

**Ra-nuki: A change in progress**

## I. Background, part 1: The passive

## (1) Consonant verbs vs. vowel verbs

(a)	motu	motanai	motta	‘hold’
	kaku	kakanai	kaita	‘write’
	odoru	odoranai	odotta	‘dance’
(b)	taberu	tabenai	tabeta	‘eat’
	nobiru	nobinai	nobita	‘stretch’ (intrans.)

## (2) Passive: How is it formed?

(a)	motareru	‘be held’	motarenai	motareta
	kakareru	‘be written’	kakarenai	kakareta
	odorareru	‘be danced’	odorarenai	odorareta
(b)	taberareru	‘be eaten’	taberarenai	taberareta
	nobirareru	‘be stretched’	nobirarenai	nobirareta

## (3) What are the uses of the passive?

## (a) Prototypical passive — promote object to syntactic subject

keeki-ga	tabe-rare-ta	
<i>cake-NOM</i>	<i>eat-PASS-PST</i>	‘The cake was eaten.’

## (b) “Adversative” passive — sometimes with no change in argument structure

Ken-wa	keeki-o	tabe-rare-ta	( <i>keeki-ga</i> also possible)
<i>Ken-TOP</i>	<i>cake-ACC</i>	<i>eat-PASS-PST</i>	

Colloquial translation: ‘Ken had the cake eaten on him.’

## (c) Passive morphology can be used as a form of subject honorific — no change in argument structure

Sensei-ga	keeki-o	tabe-rare-ta	
<i>teacher-NOM</i>	<i>cake-ACC</i>	<i>eat-PASS-PST</i>	‘The teacher ate the cake.’

## II. Background, part 2: The potential

## (4) How is it formed?

(a)	motareru	‘can hold’	motarenai	motareta
	kakareru	‘can write’	kakarenai	kakareta
	odorareru	‘can dance’	odorarenai	odorareta
(b)	taberareru	‘can eat’	taberarenai	taberareta
	nobirareru	‘can stretch’	nobirarenai	nobirareta

## (5) How do the passive and potential morphemes compare?

	<i>After consonant verb</i>	<i>After vowel verb</i>
<i>passive</i>	-are-	-rare-
<i>potential</i>	-e-	-rare-

- (6) Two complications involving the potential:
- The form for vowel verbs is ambiguous with the passive
  - The difference between the vowel-verb and consonant-verb forms of the potential is greater than for almost all other suffixes:

	<i>After consonant verb</i>	<i>After vowel verb</i>
<i>nonpast</i>	-u	- <u>r</u> u
<i>provisional</i>	-eba	- <u>r</u> eba
<i>passive</i>	-are-	- <u>r</u> are-
<i>causative</i>	-ase-	- <u>s</u> ase-
<i>volitional</i>	-oo	- <u>y</u> oo
<i>imperative</i>	-e	-ro
<b><i>potential</i></b>	<b>-e-(ru)</b>	<b>-rare-(ru)</b>

### III. *Ra-nuki* examples

- (7) There is another version of the potential for vowel verbs, often encountered in colloquial Japanese speech and casual writing — called *ra-nuki*, i.e., “*ra*-less”

- “Standard” form  
 taberrareru      taberrareta      nobirrareru      nobirrareta
- ra-nuki* form  
 taberreru      taberreta      nobirreru      nobirreta

- (8) *Ra-nuki* forms are often stigmatized or complained about as “bad Japanese” — they represent a newer, non-traditional form

- (9) However, there are very obvious linguistic reasons for this form to have arisen:

	<i>After consonant verb</i>	<i>After vowel verb</i>
<b><i>passive</i></b>	<b>-are-</b>	<b>-rare-</b>
<i>potential (standard)</i>	-e-	-rare-
<b><i>potential (ra-nuki)</i></b>	<b>-e-</b>	<b>-re-</b>

- Is the *ra-nuki* potential for vowel verbs ambiguous with the passive?
  - How different are the vowel-verb and consonant-verb potential forms, given *ra-nuki*?
- (10) There are prescriptivist attitudes against *ra-nuki* forms (see web link to blog rant)
- Ra-nuki* is sometimes described as a case of *nihongo no midare*, ‘confusion’ or ‘chaos’
  - Sometimes, forms like the following are observed:

Verb root:    syaber-    ‘chat’    Expected potential: syabereru, syabereta, ...

Observed potential: syaberareru, syaberareta, ...

- What has happened here?

Sociolinguists call this *hypercorrection*, and it arises when there is “linguistic insecurity”; compare English *between you and I*