

**Casting a new ‘eye’ on an elusive suffix:
The use and origin of Japanese dialectal suffix ‘-me’**

[Keywords] Japanese, Dialectology, Lexicology, Animacy, Grammaticalisation

Although they are separated by hundreds of kilometres, several Japanese dialects exhibit a peculiar suffix *-me*. There, this suffix was very productive until recent times, and is now in demise due to the pervasion of standard Japanese (MORISHITA: 1979b, 1984).

Traditionally, it was reported in three separated areas, namely:

1. the south of the Izu islands (Hachijō, Kojima and Aogashima)
2. some part of Chūbu (parts of Fukui, Ishikawa and Gifu prefectures)
3. some parts of Kantō and Tōhoku (parts of Fukushima, Tochigi and Ibaraki prefectures).

This alone could indicate that it was once widespread in a large part of Japan (YAMADA: 1984).

Standard Japanese also exhibit various *-me* suffixes, and at least three are considered somewhat productive (KAWAGUCHI: 1998), namely:

1. an ordinal marking *-me* -目, as in 一番目 *ichiban-me* ‘first’
2. a nominalising suffix *-me* -め, as in 多め *ō-me* ‘a lot’
3. a dated suffix *-me* -め / -奴 expressing contempt or humbleness, which was very productive in middle Japanese, as in 奴め *yatsu-me* ‘guy’ (pej.), 私め *watakushi-me* ‘my humble self’

However, the *-me* that we are considering in those dialects seems completely different from all of the above, as it behaves as follows:

1. it attaches solely on **nouns** that denote an **animate**, especially all kinds of animals:
inu-me ‘dog’, *hebi-me* ‘snake’, *hē-me* ‘fly’, *hato-me* ‘dove’, *fugu-me* ‘puffer fish’
2. it is extremely productive, and can attach to words from all *strata* of Japanese lexicon alike:
kemushi-me ‘caterpillar’ (native), *kingyo-me* ‘goldfish’ (SJ), *hōhō-me* ‘owl’ (onomat.) (Ibaraki)
3. it can also attach to a few human substantives, especially from the family lexicon:
odo-me ‘baby’, *gagi-me* ‘child’ (Ibaraki); *yakko-me* ‘first son’, *taggo-me* ‘twin’ (Hachijō)
4. in Hachijō, it can attach to some human nicknames as well:
Tarō (first son) → *Tarō-me*, *Tego* (3rd daughter) → *Tego-me*
5. on rare occurrences, it can even attach to nouns denoting supernatural animates:
tenji ‘ghost’ → *tenji-me* (Hachijō), *oni* ‘demon’ → *oni-me* (Hachijō & Ibaraki)

However, while this suffix is quite easy to observe, its semantics is still problematic. Indeed, while it is often said to have an endearment or diminutive connotation (MORISHITA: 1984; ITOYO: 1984, IANNUCCI: 2019), which would explain its use with kinship terms and nicknames, other authors claim it rather has a negative connotation (NAITŌ, 1979), which could explain that it is used for a lot of insects, for a few human derogative terms and even for ghosts and demons.

Moreover, while the synchrony of this *-me* has been quite discussed already, its diachrony remains rather mysterious, as it could come from various sources, namely:

1. 目 *me* ‘eye’, which grammaticalised in various ways in Japanese (KAWAGUCHI, 1998)
2. the derogative suffix *-me*, which has an uncertain etymology (MARTIN, 2004)
3. an archaic element *-me* found in some animal names, and said to come from a collective suffix **-mure* ‘flock’, cognate with the Ryukyuan suffixes *-buri* / *-mmi* (SHIMOJI: 2022).
4. a convergence of several (or all) of the above

Thus, this presentation will try to determine what were the source(s) and frame of the grammaticalisation of the suffix *-me*. In order to do so, we will first give a synchronic and comparative description of its use within the various dialects (especially Hachijō and Ibaraki). Then, through comparison of this phenomenon with Ryūkyū, Middle Japanese and Old Japanese, we will try to understand how and when this grammaticalisation took place.

Prospective References

- AKAGI Takehiko. 1991. *Ibaraki hōgen minzoku-go jiten*, Tōkyō: Tōkyō-dō shuppan.
- ASANUMA Ryōji. 1999. *Hachijō-jima no hōgen jiten*. Tōkyō: Asahi Shimbun publishing service.
- HAYANO Shingo. 1991. *Tochigi Ibaraki ryō-hōgen no setsubi-go: 'me', 'ko' / 'bo / bō' ni tsuite, Nagoya hōgen kenkyūkai kaihō*, 8, 1991, pp. 77-94.
- IANNUCCI, David. 2019. *The Hachijō Language of Japan: Phonology and Historical Development*, PhD dissertation, Mānoa: University of Hawai'i.
- ITOYO Kiichi et al. 1984 [1998], *Kōza hōgen-gaku, Kantō chihō no hōgen*, Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai.
- KAWAGUCHI Junji. 1998. 'Me' no bunpōka wo megutte, *Keiō gijuku daigaku geibun gakkai*, 74, pp. 253-268.
- MARTIN, Samuel. 2004. *A Reference Grammar of Japanese*, Honolulu: University Of Hawai'i Press.
- MORISHITA Kiichi:
 - 1979a. *Dōbutsu-mei ni tsuku setsubigo 'me' ni tsuite, Tanabe-hakase koki kinen kokugo joshi jodōshi ronsō*, Tōkyō: Ōfū-sha.
 - 1979b. *Hachijō-jima ni okeru setsubigo 'me' no kinō ni tsuite – toku ni kaku nenrei-sō o tōshite, Iwate ika daigaku kyōyō-bu kenkyū nenpō*, 14, pp. 134-144.
 - 1981. *Shin'ai hyōgen no setsubigo ni tsuite – 'me' o chūshin ni, Iwate ika daigaku kyōyō-bu kenkyū nenpō*, 16, pp. 172-180.
 - 1984. *Shin'ai o arawasu setsubigo 'me' no genshō suru katei ni tsuite – Fukui-shi oyobi sono shūhen chiiki o chūshin ni shite, Iwate ika daigaku kyōyō-bu kenkyū nenpō*, 19, pp. 180-188.
- NAITŌ Shigeru. 1979 [2002], *Hachijō-jima hōgen*, Tōkyō: Fuchū-shi.
- SHIMOJI Michinori. 2022, 'Number in the Japonic Family', in ACQUAVIVA, Paolo and DANIEL, Michael. *Number in the World's Languages – A Comparative Handbook*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- YAMADA Tatsuya. 1984. *Dōbutsu-mei ni tsuku 'me' ni tsuite – Gifu ken Ibi-gun no baai, Nagoya hōgen kenkyūkai kaihō*, 1, pp. 1-6.