

Grammatical Features of Yokohama Pidgin Japanese: Common Characteristics of Restricted Pidgins

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1. Introduction¹

A pidginized variety of Japanese called *Yokohamese* or *Japanese Ports Lingo* evolved during the reign of Emperor Meiji from 1868 to 1912, and largely disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century (Holm 1989:593). Hereafter this variety is referred to as Yokohama Pidgin Japanese, or YPJ. In this paper, I will describe the sociohistorical background and linguistic features of YPJ. Then I will examine if we could label YPJ as 'restricted pidgin' based on the common characteristics of restricted pidgins discussed in Siegel (in press) and Sebba (1997). Restricted pidgins are those that are used only for basic communication among people who do not share a common language. They are not the everyday language of any speech community. Siegel (in press) showed eight grammatical features that are shared by most restricted pidgins: a) virtually no productive bound morphology—inflectional or derivational, b) reduced number of adpositions and pronouns,

¹ I would like to thank Jeff Siegel for his valuable comments and encouragements. All remaining errors are of course my own.

c) reduced lexicon, d) no TMA markers—temporal adverbs used, e) preverbal negative markers, f) no complementizers, g) more reduplicated forms (but reduplication not productive), and h) some bimorphemic question words. Grammatical features of YPJ that are relevant to these eight features will be introduced and examined. The influence from Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) will also be discussed.

2. Sociohistorical Background

The pidginized Japanese in Yokohama was produced by the contacts between Japanese and foreign nationals from abroad particularly in the Yokohama area at the time of the Meiji opening of Japan to the West (Miller 1967:266). According to a study on the formation of Yokohama Settlement (Ishizuka 1996), Yokohama developed as an international trade city and a port town of the capital, Tokyo, that served an important role in monopolistic exporting of raw silk. The Tokugawa Shogunate (later on the Meiji government) allowed foreign nationals to borrow land, build buildings, and do trading businesses only within the Gaikokujin-Kyoryuuchi (Foreign nationals' Settlement) for forty years from the opening of Yokohama port in 1859 until 1899. The Settlement was about 108 hectares in area. In 1860, six months after the opening of the Yokohama port, only forty-four foreign nationals (mainly English and Americans) were living in the settlement. In eighteen years, the number of Europeans increased to 1,370. This meant that combined with 1,850 Chinese, more than 3,000 foreign nationals were living in the settlement then. In terms of nationality, the British were the most representative followed by Americans and Germans. Many of the foreign nationals were businessmen, doctors, teachers, and missionaries. One-fourth were women who came to Japan as wives or tutors. Table 1 below shows the demographic data of the foreign nationals in the Yokohama Settlement from 1870 to 1897.

Year	1870	1878	1893	1897
British	513	515	808	869
American	146	300	253	372
German	76	175	151	208
French	83	120	133	274
Dutch	34	59	60	40
Total Europeans	*942	1,370	1,605	2,096
Chinese		1,850	3,325	2,015
Total		3,220	4,930	4,111

Table 1. The Number of Foreign Nationals in Yokohama Settlement 1870 – 1897 (from Ishizuka 1996) [The number with * does not include the number of women.]

As Table 1 demonstrates, the number of Chinese represents a significant proportion in the demographic data. It is assumed that Chinese people played a significant role in the formation of YPJ although their role has not been discussed in the previous studies. Since the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Qing dynasty did not conclude their treaty, Chinese people could not officially enter Japan before 1871. Meanwhile, Chinese people entered Japan as employees of the foreign nationals who were from the countries with treaties. After the *Nissin tsuusyou jouki* ‘Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty’ was concluded on 1871, more Chinese migrated to Yokohama (Sugahara 1993). Most of the Chinese people who came to Yokohama were from Canton where CPE evolved in the early eighteenth century (Holm 1989:512). Concerning Chinese traders in the Settlement, Ishizuka (1996) stated that many of them did their business throughout the Pacific including places such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In an autobiographical essay written by Theodate Geoffrey (Geoffrey 1926:7), who arrived in the Settlement in 1917, there is an anecdote about a Chinese baby nurse who spoke ‘pidgin English.’ The Chinese baby nurse greeted the author, ‘How do, missy. You b’long ship side long time; you velly tired?’ when she first met her. Two features of Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) are observed in this short discourse. They are the use of *belong* as copula and the zero copula. According to Baker (1987:183), the *belong* copula is an exclusively CPE feature and one which reflects Cantonese influence. As for the zero copula, it is one of the frequently found features in many other pidgins and creoles (Baker 1987:177). Taking these into consideration, it is very probable that Chinese people in the Settlement had used some CPE. Geoffrey (1926) also tells us that social interaction between foreign nationals and Japanese was limited to certain settings such as business negotiations and interaction with servants.

Niki (2001) revealed the social psychological attitudes of the English speakers toward YPJ by referring the articles in two major newspapers of those days for the English speakers in Yokohama settlement. Niki’s discussion tells us about people with two opposing attitudes toward YPJ—those who designated YPJ as corrupted and vulgar, and those who believed in its usefulness. The review article in *The Japan Gazette* for the other orthodox textbook of Standard Japanese ‘Kwaiwa Hen, Twenty-Five Exercises in the Yedo Colloquial’ edited by Ernest M. Satow, mentioned YPJ as ‘that odious jargon—the pidgin Japanese of Yokohama,’ and also as ‘the contemptible, vulgar, and to all but open port men, incomprehensible jargon that has flourished hitherto (*The Japan Gazette*: 1873, Oct. 21st).’

On the other hand, the review article of Atkinson (1879) in *The Japan Weekly Mail* argued that YPJ is very helpful for learners of Japanese as a

foreign language and emphasized that the textbook is not for the small number of elites but for the public ‘as regards this dialect [YPJ], no person can deny its marvellous compactness when finding the amount of multum it is capable of reproducing by so slight a pervo...’, and applauded the anonymous author as one ‘whom fame will soon lead forth to crown with public honours (*The Japan Weekly Mail*: 1873, Nov. 22nd).’

3. Linguistic Description of Pidginized Japanese in Yokohama

3.1. Data

The data is a word list and a set of example sentences from the small pedagogical guide for the learners of YPJ: *Revised and Enlarged Edition of Exercises in the Yokohama Dialect* (Atkinson 1879, hereafter referred to as ‘*Exercises*’). This small 40-page pamphlet was published anonymously, and the author later turned out to be a merchant who engaged in Commerce both in China and Japan. Although the amount of data contained in Atkinson (1879) is not comprehensive, as the author stated in the preface, it is enough to provide some idea of its lexicon and grammatical structure. Since YPJ is represented with English words (and pseudowords), two separate words were sometimes used to transcribe a word in YPJ. A good example is *cheese eye*, an adjective meaning ‘little.’ Apparently *cheese eye* derived from a Japanese adjective *chiisai* (little, small). In this paper, I will use a hyphen to combine such words as *cheese-eye* for the reader’s convenience.

3.2. Phonology

As Holm (1989) pointed out, YPJ generally retained the CV syllabic structure of Japanese. Since YPJ is mostly transcribed with a series of small English words that sound similar to the target Japanese words, it is difficult to see phonological features in the light of how and to what extent YPJ had phonological features in common with Japanese. Yet it is assumed that they were pronounced with English phonology on the basis of the English words. There is one interesting phonological aspect to point out about YPJ: how it reflects the characteristic feature of the Tokyo dialect spoken in those days. Unlike dialects of Japanese spoken in other areas, the Tokyo dialect used to have a salient phonological feature: they pronounced as /s/ which was pronounced in other dialects as /h/. *Sto/shto* (*hito* in other dialects) meaning ‘human being’, and *stoats* (*hitotsu* in other dialects) meaning ‘one’ are good examples. These features are being lost and only older speakers have this feature currently.

3.3. Lexicon

The lexicon of YPJ seems to be highly reduced. There are many cases where limited vocabulary was made use of to express various things and

situations. For example, *daijoubu* in Japanese is usually used to describe a situation where no problems or dangers are involved. *Die-job* in YPJ, however, was used to depict ‘being good’ as in *die-job boto* ‘a good sea boat’, or ‘being sound’ as in *die-job mar* ‘a sound horse.’ Another example is the polysemy of the word *aboorah*. While *abura* in Japanese only designates ‘oil’, *aboorah* in YPJ refers to ‘butter’, ‘oil’, ‘kerosene’, ‘pomatum’ and ‘grease.’ *Aboorah* in YPJ is a good example of semantic extension as is frequently observed in pidgins. As Sebba (1997) explained, since pidgins need to place as small as possible a burden on their learners, the list of words should be as small as the function of the language will allow, and therefore, there will be a need to make the best use of the word-resources.

As Holm (1989:594) pointed out, YPJ contained words from a variety of languages such as *boto* ‘boat’ (> English *boat*), *piggy* ‘go’ (> Bazaar Malay *pergi*), though lexicon of YPJ mainly derived from Japanese, the superstrate language. Atkinson (1879:21) referred to the origin of the two words *chobber chobber* ‘food, sustenance’, and *bobbery* ‘disturbance, noise’ to ‘pigeon English—a low and ungrammatical dialect, void of syntax—spoken between foreigners and Chinese.’ Some words reflected loanwords from other European languages which had already been introduced by the time YPJ was evolved, such as *shabone* ‘soap’ (> French *savon*). Holm also states that some English derived words such as *nun-wun* ‘the best’ (> English *number one*) came from English via Chinese Pidgin English.

Some words in YPJ have a pragmatic origin. For example, a word for ‘a dog’ is *come-here*. It is not difficult to assume that Japanese people misunderstood the expression ‘Come here!’ that is often said to dogs, as the generic term of the creature. Another example is *high-high-mar* for ‘racing pony.’ *Hai-hai* is a typical interjection used when a rider hastens a horse in Japanese. These YPJ words are not similar to the Japanese words.

(1)	YPJ:	come-here	high-high-mar
		‘dog’	‘racing pony’
	J:	inu	kyousouba

Subject pronouns in YPJ distinguish three persons (1st, 2nd, and 3rd) but there is no distinction in number. No example of object pronouns is observed in *Exercises*. There are no examples of adpositions and complementizers in the data.

1 st person	watarkshee
2 nd person	oh-my
3 rd person	acheera sto

Table 2. Pronouns in YPJ

3.4. Morphology

There are several reduplicated forms in the data that do not originate from Japanese in the data: for example, *so-so* for the verb ‘sew’, *maro-maro* for ‘to pass, to walk, to be not at home’, and *sick-sick* for ‘sick.’ *So-so* and *sick-sick* are apparently from English ‘sew’ and ‘sick’ respectively for Japanese words for these words *nuu* and *byoukida* are not phonologically similar to them. Reduplication in YPJ does not seem to add any grammatical functions. YPJ data do not show evidence of bound morphology. There is one frequently observed compounding strategy with *sto/shto* ‘person’. *Sto/shto* is added to any part of speech to describe and make the terms for professions.

(2)	YPJ:	ah-kye kimono sto , ² red clothes (N.) person ‘soldier’	eeto high-kin sto thread look (V.) person ‘silk inspector’
	J:	heitai	kinukensakan

Long words that consist of several components are sometimes observed in YPJ, and it is not very easy to determine the meaning of the words from the component morphemes. For example, the word for ‘light house’, *fooney high-kin serampan nigh rosokoo* is not easily understood at first glance, though it makes sense after a while.

(3)	YPJ:	fooney high-kin serampan ship look break ‘lighthouse’	nigh NEG	rosoko candle.
	J:	toudai ‘lighthouse’		

3.5. Grammar

3.5.1 Article

There were no articles which exist in YPJ just as there are none in Japanese (Atkinson 1879:15).

3.5.2 Case Marking

All of the case markers found in Japanese were dropped.

(4)	YPJ:	Kooromar car	aboorah oil	sinjoe. give
		‘Oil the carriage wheels’		

² ‘The British established a navy base in Yokohama from 1863 to 1875 to defend their settlements, and ... the red uniforms of their soldiers were a common sight in the harbor area...’ (Holm 1989:593).

J: Kuruma-ni abura-o ire-ro.
 car-DAT oil-ACC put-IMP
 'Put some oil into the car.'

3.5.3 Possessive Expression

No lexical item is used for possession in YPJ. Possessive relationships between two noun phrases is expressed simply by juxtaposition of the possessor (including pronouns) and the possessed.

- (5) YPJ: acheera sto caberra- mono
 over-there person hat
 'his hat'
- J: achira-no hito-no kaburi-mono
 over there-GEN person-GEN hat
 'that person's hat'
- (6) YPJ: watarkshee mar
 I horse
 'my horse'
- J: watakushi-no uma
 I-GEN horse
 'my horse'

Possession in Japanese is marked with the genitive case particle *-no* in the order of [possessor *-no* possessee]. Therefore, word order in YPJ is the same as Japanese except for the lack of the case marker *-no*.

3.5.4 Word Order

YPJ retained basic word order of Japanese, SOV. Direct and indirect objects always precede verbs both in YPJ and Japanese.

- (7) YPJ: Mar chobber-chobber sinjoe
 horse food give
 'Give the horse some feed.'
- J: Uma-ni esa-o yare.
 horse-DAT feed-ACC give-IMP
 'Give the horse some feed.'

3.5.5 Tense

There are not any tense/aspectual markers in YPJ. Tense is expressed by the context or by temporal adverbs such as *meonitchi* 'tomorrow,' *bynebai* 'later.' For example, future time is expressed by temporal adverb *bynebai* in (8).

- (8) YPJ: Sigh-oh-narrow dozo **bynebai** moh-skosh cow
 good-bye please by and by more little buy
 ‘Good-by and please buy some more (in the future).’
 [translation mine]
- J: Sayounara, douzo mata kat-te kudasai.
 good-bye please again buy-CON please
 ‘Good-by, and please buy something again.’

Bynebai is one of the features commonly attested in both Chinese Pidgin English and Melanesian Pidgin English (Siegel 2000). Considering the fact that there were a lot of Chinese people in the settlement, it may have been brought into YPJ via Chinese Pidgin English. Baker and Mühlhäusler (1996) made a list of first attestations of 106 selected features of Melanesian Pidgin English. The use of *by and by* as a preverbal marker as in (8) is also included in the table indicating that it was first attested in Chinese Pidgin English in 1878.

3.5.6 Negative

YPJ has a general negative marker *nigh* which follows the verb. There was also a negative predicate *arimasen* ‘not to have, to be out’.

- (9) YPJ: Oh-my nangeye tokey high-kin **nigh**.
 you long time see NEG
 ‘I haven’t seen you for a long time.’
- J: Nagai aida anata-to at-te (i)-nai.
 long time you-COM see-CON be-NEG
- (10) YPJ: Bates **arimasen?**
 other be-NEG
 ‘Have you no others?’
- J: Betsu-no (mono)-wa ari-mas-en-ka?
 other-POS thing-TOP be-PLT-NEG-Q
 ‘Do you have others?’

Although *Exercises* explains that the formation of the negative by the addition of *-en* or *-in* to verbs ending, *-en/ing* are added only to the two verbs, *arimas* and *walkarimas*. In both ways, the negation strategy of Japanese reflects the syntactic position of negative markers in YPJ.

3.5.7 Interrogative Sentences

As for the ‘WH-questions’, all the question words comes from Japanese (*doko* ‘where’, *nanny* ‘what’, *ikoorah* ‘how much’, *dalley* ‘who’). In Japanese, there is no movement of a constituent associated with the formation of WH-questions, either. WH-question words replace noun phrases at the

same position, and the question particle *ka* is added at the end of the sentence (Tsjimura 1996:185). YPJ employs the similar strategy as Japanese except that the question particle *ka* is dropped.

- (11) YPJ: Num wun sindoe **doko**?
 best sailor where
 ‘Where is the Captain?’
- J: Senchou-wa doko (-desu-ka)?
 captain-TOP where-PLT-Q

As is not observed in Japanese, a bimorphemic question word, *nanny sto* ‘who’, was also used as in (12) in addition to sets of monomorphemic WH-question words listed above.

- (12) YPJ: **Nanny sto** arimas, Watarkshee arimasen?
 what person be I be-NEG
 ‘Who called when I was out?’
- J: watakushi-ga i-nai aida-ni dareka-kara
 I-NOM be-NEG a while-DAT someone-OBL
 denwa-ga ari-mashi-ta-ka?
 OBL telephone-NOM be-PLT-PPST-Q

4. Is YPJ a Restricted Pidgin?

Does YPJ share the common functional and structural features with other restricted pidgins? The sociohistorical background of YPJ tells us that the function of YPJ was restricted to the communication in the limited settings such as commerce and conversation with servants. Both Japanese and foreign nationals spoke other languages when they were with their peers. In the preface of *Exercises*, the author referred to YPJ as ‘a means of communication between the native and foreign resident or visitor.’ Thus YPJ was used only for basic communication among people who did not share a common language in a polyglot contact situation. The social environment of YPJ seems typical of the use of pidgin language.

Siegel (in press) discussed eight grammatical features that most restricted pidgins share. These characteristics are found in Chinese Pidgin English, Greenlandic Pidgin, the Hiri Trading Languages, Nauru Pidgin English, Ndyuka-Trio Pidgin, Pidgin Delaware, Pidgin Hawaiian, Pidgin French of Vietnam and Russenorsk (Siegel in press:8). Out of the eight grammatical features, YPJ shares seven features (a) – (h) as demonstrated in Table 3 (see Section 3 for discussion). As for (e) preverbal negative marker, it is not observed in YPJ for the negative markers in YPJ are post-verbal as in the superstrate language, Japanese.

<i>Eight features commonly shared by restricted pidgins</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
a) virtually no productive bound morphology —inflectional or derivational	√	
b) reduced number of adpositions, pronouns	√	
c) reduced lexicon	√	
d) no TMA markers—temporal adverbs used	√	
e) preverbal negative marker		√
f) no complementizers	√	
g) more reduplicated forms than superstrate language	√	
h) some bimorphemic question words	√	

Table 3. Linguistic Features of Restricted Pidgins Observed in YPJ

Although negative markers occur before the verb in the majority of known pidgins, Sebba (1997:42) pointed out there are some exceptions to this, referring to Hiri Motu³ in which the negator comes after the verb. Sebba provides an explanation of the exceptional case in Hiri Motu, saying that the presence of preverbal negator might be because of a universal preference among languages with SVO word order for preverbal modification, and it is not the case with languages with SOV word order. Since YPJ is also a language with SOV word order, YPJ serves as another evidence that the preverbal negator correlates with pidgins with SVO word order and portverbal negator with pidgins with SOV word order.

We have seen how the sociohistorical background and linguistic features of YPJ show the typical character of restricted pidgins so far. The next question is whether YPJ was stable enough to be called a pidgin. The fact that there existed a booklet for learners such as *Exercises* is good evidence that YPJ was a very stable variety and was recognized as a communication medium by many people. Also, people's attitudes towards YPJ—as illustrated in the review article on the *Exercises* (Atkinson 1879) published by the well established newspaper, *The Japan Weekly Mail*—is another piece of evidence that YPJ was recognized as a stable variety. In conclusion, YPJ is a variety that we can label “Restricted Pidgin” in terms of sociohistorical background, linguistic features, and stability.

5. Conclusion

The sociohistorical environment of the Yokohama Settlement in the late 19th century provided a typical situation where a restricted pidgin evolved: 1) limited social interaction between foreigners and the speakers of the superstrate language, Japanese, 2) a polyglot contact situation. Although the

³ Hiri Motu is a pidgin based on Motu, an Austronesian language. It is spoken around Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

data in Atkinson (1879) is limited, it provides us enough data to observe the linguistic features shared by other restricted pidgins. The linguistic data and sociohistorical environment of YPJ tell us that there were a considerable number of speakers of Chinese Pidgin English in Yokohama in the late 19th century and CPE influenced the lexicon of YPJ.

Abbreviation

N.	noun	A.	adjective	V.	verb
NOM	nominative	ACC	accusative	DAT	dative
GEN	genitive	COM	comitative	OBL	oblique
NEG	negative	PLT	polite	VOL	volitional
PST	past	CON	connector	IMP	imperative
COMP	complimentizer	COND	conditional		
Q	question particle				

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