Real-time Demonstration of the Change from Above/Below Based on the Corpus Data:
Cases of Sa-Insertion, Ra-Deletion, and Re-Insertion in Japanese

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This research investigates three ongoing language changes in Japanese: sa-Insertion, ra-Deletion, and re-Insertion, in light of the “change from above/below” (Labov 1990). Sa-Insertion involves a process, which adds an extra -as- to the causative morpheme, yielding a double causative construction (1). Ra-Deletion involves a process which deletes -ra- in the potential morpheme (2). Re-Insertion involves a similar process to sa-Insertion where an extra –re is added to the potential morpheme, yielding a double potential construction (3).

Although previous studies have elucidated the properties of these phenomena especially with respect to language-internal factors and language-external factors (Matsuda 1993; Sano 2008, among others), the status of each language change concerning the change from above/below remains to be explored. The aim of this research, therefore, is to characterize the phenomena quantitatively using the large-scale corpus and to identify the status of each phenomenon (above/below) in real-time study, specifically focusing on the roles of gender and style.

The corpus employed is the Corpus of Spontaneous Japanese (Maekawa 2004, henceforth CSJ), which has rich annotations concerning language-external factors such as speaker attributes and speech style. An exhaustive examination of CSJ brought forth a total of 13,375 innovative- and traditional forms (Table 1). The data are subject to the analysis concerning speech type, gender, speech style, and education.

The results show that the properties of each phenomenon are compatible with the claim that the innovative form is more compatible with 1) the casual style in the change from below; 2) the formal style in the change from above (Labov 1990); the properties of sa-Insertion follow the Principle Ia, and those of ra-Deletion and re-Insertion follow the Principle II (Labov 1990). Thus, I conclude that sa-Insertion is an instance of the change from above, ra-Deletion of the change from below, and re-Insertion of the change from below.

Examples
(1) a. standard causative yar-ase-ru
   b. sa-Insertion yar-as-ase-ru ‘let someone do’
(2) a. standard potential mi-rare-ru
   b. ra-Deletion mi-re-ru ‘can see’
(3) a. traditional counterpart ik-e-ru
   b. re-Insertion ik-e-re-ru ‘can go’

Selected References:
Labov, William. 1990. The intersection of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change. Language variation and change 2: 205-254.