Assimilation of the Japanese Moraic Nasal: A Chameleonic Phoneme

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics, General

By

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Dedication

To my bio family, chosen family, and myself. This world is full of experiences, thank you for being there to support me, oftentimes with coffee, during them all. Dulce may you forever be my left nut. Anden, may you forever be the same bitch but different font and my bestie in the NorthWestie. River, may you always be my angel. Betsy, may you forever be my ‘terpstie’. Hannah and Ingrid, may you always be my favorite adventurer buddies. Always continue learning, knowledge is powerful and so are we. May we continue on to slay another day!
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Abstract

Assimilation of the Japanese Moraic Nasal: A Chameleonic Phoneme

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How certain phonemes function and are produced in languages leaves room for some debate in the linguistic field regarding special cases. One such phoneme is the moraic nasal (/N/). The question of where this phoneme is articulated has been the topic of many papers. Previous research has shown that this phoneme behaves differently in terms of place of articulation (POA) when present word finally versus word medially. Researchers have determined that its POA ranges from the coronal to dorsal place. The Japanese IPA regards the moraic nasal, an allophone of the phoneme /n/, as being produced at the uvula. The gap that this paper intends to fill discusses environments or instances that cause POA variation, looking specifically at apical shifts in POA, opposite to the uvular placement accepted by many Japanese phonologists. Assimilation to points beyond the coronal and dorsal range has been posited to be based on the POA for the phoneme immediately following the moraic nasal. This current study looks at three POAs - velar, alveolar, bilabial - to identify environments where shifting of the moraic nasal occurs in their voiceless/voiced pairs, totaling in six different consonant environments. In order to determine the POA, audio and video recordings of the data were collected. Participants were provided with 36 tokens and directed to read them aloud during the recorded interview process. Results showed the POA for the moraic nasal to be heavily reliant on the following consonant’s POA. Apical shifting of the moraic nasal is triggered by the assimilation occurring when followed by a voiceless alveolar stop. This is noted to be the case when said alveolar stop is the onset to an open central nucleus, [a]. Results from this study revealed the over assimilation of the alveolar moraic nasal to an interdental moraic nasal. Analysis of the data shows a significant correlation between POA for the moraic nasal and the following mora- consists of either a consonant or
vowel. These results imply a need for reevaluation of the POA for the moraic nasal due to assimilation.