

FEATURES OF VOWEL REDUCTION AND VOWEL SHORTENING IN THE LANGUAGE OF JAPANESE MASS CULTURE

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Summary

The paper, based on the material of the texts of the language of mass culture of Japan, demonstrates that the language of mass culture is characterized by non-standard phonetic phenomena and phonetic innovations that violate the orthoepic norms of the literary language. Non-standard phonetic phenomena spread, in particular, to the system of vowel sounds, which in the language of mass culture undergo non-standard reduction and prosodic shortening, due to which the language of mass culture approaches colloquial patterns and becomes more emotional. In contrast to the standard Japanese language, where only the vowels /i/ and /u/ are usually reduced, the language of mass culture reduces all vowel sounds of the system, both single sounds and the combinations of vowels, often with a subsequent transition to another vowel. At the same time, such reduction is inherent even to vowel sounds that are part of root morphemes, which violates the norms of the literary language, and is also chaotic in its nature. The non-standard emphatic vowel reduction is often accompanied by the similar phenomenon of prosodic vowel shortening. The criteria for distinguishing the two phenomena are that reduction affects single short vowels or combinations of two short vowels, whereas prosodic shortening affects only one long vowel, and that reduction and prosodic shortening bring slightly different connotations to the word – familiarity for reduction and giving the word a fragmentary character for prosodic shortening.

Key words: Japanese language, phonetics, non-standard phonetic phenomena, phonetic innovations, colloquialism, connotation, emphatic articulation, phonoexpressive word.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/6808>

1. Introduction

It is known that the phonetic system of a language is the most conservative and is very slowly subject to change, that is why any phonetic innovations arouse great interest. Non-standard phonetic phenomena are observed in the language that serves mass culture, thus it is possible to put forward a hypothesis about the existence of a special language of mass culture, which exists alongside the language substandards known to linguistics, but has not yet been described scientifically. Accordingly, the relevance of the topic of the paper is due to its focus on studying the newest, hitherto undescribed phenomenon of the language of mass culture, which allows to outline the latest trends in language changes caused by the transformation of the global cultural paradigm, and to comprehend the formation of the newest language substandards that are imposed on recipients through the mediation of the media, influencing their speech culture. In our opinion, the analysis of each linguistic level of the newest linguistic phenomenon of the language of mass culture allows to trace the trends of language change and predict possible future transformations in the language standard on the material of various languages of the world, in particular Japanese. Thus, according to our observations, at the phonetic level, a vivid

feature of the language of mass culture of Japan is that it strives to reproduce non-standard phonetic phenomena, in its written form as well, for which the potential of the Japanese writing system is used. Of course, it is obvious that the phonetics of the language of mass culture in Japan is still based on standard Japanese phonetics (just like the lexical and grammatical systems do), however, due to including a whole series of deviations from the literary norm it seems to produce its own special substandard. In other words, despite the fact that the language of mass culture uses the same set of phonemes as the literary language, it demonstrates differences from the latter in the orthoepic aspect, since, according to our observations, it allows deviations from orthoepic norms. And such deviations are mostly caused by the desire of the language of mass culture to stand out, to draw attention to the mass-cultural product that it serves, the ultimate goal of which is to impose this product on the consumer, increasing demand for it and receiving a profit in return. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze deviations from orthoepic norms in the language of Japanese mass culture; respectively, the tasks are: 1) to consider cases of non-standard vowel reduction in the language of Japanese mass culture; 2) to identify the patterns of such non-standard reduction; 3) to analyze cases of prosodic vowel shortening in the language of Japanese mass culture; 4) to formulate criteria for distinguishing between both phonetic phenomena; 5) to describe the functions of both phonetic phenomena in the language of Japanese mass culture. To fulfill the tasks set, qualitative research methods will be relevant, in particular, the synchronous linguistic descriptive method involving the techniques of observation, generalization, external and internal interpretation, which helps to inventory and systematize linguistic units. The method of contextual-semantic analysis, functional and pragmatic methods will help to establish the functions of non-standard phonetic phenomena and the semantic content of specific linguistic phonoexpressive units, formed by non-standard reduction and shortening of vowels, in the language of Japanese mass culture.

2. Non-standard vowel reduction in the language of Japanese mass culture

It is known that vowel reduction in Japanese (母音の無声化) is a weakening of the articulation of unstressed vowels in the speech stream, which leads to a change in their sound, while mainly the vowels /i/ and /u/ are reduced in certain positions in the word, as a result turning into voiceless (*Dementieva, 2024: 15, 64*). According to the rules of Japanese orthoepy, the following cases of vowel reduction are allowed: 1) the reduction of vowels “i” and “u” occurs if they are located between the voiceless consonants “k”, “s”, “sh”, “t”, “ts”, “ch”, “f” and “p”: kusa (草 – grass), kiku (菊 – chrysanthemum); 2) sometimes the vowels “i” and “u” after voiceless consonants at the end of a word are reduced if the corresponding syllable is unstressed: arimasu (あります – to be present), gozaimasu (ございます – to be present /official-polite version/), motsu (持つ – to carry, to possess), hashi (箸 – chopsticks); 3) in addition to the already mentioned vowels “i” and “u”, which are often reduced, other vowels (“a”, “e”, “o”) can also be reduced as an exception: kakashi (案山子 – scarecrow), tokoroten (心太 – agar-agar jelly), kakato (踵 – heel) (*Komarnytska & Komisarov, 2012: 60–61*). Thus, in standard Japanese, reduction is mostly inherent only in the vowels /i/ and /u/ in an unstressed position at the end of a word after a voiceless consonant or in the middle of a word between two voiceless consonants (*Dementieva, 2024: 64*); at the same time, reduction in the middle of a word is often associated with a fast pace of speech, and therefore one can generally consider it as syncope (*Kawahara, 2016: 6*). However, in the language of mass culture deviations from these orthoepic norms are observed, since reductions in it can be inherent in all vowels of the phonetic system, and even their combinations. Here are some examples:

スゲー頭いいの なんかフツーにかわいい へ なによ-つ (manga) – in the fragment the reduction of the normative すごい to スゲー (written in katakana for greater expression) is observed, that is, the vowel sounds /o/ and /i/ at the end of the word were reduced to an elongated /e/, due to which the word acquired an additional connotation with an increase in the emotional-expressive component of the meaning, as well as the introduction of a colloquial element, since such a pronunciation of the word is perceived as more careless; in addition, the reduction of /i/ in the word なんか (from the normative なにか) is observed, which also gives the word a more colloquial connotation, and the emphatic lengthening of the vowels (へ, よ-);

すげーいい・・・！！ (manga) – a similar example;

すげー！おおおお！いいの！ (a TV show) – in this excerpt the reduction of the final vowels /o/ and /i/ in the same word すごい with their subsequent transition to /e/ is observed (however, in this case not to a long one, but to a regular short one); thus one can conclude about the chaotic nature of the phenomenon of reduction in the language of mass culture;

カニじゃねえってんだよ (manga) – in the fragment there is a reduction based on a similar model: the vowels /a/ and /i/ at the end of the word were reduced to an elongated /e/, due to which the word became more expressive and colloquial;

言えてねえよ！！ (manga) – reduction of the vowels /a/ and /i/ at the end of the word (in the literary language it would look like 言えてない) with their subsequent transition to an elongated /e/, which generally gives the word a careless and colloquial sound design (which in writing is reflected in non-standard spelling with the non-normative inclusion of the katakana sign);

若干 背は足らんけど (manga) – reduction of the final vowel /i/ (the normative form is 足らない), which also cannot be considered as standard, since according to the rules of orthoepy such reduction is allowed after a voiceless consonant, and in the example given the sound /i/ is preceded by a vowel;

うるせえ！！ (anime) – reduction of the final vowels /a/ and /i/ (the literary form is うるさい) with their transition to an elongated /e/, which adds an emotionally expressive connotation to the word and makes it rougher and sharper;

うっせーな (manga) – the same original word as in the previous example (うるさい) underwent even greater phonetic transformations, as a result of which it became as rude as possible: reduction of the mora /ru/ with emphatic doubling of the following consonant /s/, as well as reduction of the final vowels /a/ and /i/ with subsequent transition to an emphatic lengthened /e/ are observed;

バカなおしゃべりはやめとく。 (anime) – reduction of the vowel /e/ in the middle form of the verb (the normative equivalent is やめておく), which brings its pronunciation closer to informal colloquial one;

事前にトイレ行つとくんだよ！ (printed advertisement) – a similar example of reduction of the vowel /e/ in the middle form of the verb (the literary equivalent is 行っておくん);

なーんちゃってー つつそだよ～～はあ？！冗談に決まってんじゃん！ケーキありがと (manga) – reduction of the vowel /i/ and the entire syllable /ru/ in the auxiliary verb いる with a transition to a nasal /n/, as well as the final vowels /a/ and /i/, which gives the entire verb construction a careless colloquial sound (literary equivalent is 決まっているじゃない);

こんなつまんねーことでへこまねえよ (manga) – reduction of the final vowels /a/ and /i/ in the inflected adjective つまらない with their subsequent transition to a long final /e/; following a similar model, the normative negative form of the verb へこまない underwent reduction of the final /a/ and /i/ to へこまねえ;

知らねーーっつの！！ (manga) – similarly, the final vowels /a/ and /i/ in the negative form of the verb 知らない were reduced with a transition to a long /e/ (in this example, a

non-normative lengthening of the sound /e/ up to four morae with a sharp interruption after that is also observed, which is reflected in the writing by two consecutive characters つつ, the use of which in a row does not comply with the spelling norms of the Japanese language);

3年怖 (こえ) えええ (manga) – reduction of the final vowels /a/ and /i/ in the inflected adjective 怖い with a non-normative lengthening according to a similar model. In this case, the reduction is particularly interesting, as it goes beyond the suffix spreading to the root of the word, expressed by the hieroglyph (as is known, the reading of hieroglyphs in the normative Japanese language is unchanging, and their sound formation cannot be subjected to reduction, metathesis, or other non-standard processes);

おっさんよー おらぁ大嫌 (でーっきれー) なんだ てめーら見てーなサラリーマンやろうがよ！！ (manga) – is a similar example of non-normative reduction in the root of a word, which in the literary language has the reading だいきらい, however, the vowels /a/ and /i/ in both parts of the word were reduced with a subsequent transition to a long /e/; in addition, the consonant /k/, from which the third mora begins, underwent emphatic doubling. As a result of all these phonetic transformations, the word acquired a completely different sound form, and in semantic terms, an extremely rude coloring (despite the fact that the word 大嫌い itself, given its meaning, is connotatively colored) – L. Tanaka interprets such phonetic changes as a tool due to which a standard word actually turns into a taboo and invective word (Tanaka, 2016: 230);

ーオラ受験で忙しいだ帰 (けえ) れ！！ (manga) – a similar example of non-normative phonetic changes in the root of a word;

わかっててやるなよ！！ (manga) – reduction of the initial vowel /i/ in the auxiliary verb いる, which creates the grammatical form of the continuous form from the middle form of the main verb;

あなたからのご応募お待ちしてます！ (printed advertisement) – a similar example of reduction of the vowel /i/ in the auxiliary verb;

Woah Woah

それが愛？

はき違えてる (a popular song) – a similar example of reduction of the vowel /i/ in the auxiliary verb;

お子さんが学校へ行ってる間だけ働きたい方 (printed advertisement) – in the fragment the vowel /i/ in the same auxiliary verb is also reduced;

くさってる (anime) – a similar example;

このうちを管理されてるとなりのおばあちゃんだよ (anime) – a similar example;

おかあさん、わらってるよ (anime) – a similar example;

やっぱ無理かぁ (manga) – reduction of the final mora /ri/ in the word やっぱり, which is accompanied by a non-normative lengthening of the final vowel /a/ in the interrogative word か;

こないださ いい場所見つけたんだ (manga) – reduction of the medial /o/ in the word このあいだ, as a result of which the mora /no/ is deleted, and its initial consonant is joined to the following mora, which gives the word an informal and colloquial connotation;

笑っとるー！！ (manga) – reduction of the vowel /e/ in the middle form of the verb (the normative one being 笑っておる), accompanied by a non-normative lengthening of the final /u/.

Such reduction minimizes articulatory efforts and at the same time maximizes the peculiarity of the word, which makes it brighter and more interesting from the point of view of perception, and, therefore, as a phonetic factor, it can even be included in synchronic phonology

(Boersma, 1998; Flemming 1995; Stampe 1973). Furthermore, it is clearly a chaotic phenomenon that occurs without a specific trigger, that is, it is not obvious, or not surface-apparent (McCarthy, 1999), and therefore it is practically impossible to single out any rules and models according to which it occurs (Kawahara, 2016: 7, 15).

The only possible regularities in the reduction of vowel sounds in the language of mass culture in Japan, which can be deduced from the examples given, are as follows:

- the reduction can involve all vowels of the phonetic system, and not only those that are allowed by the literary standard;

- optional syncope in words with nasal /n/ is typical, which brings the sound form of the word closer to the colloquial one, as a result of which the so-called “nasal-stop cluster” is formed: /anata/ → /anta/, /nani+ka/ → /naNka/, /nani+to/ → /nanto/, /anosa:/ → /ansa:/, /ani+san/ → /ansan/, /ani+tjan/ → /aŋtjan/ (Kawahara, 2016: 6). For example: あんた、カマジイにお礼言っただの？世話になったんだろ？ (anime) (in the example prosodic vowel shortening is also observed, which will be considered below);

- the reduction is closely related to the morphological level, since typical is, for example, the reduction of the initial /i/ in the auxiliary verb-conjunction いる, which, joining the middle form of the main verb, forms an analytical form of the continuous form; or the final /e/ in the middle form of the verb, as a result of which the middle form merges with the auxiliary verb-conjunction おく or おる, which add the necessary final grammatical meaning to this form, actually forming a non-normative synthetic form of the verb instead of an agglutinative-analytical one. In addition, the reduction of final /a/ and /i/ with their possible transition to /e/ in the negative form of the verb and inflected adjectives is also associated with the violation of morphological norms, which is often accompanied by a non-normative lengthening of the final vowel /e/ in two to four morae; at the same time, such a reduction can even cover the root of the word, which is unacceptable in the normative Japanese language. All reduced forms are intended to reproduce careless colloquial speech, which turns out to be quite typical of the language of mass culture. Indeed, as T. Dementieva rightly notes, reflecting on the reasons for the reduction of the combination of final sounds /e/ and /i/ to an elongated /e/, “the variant エイ is more often heard in careful pronunciation, while エー is used in ordinary rapid speech,” and the reasons for using the form センセー (instead of the normative センセイ) among the Japanese are that it is “easy to pronounce” and it sounds more “conversational” (Dementieva, 2024: 153). A similar idea is found in Shigeto Kawahara’s work, who points out that the final vowel of the root and the suffixal vowel /i/ can merge with the preceding vowel into one long vowel in informal speech: /suppai/ → /supee/, /sugoi/ → /sugee/ (Kawahara, 2016: 15). Moreover, the reduction of vowels at the end of a word can also give it a pejorative connotation, which can often be observed in the language of manga. For example, if a slightly rude familiar pronoun 手前 *you* is pronounced with the reduction as てめー, it will become very rude (similarly お前 –

おめー); the word 最低 *the lowest* (in colloquial speech also *the worst*) in its reduced version will look like さいてー and have a pejorative-colloquial connotation (Komarnytska, 2021: 591). All of the above cases of reduction in the language of mass culture are reflected in writing (when it comes to written genres of mass culture) using non-normative spelling. It is also possible that due to the orthographic fixation of such reduced forms inherent in informal colloquial speech in the written genres of mass culture, a convergent process of the maximum rapprochement of oral and written language in the entire historical development of the Japanese language can be observed.

3. The phenomenon of prosodic vowel shortening in the language of Japanese mass culture

Another unusual phenomenon closely related to vowel reduction is the prosodic shortening of vowels, which is emphatic in its nature. This phenomenon usually involves a final long vowel (although it also occurs with a long vowel in the middle of a word), which makes it extremely close to reduction. For example, O. Stuzhenko, analyzing such phonetic processes in Japanese informal speech, writes: “The assimilation and reduction of long vowels typical of Japanese colloquial speech is caused by the desire to save speech effort; since all syllables in the Japanese language are open, and such assimilation and reduction facilitate the pronunciation of words, for example: *こんちは、こんちゃ、そんなら、ども、なんか、こないだ、いろんな、めんどくさい、ほんと*” (Stuzhenko, 2008: 46), that is, she suggests using the terms “assimilation” and “reduction” without their semantic distinction, and includes cases of prosodic reduction in the examples given. However, we still reckon that there is a difference between reduction and prosodic shortening of vowels, since it is possible to distinguish different principles according to which vowels undergo each process, as well as different stylistic nuances that each of them brings to the word. Our belief in the need to distinguish between the two phenomena is also shared by the researcher of modern Japanese phonetics T. Dementieva, who, highlighting separately the prosodic shortening of vowels, notes that “prosodic reduction occurs mainly with long vowels in morae that follow other long vowels or ん; mainly at the end of the word and very rarely at the beginning”, while “this phenomenon occurs mainly in gairaigo words and to a lesser extent in kango – as linguists claim, approximately one third of all long vowels undergo prosodic reduction: *ほんとう → ほんと、コンピューター → コンピュータ、だいじょうぶ → だいじょぶ、せんせい → せんせ、あかんぼう → あかんぼ* (Dementieva, 2024: 153).

Here are some examples of such emphatic prosodic shortening of vowels in the language of mass culture:

.....そんな簡単に放り出していいもんじゃないだろ..... (anime) – prosodic shortening of the long final /o/ to a short one in the conjunction (the normative equivalent being *だろう*), which makes the whole phrase more abrupt, sharp, as well as the reduction of the final /o/ in the formal noun *もの*;

どうせアレだろ 氷の女王の命令だろ (manga) – a similar example of prosodic shortening of the final long /o/ in the conjunction *だろう*, as a result of which the phrase acquires greater energy and abruptness;

失恋だったら連れて来ないでしょ (manga) – shortening of the long /o/ in the conjunction *でしょう*, which also brings a connotation of greater sharpness, energy, and determination;

次 音楽室だよ 行こ (manga) – *次 音楽室だえ 行こ* (from manga) – a prosodic shortening of the long /o/ in the exclamatory form of a verb-predicate, which gives greater determination, sharpness, and persistence to the call to action expressed by this verb;

おはよ (из манти) – prosodic shortening of the final long /o/ in a greeting etiquette cliché, which brings a connotation of sharpness, cheerfulness, and informality;

ほんと、よくがんばったね (printed advertisement) – prosodic shortening of the long /o/ at the end of a word, which adds more energy and sharpness to the advertising text;

ほんとに細かいところなんですけど、それをずっとやるのが僕は楽しかったです. (a fashion magazine) – a similar shortening in the noun *ほんとう*.

In general, it can be seen that a typical case of prosodic vowel shortening in the language of Japanese mass culture is the shortening of a long final /o/ to a single-syllable one, however, there aren't any patterns regarding which category of words can undergo such a metamorphosis: for example, in the examples given, both full-meaning and auxiliary words, both inflected and non-inflected words undergo shortening, therefore, the morphological characteristics of the word obviously do not play any role here, and the only criterion for a word to undergo prosodic shortening is the presence of a long /o/ sound at the end. As for the additional connotations that a word acquires as a result of prosodic shortening, as follows from the context of the analyzed examples, such words are mostly included in mass cultural messages when their authors try to make their messages more decisive, fragmentary, and energetic (this is especially evident, in particular, in the language of advertising, where prosodically shortened words are part of advertising slogans, which are the central component of the advertising text, aiming to encourage, convince, and give determination; as well as in the language of manga and anime, where characters use prosodic shortening in situations when they strive to be convincing, decisive, and businesslike).

Thus, the criteria for distinguishing between emphatic reduction and prosodic shortening of vowels, which are observed in the phonetics of the language of mass culture, in our opinion, are the following:

- 1) the reduction mostly involves a combination of two short vowels, whereas the prosodic shortening involves only one long vowel;
- 2) the reduction can also involve one short vowel, as a result of which it drops out completely, whereas the prosodic shortening is inherent only to a long vowel, which turns into a short one as a result;
- 3) the reduction and prosodic shortening bring somewhat different connotations to the word: with reduction, the word acquires a carelessly colloquial, informal, and sometimes pejorative meaning, and with the prosodic reduction it becomes choppy, energetic, sometimes businesslike.

At the same time, however, both reduction and prosodic shortening of vowels in the language of mass culture aim to bring it closer to colloquial speech, since both of these phenomena are inherent primarily to it. As the researchers note in this regard, "in the colloquial style of speech, some lengthenings may be omitted" (*Dementieva, 2024: 73*), "often in everyday informal communication, a long vowel in words is spontaneously shortened" (*Dementieva, 2024: 153*), and words with reduction or prosodic shortening are "colloquial phonovariants of neutral vocabulary" (*Stuzhenko, 2008: 46*).

4. Conclusions

The analysis of Japanese-language mass cultural material has shown that the language of mass culture in Japan is characterized by phonetic innovations, which are manifested, in particular, in non-standard reduction of vowels and their prosodic shortening, as a result of which the expressiveness and emotionality of the verbal message are increased. If in standard Japanese the vowels /i/ and /u/ are usually reduced, then in the language of mass culture all vowels of the system can be reduced, and it is often accompanied by the transition of the combination of reduced vowels to another vowel sound. In addition to the non-normative expansion of the list of vowels that can be reduced, the language of mass culture in Japan is characterized by a violation of the norms in that not only vowels in affixes, but also vowels that are part of root morphemes can be reduced. As the examples show, non-standard reduction of vowels in

the language of mass culture in Japan is a chaotic phenomenon. Another non-standard phonetic phenomenon – prosodic vowel shortening – also belongs to emphatic articulation and is designed to reproduce colloquial phonetic patterns, and differs from reduction in the number and nature of shortened vowels, as well as in the introduction of slightly different connotations to the formed phonoexpressive units.

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