

# Facets of Japanese negative prefixes: Empirical support for distributed morphology

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This paper draws attention to intriguing behaviours of Japanese negative prefixes and argues that the phenomena lend support to one of the tenets of Distributed Morphology that roots are not specified for category.

In addition to Verbal Nouns (VN) (1), there is a class of roots called Adjectival Nouns (AN) (2):

- (1) a. *benkyoo-su-ru* 'do study'  
b. *sessei-su-ru* 'do health-maintenance'  
study do-[-past] health-maintenance do-[-past]
- (2) a. *senmei-de ar-u* 'be vivid'  
b. *ziyuu-de ar-u* 'be free'  
vividness-de be-[-past] freedom-de be-[-past]

Although the complex words in (1) and (2) are V and A respectively, they behave as different categories when a negative prefix *hu* 'non' is attached as follows:

- (3) a. *hu-benkyoo\*-su-ru* / <sup>ok</sup>-de ar-u 'be in the state of not studying'  
non-study-de be-[-past]/ do-[-past]  
b. *hu-sessei* <sup>ok</sup>-su-ru / <sup>ok</sup>-de ar-u 'live unhealthily/be in the state of unhealthy'  
non-health-maintenance-do-[-past]/-de be-[-past]
- (4) a. *hu-senmei* <sup>ok</sup>-de ar-u/\*-su-ru 'be non-vivid'  
non-vividness-de be-[-past]/-do-[-past]  
b. *hu-ziyuu* <sup>ok</sup>-de ar-u / <sup>ok</sup>-su-ru non-freedom-de be-[-past]/-do-[-past]

*Benkyoo* is a VN root, yet cannot behave as V but as A after *hu* prefixation, as in (3a). (3b) shows that *sessei*, originally an VN, can behave both as V and A. While there is no mismatch in category between (2a) and (4a), *ziyuu*, which is an AN, behaves V as well as A. Similar mismatches in category are observed with other negative prefixes *hi* 'un' and *mu* 'no', too.

Traditional derivational morphology where roots as well as suffixes are specified for category

in the lexicon will run afoul of the above phenomenon. I propose that “VN” and “AN” roots are in fact category-less. And, departing from Marantz (2001), who states that affixes are category heads, or f-morphemes in the sense of Harley and Noyer (1999), I argue, along with Lowenstamm (2015) and Creemers et al. (2018), that (some) suffixes are roots and Japanese negative prefixes are one of them. As such, they too are not specified for category.

Then I show that the final exponence is determined by higher category heads including *de*, an AN head and *su-ru*, V inserted under VoiceP as a VN head. This explains the seemingly complex phenomena cleanly.

Finally, I show that such “flexibility” in exponence is observed only with prefixation, not with suffixation, in Japanese. I argue that this is due to the “well-behaved” head-final nature of Japanese and the fact that negative prefixes have semantic contents as opposed to purely category-determining suffixes.

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