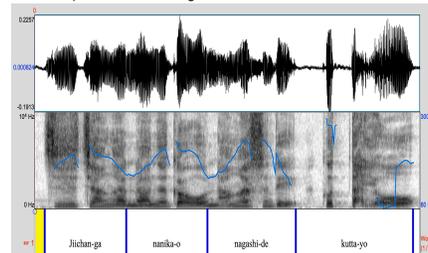


Fig. 5: Pitch track for (5), spoken by a 75-year old female (Subject 32, Item 10')

(6) *Jiichan-wa nani-o nagashi-de kutta no?*
 Emph grandpa-Top what-Acc kitchen-Loc ate Q
 'What did grandpa eat in the kitchen?'

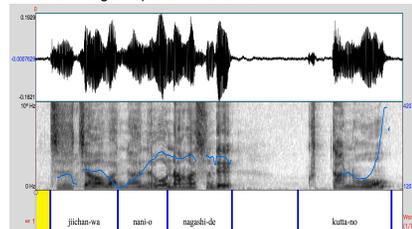


Fig. 6: Pitch track for (6), spoken by a 75-year old female (Subject 32, Item 11)

- In the statement (Fig. 5), there is a pitch peak on the indefinite *nanika*, followed by peaks on each successive phrase.
- In the corresponding wh-question (Fig. 6), the pitch peaks on the wh-phrase and then gradually falls until the question particle, where it rises.
- The accents on the words following the wh-phrase have been reduced. This is similar to Fukuoka Japanese, except that accents haven't necessarily been deleted, unlike in Fukuoka Japanese.
- Unlike in Tokyo Japanese, in the wh-question pattern (Fig. 6), pitch on the wh-phrase is not elevated, when compared with the indefinite *nanika* (Fig. 5), and there is very little (if any) pitch compression after the wh-phrase.

(7) *Jisama-ga nanika nagashi-de kuteta yo.*
 grandpa-NOM something kitchen-LOC ate Emph
 'Grandpa ate something in the kitchen.'

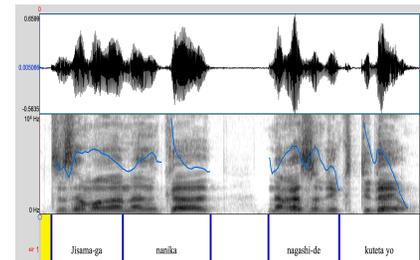


Fig. 7: Pitch track for (7), spoken by an 80-year old male (Subject 41, Item 11)

(8) *Jisan-wa nani-o nagashi-de kuta no-gana?*
 grandpa-NOM what-ACC kitchen-LOC ate Q
 'What did grandpa eat in the kitchen?'

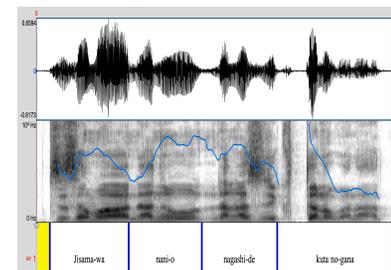


Fig. 8: Pitch track for (8), spoken by an 80-year old male (Subject 41, Item 12)

- In the statement (Fig. 7), there is a pitch peak on the indefinite *nanika* 'something', followed by peaks on each successive phrase.
- In the corresponding wh-question (Fig. 8), the pitch peaks on the wh-phrase and then gradually falls on the adjunct phrase *nagashi-de* 'in the kitchen', followed by a high peak on the verb, which precedes the question particle.
- The accent on the adjunct phrase appears to be reduced.
- If one assumes that a prosodic domain consists of the region from high peak to a successive high peak, then the peak on the verb might create a new prosodic domain between the wh-phrase and question particle.
- One possibility:
 - The high pitch on the verb signifies a continuation of the prosodic domain that starts on the wh-phrase, but that is interrupted by *nagashi-de* 'in the kitchen'.
- Again, there is no significant pitch compression after the wh-phrase.

(9) *Yube bachan-wa nagashi-de nani-o kuteta no?*
 evening grandma-TOP kitchen-LOC what-ACC ate Q
 'That evening, what did grandma eat in the kitchen?'

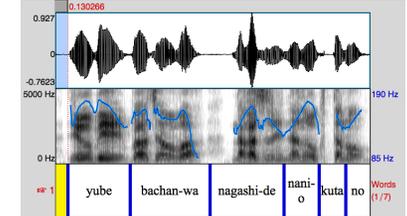


Fig. 9 (80-year old male – Subject 41, Item 13)

- (8) is similar to (9), except that the adjunct phrase precedes the wh-phrase, and the wh-phrase directly precedes the verb.
- Both (8) and (9) are spoken by the same subject.
- In Fig. 9 there is a peak on the wh-phrase, followed by a drop and then a rise on the particle.
- The accent on the verb appears to be reduced (compare with Fig. 7).

5. Conclusions

- There is a pitch peak on the wh-phrase, but it is not necessarily elevated when compared with the indefinite counterpart, unlike Tokyo Japanese.
- Overall, the Showamura dialect appears to be more like Fukuoka Japanese than Tokyo Japanese, in that accents appear to be reduced between a wh-phrase and a question particle.
- Accents between the wh-phrase and the associated question particle are reduced, like in Fukuoka Japanese, but not as drastically.
- It may be that the prosodic domain of a wh-phrase can essentially be "interrupted" by an intervening adjunct phrase, and then continued (Fig. 6).
- This phenomenon deserves further examination.
- This accent-reduced domain between a wh-phrase and a question particle in Showamura Japanese seems to be consistent with Richards' proposal that in a non-wh-movement language a wh-phrase and question particle must be in the same prosodic domain.
- Richards makes his proposal based on domains that are very clear – in Tokyo and Fukuoka Japanese there are no peaks (or practically nonexistent peaks) in the wh-prosodic domain.
- In the Showamura dialect, there are peaks (although reduced) in the wh-prosodic domain, thus showing the need for a clearer definition of what constitutes a prosodic domain.

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