

**Dr. John Whitman, Cornell University**

**December 6 (Tue), 2022, 20:00 - 21:30 JST**  
**Zoom Live Language: English**

## **Old Japanese (and proto-Japonic) as a retracted tongue root harmony language**



This talk exploits our improved understanding of tongue root harmony systems, particularly in NE Asia (see Joseph et al 2020 and the work cited there), to reconsider the long-mooted issue of the “laws of syllable combination” in Old Japanese identified by Arisaka Hideyo (1934). Building on an insight of Hayata (2006), I show that the Old Japanese vowel co-occurrence patterns have the properties of a vestigial NE Asian RTR (retracted root tongue)-dominant system. I explore and extend previous work on the reflexes of this system in Eastern Old Japanese suffix selection.

The talk then focuses on the observation of Joseph et al (2020) that the well-known Eastern Old Japanese alternation between /u/ and /o/ in the attributive suffix may reflect a TR harmony-conditioned pattern. Attributive -o occurs almost exclusively after stem-final [+RTR] vowels; of the 52 examples of -o collected by Ikier (2006), only one occurs after an unambiguous [-RTR] vowel; 4 occur after stems with final vowel /i/ or /u/, which may be the result of mid vowel raising from \*e or \*o.

The talk concludes with a discussion of the relation between RTR- versus ATR (advanced tongue root)-dominant harmony and vowel inventory in light of Van der Hulst’s (2017) formalization of a proposal by Casali (2003, 2008) that ATR-dominant systems typically have only one pair of contrasting high vowels.

Selected references: Hattori, Shir . 1976. J dai Nihongo no boin taikei to boin ch wa, Hayata, Teruhiro. 2006. Jōdai Nihongo boin chōwa obegaki, Joseph, Andrew, Seongyeon Ko, and John Whitman. 2020. A comparative approach to the vowel systems and harmonies in the Transeurasian languages and beyond, Van der Hulst, Harry. 2017. Deconstructing tongue root harmony systems, Whitman, John. 2016. Nichiryū sogo no on’in taikei to rentaikei, izenkei no kigen.

Full abstract and bio: <https://tinyurl.com/udbku6bt>

**Bio:** Dr. John Whitman is Professor of Linguistics at Cornell University. He is former Chair of the Department of Linguistics (2006-9, 2016-21) and Director of the East Asia Program at Cornell and previously served as Director of the Department of Crosslinguistic Studies at the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics. His linguistic specializations are East Asian linguistics, comparative syntax, language typology, and historical linguistics. Whitman’s recent nonlinguistic research has focused on the role of vernacular reading in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Central Asia, and points of contact between the East Asian practice and glossing and reading in the Medieval West.

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