

Mora structure in Japanese

Data set and discussion questions to accompany the reading in Tsujimura (2007), ch 3 excerpt, “Mora vs. syllable”

The Tsujimura reading presents basic information about moras and mora structure in Japanese. However, her discussion does not cover all cases, so we will make refinements in class.

- The word *mora* has two possible plural forms, *moras* and *morae*.

I. Basic concepts related to moras

- (1) Using the classification of moras in Tsujimura’s example (121), divide the following words into moras. Indicate for each mora whether it is type (a), (b), or (c). (To make this more convenient, I have written long vowels and long consonants with double symbols rather than using the length mark [:].)

[i k e b a n a]
‘flower arranging’

[s e k k e n]
‘soap’

[h o n t o o]
‘truth’

- (2) Does Tsujimura’s mora-type classification in (121) make the correct prediction for these words? If so, do the same as in (1) above. If not, how does Tsujimura’s classification fail?

[b e ŋ k y o o]
‘study’

[r y u u k y u u]
‘Ryukyu Islands’

[ç y a k u]
‘hundred’

- (3) What is the relationship between hiragana characters and moras? Hiragana are given here for all the examples considered above.

いけばな [ikebana]

べんきょう [benkyoo]

せっけん [sekken]

りゅうきゅう [ryuukyuu]

ほんとう [hontoo]

ひゃく [çyaku]

II. Evidence that the mora is relevant in Japanese phonology

- (4) One way of making nicknames in Japanese is to add the suffix [tçan] to a shortened form of the name. Here are some nicknames formed this way. Can you state a generalization about the phonological structure of the shortened forms — is there anything they have in common?

(a) [hanako] —> [hana-tçan] [osamu] —> [osa-tçan]
[çuusuke] —> [çuu-tçan] [keiko] —> [kei-tçan]
[dzuŋko] —> [dzuŋ-tçan]

(b) [akiko] —> [ako-tçan] [masako] —> [mako-tçan]

(c) [çiroko] —> [çii-tçan] [natsuko] —> [nat-tçan]
[yasuko] —> [yat-tçan]

