Rhyme and the Reinterpretation
of Hip Hop in Japan

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Introduction

Japan has an active and diverse Hip Hop scene with widespread popularity among the younger generation. This is reflected in recent figures cited by Manabe (2006, pp. 3–4) who notes that 15% of all singles classified as gold or above in the first half of 2005 were rap-oriented and that rap is an integral part of the Japanese music scene. The history of Hip Hop in Japan has been delineated in a series of articles by Condry (2000, 2001a, 2001b) and in his 2006 book, *Hip-Hop Japan*. Condry (2001a, p. 228) traces the beginnings of Hip Hop in Japan to the mid-1980s with the release of the film *Wild Style*, a low-budget film featuring the first generation of U.S. rappers, DJs, and breakdancers, and the subsequent release of the film *Breakdance* in 1985 which launched the first of several breakdance booms in Japan. A club called Hip Hop opened in 1986 in the Shibuya district of Tokyo, the district that is the center for fashion, entertainment, and youth culture in Japan. Condry notes that in the period from 1988 to 1992 there was a growing number of clubs sponsoring rappers, DJs, and breakdancers. Specialty magazines began covering the Hip Hop scene in detail from the mid- to late 1980s. The first produced million-selling rap hits in Japan appeared in 1994 and 1995 and the term *J-rap* was coined to represent this new genre (Condry, 2001a, p. 233). In the mid- to late 1990s, Condry divides the J-rap scene into two camps: party rap and underground Hip Hop. According to Condry (2000, p. 177), "Party rap tends to have light, funny lyrics that speak to themes from everyday life (e.g., video games, dating, teenage love songs).… In contrast, underground hip-hop tends to be more abstract, darker, and at times in opposition to mainstream Japanese society." The two camps had very different followings and were critical of one another. The current Hip Hop scene in Japan, since 2000, according to Condry (2006) is more diverse:

We find a broad spectrum including rock rap to hard core to gangsta, spoken word/poetry, to conscious, old school, techno rap, anti-government, pro-marijuana, heavy metal-sampled rap, and so on. Alongside the widening diversity with the hip-hop scene, we also see the disappearance of any orientation toward a center.… The era in which underground hip-hoppers debated with party rappers has given way to more personal conflicts between rappers. These conflicts gesture toward ideas of what hip-hop should be about. (p. 82)

Recent trends that Condry notes include the regionalization of Hip Hop within Japan and the incorporation of samurai imagery. What these trends suggest to some is that the global spread of Hip Hop reflects a "cultural homogenization" in the "borrowing" of a particular type of musical genre. However, through a structural poetic analysis of Japanese Hip Hop rhyming, we aim to demonstrate in this chapter the complicated linguistic aspects of cultural appropriation that occur when Japanese Hip Hop is given a local interpretation. Specifically, we illustrate how Japanese Hip Hop artists fuse local, historically Japanese poetic traditions with global, historically Western rhyming practices.

With this as background, this chapter focuses on the adaptation of the notion of rhyme in Japanese Hip Hop. Rhyme, rhythm, and word play are defining aspects of Hip Hop and as Alim (2003) demonstrates, U.S. Hip Hop artists such as Pharoahe Monch use complex and creative multiple rhyme strategies in their lyrics. Traditional Japanese poetry has no notion of rhyme. Yet, over the past two decades, since the arrival of rap music in Japan, a "borrowed" notion of rhyme has become incorporated in many of the lyrics of Japanese Hip Hop. This chapter offers an analysis of the adaptation of rhyme in the lyrics of one Japanese Hip Hop group, Dragon Ash. While much of the work on the language of Hip Hop culture focuses on the politics of language, this chapter focuses more specifically on the poetics of Japanese Hip Hop rhyming and thus contributes to a more technical, linguistic understanding of the language of Hip Hop. But, it also illustrates at a microlevel how a foreign notion of rhyme is given a "local" interpretation within the mechanism of the Japanese language. Before detailing the analysis, we first give background in Section 2 on traditional Japanese poetry. This entails discussion of the notion of mora, a key linguistic unit of both Japanese poetry and the Japanese language more generally. In Section 3 we discuss the rhyming domain found in Japanese Hip Hop. In Section 4, we will offer an analysis of the rhyming lyrics of Dragon Ash contending that it can be best described in terms of *moraic assonance*. In Section 5 we discuss various issues that arise from the analysis. Section 6 concludes the chapter and ties these specific linguistic findings to broader ideas about cultural globalization.

The Mora and Traditional Japanese Poetry

Traditional Japanese poetry, such as Haiku and Tanka, is largely conditioned by mora count. For example, Haiku consists of three lines with 5, 7, and 5 moras

in each line, while Tanka is formed by five lines with 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 moras. Traditional Haiku and Tanka poetry is sampled in (1–2), where mora breaks are indicated by hyphens.

(1) a. Hu-ru-i-ke-ya   b Sa-mi-da-re-o
       Ka-wa-zu-to-bi-ko-mu   A-tsu-me-te-ha-ya-shi
       Mi-zu-no-o-to   Mo-ga-mi-ga-wa

(2) A-ra-za-ra-mu
    Ko-no-yo-no-ho-ka-no
    O-mo-i-de-ni
    I-ma-hi-to-ta-bi-no
    A-u-ko-to-mo-ga-na

While superficially moras resemble syllables, as discussed by Kubozono (1999) and Tsujimura (2007) they are crucially different. A mora is instantiated by (i) a vowel with an immediately preceding consonant if there is one; (ii) a nasal consonant that is not accompanied by a following vowel; or (iii) the first part of a long consonant (i.e., a geminate consonant). Native Japanese speakers naturally divide words into moras rather than syllables. Consider the four Japanese words shown in (3) with their moraic division.

(3) a. ka-mi-ka-ze   b. Lo-n-do-n   c. ni-p-po-n   d. ha-i

The Japanese word *kamikaze* in (3a) is shown with its division into four moras. Here, mora seems to correspond to syllable, but the difference between mora and syllable is made clear by (3b) and (3c). Japanese speakers hear the place name *London* as consisting of four moras while English speakers hear it as comprising two syllables (i.e., Lon-don). Similarly, the Japanese word *nippon* is heard by Japanese speakers as comprising four moras though it consists of two syllables (i.e., nip-pon). The word *nippon* illustrates the three different instantiations of a mora. The first mora, *ni*, contains a vowel with an immediately preceding consonant; the second mora, *p*, is the first part of a geminate consonant; and the final mora, *n*, is a nasal consonant with no following vowel. The final example in (3d), the Japanese word for "yes," *hai*, is pronounced almost identically to the English word *high*. But while the English word is heard as one syllable, the Japanese word is perceived as comprising two moras. This reflects that vowel sequences or diphthongs do not comprise single moras. It also reflects that the prevocalic consonant (i.e., the consonant immediately before the vowel) is not an essential part of the mora.

Given this understanding of mora, what is essential in the examples of traditional Japanese poetry in (1) and (2) is the number of moras per line. Crucially, individual moras in the different lines are not required to be composed of identical or similar sounds. Thus, there does not seem to be anything like the notion of rhyme in Haiku, Tanka, and other types of traditional Japanese poetry (cf. Kawamoto, 2000).

Despite the lack of a poetic tradition in Japanese that incorporates rhyme, it is interesting to note that Japanese Hip Hop lyrics, as investigated by Kawahara (2002, 2005, 2007) and Manabe (2006) incorporate a notion of rhyme. While the rhyming pattern demonstrated in Japanese Hip Hop is somewhat different in nature from its English counterpart as will be discussed in the following sections, the resemblance to English rhyme is readily observed in the parts of two sample songs from Dragon Ash in (4) and (5) where the rhyming parts are underlined. (Note that all the lyrics from Dragon Ash cited in this article are taken from their 2001 album *Lily of da Valley*. We leave all verses untranslated.)

(4) machija nayameru <u>juudaiga</u>
     naihu nigiri aitewa <u>juutaida…</u>
     sonnauchini yumeou <u>monodooshi</u>
     tekundara zettee <u>morochooshi</u> ii

     temeeno ketsuwa temeede <u>motsubekida</u>
     soitsuga wakaru yatsuwa <u>totsugekida</u> (from *21st Century Riot*)

(5) owari aru jinnseidemo <u>yookosoo</u>
     tukamitorerusa <u>kyookoso.…</u>
     tinbaarando humishimeru <u>daichio</u>
     in da round moyasu a<u>kaichio</u>

     konomachide <u>tashikani saiteru</u>
     yuri <u>ashitani maiteru</u> (from *Yurino Hanasaku Bashode*)

Both Condry (2001a) and Manabe (2006) observe that rhymes like those illustrated in (4) and (5) are not characteristic of the early Japanese Hip Hop of the 1980s. As mentioned by these authors, Hip Hop of the early period either used word repetition or had very little or no rhyming. However, especially since the early 1990s, Japanese Hip Hop rhyming has evolved and has become more sophisticated over time. It has come to adopt a notion of rhyme even though there is no basis for it in traditional Japanese poetry. In the remainder of this chapter we will consider the nature of rhyming found in contemporary Japanese Hip Hop as exemplified in Dragon Ash's 2001 album *Lily of da Valley*. We will place the nature of Japanese Hip Hop rhymes in the context of Zwicky's (1976) discussion on imperfect rhymes in rock music and in Alim's (2003) analysis of rhymes in U.S. Hip Hop. We will contend that Japanese Hip Hop exemplifies a system of imperfect rhyme that is best described as *moraic assonance*. We will further examine cases where moraic assonance does not seem to hold, and suggest that moraic assonance most frequently occurs with moras whose core is a vowel. First, though, we will consider the domain of rhymes in Japanese.

The Rhyme Domain in Japanese Hip Hop Rhymes

When we think of the rhyme domain in English, we often think of the domain as being the word. Examples would include one syllable words like *line-sign*, two syllable words like *table-cable*, and three syllable words like *sinister-minister*. Technically, though, the rhyme domain in English is not an entire word but a subpart of the word that extends from the stressed vowel to the end of the word. This is the part of the rhyming words that need to be identical. In the rhyming word pairs cited above, and in examples like *promotion-lotion* and *audition-politician*, it is the stressed vowel and all the following sounds that are identical in the rhyming pairs. This is what constitutes a perfect rhyme in English poetry. Kawahara (2002) observes that in Japanese Hip Hop lyrics, a rhyme domain constitutes at least two moraic elements. He states this principle as the Minimality Principle in (6), and gives examples in (7) and (8) where the underlined moraic elements are pronounced identically.

(6) Minimality: Rhymes should consist of the agreement of at least two moraic elements. Moraic elements are vowels and consonants at the end of a syllable.

(7) soshite te ni ireyooze satsut<u>aba</u>
     mitero ore no sokojik<u>ara</u>

(8) kyoomo T-shatsu ni shibumeno g<u>ooru</u>d<u>o</u> ch<u>een</u>
     shanpan banban akete s<u>ooru</u> t<u>oreen</u>

The example in (7) illustrates that the minimal domain for a rhyme in Japanese Hip Hop is a two mora or bimoraic sequence. Specifically, in (7) the last two moras of the words satsutaba and sokojikara constitute the rhyming domain. Note that the consonants at the beginning of the last two moras of each of these words do not have to be identical for the words to rhyme. In (8) we see a more complicated rhyme where the domain comprises the final word pair of each line with seven moras in each word pair. We note that in the rhyming domain in (8) all vowels are identical as well as the word-final nasal consonant which would constitute a mora on its own. Again, crucially, the consonants immediately before the vowel in the rhyme domain do not need to be identical. Kawahara (2005) further observes that a rhyme domain has its own intonation (or pitch pattern) that is independent of what the pitch of the words would be if pronounced independently. Specifically, the first mora in the rhyming domain is articulated with a high pitch while the other moras are pronounced with a lower pitch. Thus, a rhyming domain is not only marked by the identical nature of the core moraic elements but also by a particular intonation pattern.

One other issue discussed by Kawahara (2002) concerning the domain of rhyme in Japanese Hip Hop stems from the observation that the rhyming domain may contain an "extra" moraic element at a line's end, as in the example from

Kawahara in (9). This can be termed *extrametricality* and we use angle brackets to indicate this.

(9)   a.   Ittuno doori no aarii m<u>oo</u>ni<n>
              yume kara samereba uso no y<u>oo</u>n<u>i</u>
        b.   hadani karamu nurui k<u>az</u><u>e</u>
              toroketeru karada wo hurui t<u>at</u><u>e</u><ru>

This phenomenon seems fairly common in Japanese Hip Hop rhymes and does occur in Dragon Ash.

Japanese Hip Hop Rhymes as Moraic Assonance

Assuming that the rhyme domain in Japanese Hip Hop is minimally bimoraic along with the notion of extrametricality we now turn to an examination of the nature of Japanese Hip Hop rhymes as found in the lyrics of the group Dragon Ash. From one perspective, Japanese Hip Hop rhymes can be considered an instantiation of what are called imperfect rhymes in the poetry literature. In his discussion of imperfect rhymes from a linguistic perspective, Zwicky (1976) gives a classification of imperfect rhymes in terms of how they deviate from perfect rhymes.

(10)   Zwicky's (1976) classification of imperfect rhymes in English
        a.   One or more of the matched vowels is unstressed:
              kiss—tenderness, scenery—tapestry
        b.   Vowels following the stressed one do not match
              face—places
        c.   Consonance-stressed vowels do not match but the consonants do
              off—enough, stop—up
        d.   Assonance-stressed vowels match but the following consonants
              do not
              wine—times, sleepin'—dreamin'

Technically speaking, none of these terms applies to the notion of rhyme that emerges from the Japanese Hip Hop lyrics because Japanese is not a stress-accent language, and, as mentioned, the rhyme domain has its own pitch pattern. In order to see the nature of Japanese imperfect rhyme in Hip Hop, consider the rhyming pairs from the Dragon Ash lyrics in (11) where mora division is indicated by a space between letters.

(11)   Hip Hop rhymes in Dragon Ash
        a.   mo tsu be ki da—to tsu ge ki da   (*21st Century Riot*)
        b.   ko o do o—bo o do o   (*21st Century Riot*)
        c.   wa i ro ni—ta i ho ni   (*21st Century Riot*)

    d. ju u da i ga—ju u ta i da   (*21st Century Riot*)
    e. se ma i to ko—de ka i ko to   (*Bring It*)
    f. shi n ji ta i—ka n ji ta i   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
    g. ba su ja k ku—ka su ja p pu   (*21st Century Riot*)

These Japanese imperfect rhymes seem to illustrate Assonance mentioned in (10d) but it should be applied in the context of mora. We shall call it a principle of "moraic assonance". In examining the rhyming data in (11), we see that the moraic elements are identical in each rhyming pair, where core moraic elements are understood to be a vowel, moraic nasal, or the first member of a geminate. The nonmoraic consonant, namely the consonant immediately before the vowel which we will refer to as the onset consonant, may or may not be identical. In (11b), for example, the first rhyming mora pair *ko* and *bo* have an identical vowel but differ in the quality of the onset consonants. This is most telling in (11e) where all core moraic elements in the rhyming pair, namely, the vowels in these cases, are completely identical, but all the onset consonants in the rhyming pair differ. The term moraic assonance thus seems most appropriate to capture the rhyming pattern of Japanese Hip Hop. Notice that in the examples in (11) the moraic elements in the rhyming pairs are identical whether the moraic element is a vowel, as in (11a-e), or a moraic nasal as in (11f). An exception to this seems to be the different geminate consonants in (11g) where a moraic core element [k] is paired off with another moraic core element [p], where each of [k] and [p] is the first consonant of a geminate. However, one can view this as not being exceptional under a traditional view of geminate consonants in Japanese linguistics as being represented by an abstract empty consonant called the Q-element in traditional Japanese phonology (cf. Vance 1987). Thus, we find the generalization that the Japanese Hip Hop songs are subject to moraic assonance which requires that moraic core elements in a rhyming pair be identical, where a moraic core element is either a vowel, moraic nasal, or the first member of a geminate.

A further observation that argues for the notion of moraic assonance in Japanese Hip Hop rhyme, at least as performed by Dragon Ash, is that the rhyming pairs virtually always have the same number of moras (ignoring the possibility of a final extrametrical mora). This is shown in the examples in (11) above as well as the further examples in (12).

(12)   Identical number of moras for each rhyming pair
    a. wa ga—wa da   (*Glory*)
    b. so ma ri—to ba ri   (*Glory*)
    c. ki ka n no ta i yo—ki ga n to a i o   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
    d. ta shi ka ni sa i te ru—a shi ta ni ma i te ru (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
    e. mo tsu be ki da—to tsu ge ki da (*21st Century Riot*)

The requirement that rhyming pairs have the same number of moras distinguishes Hip Hop rhyme (at least as manifested by Dragon Ash) from rhymes in English, where identical word length is not required for two words to rhyme. In English, words having different number of syllables can constitute rhymes as long as the stressed vowel and every sound after it is identical. Thus, pairs like *end-offend* and *tore-adore* are good rhymes even though the rhyming words do not have the same number of syllables. It is also clear from the data in Zwicky (1976) that even imperfect rhymes in English do not have to be of the same length. Examples include *kiss-tenderness* and *underfed-kid*. Thus, the notion of moraic assonance in Japanese Hip Hop seems to impose a requirement on the forms in a rhyming relation that they have the same mora length.

As much as this state of affairs in Japanese Hip Hop rhymes may seem unique, our findings together with Kawahara's (2002) observations discussed above are reminiscent of (though not identical to) what Zwicky (1976) calls "rock rhymes" in his investigations of rhyming in English rock music. Zwicky notes that there is a great deal of deviance from traditional classifications of rhyming patterns in rock lyrics, and describes such deviant behavior in terms of the principles that he calls "subsequence rhyme" and "feature rhyme." Crucially, characterizations of Japanese Hip Hop rhymes that we have discussed thus far can also be captured on the basis of these two principles. First, subsequence rhymes are defined in (13).

(13) **Subsequence rhyme**: X counts as rhyming with XC, where C is a consonant

(X may end with a consonant itself, as in pass-fast, or with a vowel, as in go-load). In a relatively infrequent variant on this principle, internal subsequence rhyme, X counts as rhyming with CX (as in proud-ground and plays-waves). (Zwicky, 1976, p. 677)

Given this definition, extrametricality as discussed previously and characterized in (9) can be viewed as an instance of subsequence rhyme: that is, subsequence rhymes generally add extra sounds after the rhyming part of one of the words, and this is precisely what extrametricality is intended to capture. The nature of added elements, however, perhaps should be interpreted somewhat differently in the case of Japanese so that any addition is based on mora, rather than on sounds. Some examples of extrametrical elements from Dragon Ash lyrics are given in (14).

(14) Extrametricality in Dragon Ash lyrics
 a. dooshita—dooshita<chi> (*Glory*)
 b. kanjitai—panchirai<n> (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)

Second, Japanese Hip Hop rhymes do not normally pay attention to the nonmoraic consonant at the onset of each mora. As shown by examples like

that in (11), the nonmoraic consonants in the rhyme do not have to be identical, though they can be. Nonetheless, as noted by Kawahara (2005, 2007) there seems to be a certain similarity between two nonmoraic consonants in a rhyme that are not identical. The role of similarity is well captured by Zwicky's second principle, feature rhymes, which is defined in (15).

(15) **Feature rhyme**: segments differing minimally in phonological features count as rhyming. The segments may be vowels (as in end-wind) or consonants (as in stop-rock); the feature in question can even be syllabicity (as in mine-tryin'). (Zwicky 1976, p. 677)

To illustrate this type of rhyme in actual songs, Zwicky (1976, p. 692) gives the examples in (16–19).

(16) My experience was limited and <u>underfed</u>,
      You were talking while I <u>hid</u>,
      To the one who was the father of your <u>kid</u>.   (*Dylan, Love is Just a Four Letter Word*)

(17) Well, the technical manual's <u>busy</u>
      She's not going to fix it up too <u>easy</u>   (*Joni Mitchell, Electricity*)

(18) Blackbird singing in the dead of <u>night</u>
      Take these broken wings and learn to <u>fly</u>
      All your <u>life</u>
      You were only waiting for this moment to <u>arise</u>
       (Dylan, It's Alright Ma (I'm only Bleeding))

 (19) Me and my gal, my gal, <u>son</u>,
      We got met with a tear gas <u>bomb</u>   (*Dylan, Oxford Town*)

In (16) and (17) the vowels that are involved in the rhyming pairs are not identical but can sometimes be perceived to be at least similar in that they only differ by one feature. The examples in (18) and (19) involve similarity of consonants rather than identity. Such "perceptual similarity" may lead to "identity" in actual performance as the musician may modify the pronunciation of the nonmatching sounds so that they are perceived as identical.

Kawahara's (2005, 2007) work on Japanese Hip Hop rhymes has largely focused on the issue of the similarity relation between the nonmoraic (onset) consonants of two units in a rhyming relation. As mentioned, Kawahara notes a strong tendency for perceptually similar consonants to be matched with one another. While the data from Dragon Ash lyrics show similar tendencies in the matching of nonmoraic consonants in rhyming pairs, we note, as Zwicky (1976) does, that there is a real issue as to what counts as perceptually similar given that results of sound similarity studies vary with task, experimental conditions, and subject population. On the other hand, one fairly common phenomena found in

Japanese Hip Hop lyrics is the observation that a nonmoraic (or onset) consonant corresponds with the absence of a consonant in many of rhyming pairs. Examples from Dragon Ash are given in (20).

(20)   Examples of rhyming pairs where nonmoraic consonants have a null cor-
       respondence (the relevant rhyming part is underlined)
       a.   i ta mi ga—hi ka ri ga   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
       b.   ji ka n to ta i o n—ki ka n no ta i yo o (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
       c.   da ke ma shi te—ka ke a shi de   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
       d.   yo o sha na ku—yo ko ja na ku   (*My friends' Anthem*)
       e.   de ka i o to—se ka i go to   (*Bring It*)

   This type of relation is not reported to be found in English imperfect rhymes, but is quite common in Japanese Hip Hop. While such forms may be problematic for a similarity account, they do provide additional evidence for the principle of moraic assonance in Japanese Hip Hop rhymes where the notion of mora plays a crucial role.

Some Linguistic Issues

While we have shown that bimoraic minimality, extrametricality, and moraic assonance constitute major characteristics of Japanese Hip Hop rhymes, we find possible counterexamples to these in our data. In our discussion earlier on extrametricality, it was observed that Hip Hop rhymes may contain an extra mora that is not matched with anything at the end of a word. Two examples from Dragon Ash were provided in (14) to illustrate it. According to Kawahara (2002), since extrametricality is restricted to the "periphery of the form", instances should not be found where a nonfinal mora is considered extrametrical, as Kawahara schematizes in (21). (C stands for a consonant and V for a vowel.)

(21)   CV <CV> CV
        | |
        CV   CV

   Precisely the type illustrated in (21) has been observed in our sample. This is shown in (22) and (23).

(22)   rensashite hiraku mi ra i   ga
                         | | | |
       sonosakiga   mi ta i <n> da   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
(23)   menomaeni   ka su ka   na
                     | | | |
       demo tashikana ka chi ka <n> ga   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)

In each of (22) and (23), the extrametricality surfaces in the penultimate mora. In fact, violations of extrametricality seem to always involve a moraic nasal. Thus, while the data in (22) and (23) are exceptional to extrametricality in that there is a nonperipheral mora that appears inside the rhyming domain, it seems to be a regular pattern that such nonperipheral extrametricality tends to involve a moraic nasal.

A second related problem concerns the principle of moraic assonance. Under moraic assonance, the expectation is that the core moraic elements of two rhyming units be identical. This is illustrated by the Dragon Ash data in (11), (12), and (20). Occasionally, however, there are examples where moraic assonance does not hold, as is shown by the examples in (24) and (25) from the lyrics of *Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*, where the moras at issue are capitalized.

(24) hidoku yaseta <u>koOyao</u>
       hosiga aseta <u>koNyamo</u>
(25) ikinukunowa <u>koNnande</u>
       daremoga mina <u>soOnande</u>

In each example, the capitalized moras, one being a vowel and the other a moraic nasal, are intended to rhyme, but they do not; and hence, assonance is not observed. Such examples, however, seem to be more common involving the pairing of a vowel and a moraic nasal. In fact, we find several examples of the same sort in our sample, as is illustrated in (26).

(26) a. ju <u>n</u> ba n ni—ju <u>u</u> ma n shi   (*Glory*)
       b. to <u>o</u> a ke ro—do <u>n</u> da ke no   (*Glory*)
       c. ku <u>u</u> ka n ni—ju <u>n</u> ba n ni   (Glory)
       d. ji ka n to ta i o <u>n</u>—ki ka n no ta i yo <u>o</u>   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
       e. ko <u>n</u> na n de—so <u>o</u> na n de   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)

This may suggest that while the principle of moraic assonance is stronger for moras whose core element is a vowel, its deviant pattern may also form a certain regularity.

These apparent counterexamples bring up the issue of modification of pronunciation in the actual performance of the lyrics. In our investigations of some of Dragon Ash songs we note that they modify their pronunciation of lyrics during performance in such a way that rhyming is achieved. A rather drastic example of this is given in (27).

(27) saa kakenukeyooze <u>dooshita</u>
       yuri no moto tudotta <u>dooshita</u>chi
       yo ima dakara koso <u>tooshi da</u>shi
       <u>don't stop</u> tomo ni mezasu eekooe e ikoo   (*Glory*)

In (27) the vowel sequences of the underlined rhyming domain in the first three lines are identical, with the second and third lines containing extrametricality, but the English phrase in the last line, "don't stop," is modified in pronunciation so that it rhymes with the first three lines: in fact, "don't stop" sounds exactly like "dooshita" in performance. Other examples of English words that involve altering pronunciation are given in (28) and (29).

(28) hai ni intoro bai ni <u>sindoo o</u>
      makiokosu Lilyda <u>sindoroo</u><mu>
(29) mune hukuramasite <u>kanjitai</u>
      kono omoio <u>panchi rai</u><n>

The last words of the second line in (28) and (29) are the English words syndrome and punch line, respectively. While the final mora of these words seems to be extrametrical in the rhyming scheme, upon listening to the actual songs, they are virtually inaudible. The phenomenon described in (27–29) is indeed reminiscent of Alim's (2003) illustration of deliberate change in pronunciation observed in Pharoahe Monch's lyrics. Alim (2003, p. 64) cites the instance from the album *Internal Affairs* where the sequence "vertebraes," "heard of me," "third degree," and "surgery" may not seem to rhyme but are modified in performance so that they do so more closely.

To be clear for Japanese, modification in pronunciation is not restricted to loan words, as the examples in (30) and (31) illustrate.

(30) suusennen himitsuno <u>beeru</u>
      tsutsumareta michinaru su<u>keeru</u>
      toodaikara naniga <u>mieru</u> doodai
      kyoodaieno <u>eeru</u>   (*Yurino Hana Saku Bashode*)
(31) sonna nakani yume ou <u>monodooshi</u>
      tekundara zettee <u>morochooshi ii</u>   (*21st Century Riot*)

The four underlined words in (30) are intended to be targets of rhyming. Notice that the third word mieru, the Japanese verb meaning "see," does not appear to rhyme with the rest of the words perfectly. In order to keep the rhyming pattern, however, the musician pronounces it as *mieeru*, lengthening the second mora of the verb. In (31) the last two moras, *ii*, in the second line, which is a Japanese word, is obviously an extra element while what precedes it perfectly rhymes with *monodooshi*. In this case, since these extra vowels are identical with the final vowel of the rhyming element in the second line, *morochooshi,* it is not detectable in performance, nor is it perhaps even relevant, whether the vowel gets strictly lengthened.

As a final issue, it is interesting to place Dragon Ash's use of moraic assonance in the context of Alim's (2003) discussion of the use assonance and complex rhymes in the Hip Hop lyrics of the U.S. artist Pharoahe Monch. Alim (2003, p.

73) notes Pharoahe Monch's use of assonance in examples like those in (32); the relevant vowels are given in bold.

(32) a. "N**e**v**e**r you d**e**vils, my l**e**v**e**l's that of a high **e**volutionary r**e**bel"
      b. "the d**e**sk of **a**ny r**e**dn**e**ck r**e**cord **e**x**e**c"

While assonance is used by Pharoahe Monch, it is only one of various possibilities that he uses along with alliteration and various different types of rhymes. We have contended that assonance, specifically moraic assonance, is the primary means that Dragon Ash uses to create rhymes in Japanese Hip Hop.

Alim (2003, p. 70) also shows how Pharoahe Monch incorporates internal rhymes in lyrics such as those in (33).

(33) a. "Every <u>line</u> to word of <u>mine</u>…"
      b. "<u>Unobtainable</u> to the <u>brain</u> it's <u>unexplainable</u> what the verse'll do"

While we have not discussed the use of internal rhymes by Dragon Ash, they do occur in their lyrics as in the couplet in (34) where the internal rhymes are indicated in bold.

(34) kake**dashite** imawa ke**gashite**
      age**dashite** kizudake **mashite**   (*Yurino Hanasaku Bashode*)

Relatedly, it is not uncommon to find in Dragon Ash instances where the first word of a line rhymes with the last word of the previous line. While one example of this was shown in (27) above, we give a fairly complicated example in (35), taken from *Glory*, where all the rhyming domains are in bold.

(35) a. munenonaka nanika kizuitara kanjiru **taka**
          narini makase kanaderu u**taga**
          nakamatachito wakachiau **waga**
          hokorashiki yurino nano **wada**
          mada mikaitakuno kuu**kanni**
          junbanni konoshirabe juu**manshi**
      b. konomachija neonde **somari**
          owarinaki yono **tobari**
          towani tuzukuyoodemo **ichigo**
          ichienanda jinnseiwa moo**ichido**

We note that the first word of the fifth line in (35a) and the first word of the third line in (35b) each rhyme with the last word of their preceding lines. This type of rhyming pattern is fairly common in Dragon Ash and we suspect that it is not uncommon with other Hip Hop artists. What is interesting about the two rhyming schemes in (35) is that they exhibit examples of what Alim (2003)

terms *bridge rhyming*. This is a complex technique where a rhyming sequence ends in the first part of a line and a new rhyming sequence begins at the end of that line. Thus, in (35a), the word *mada* at the beginning of the fifth line ends a rhyming sequence and a new sequence starts at the end of that line. Similarly in (35b), *towani* at the beginning of the third line serves as a bridge marking the end of one rhyming sequence, and a new sequence starts at the end of that line. Thus, examples like (34) and (35) testify to the complexity of rhyming schemes that are utilized by Japanese rappers.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have proposed that Japanese Hip Hop musicians use the principle of moraic assonance in their rhyming scheme. This principle can be seen as combining the traditional notion of mora count in Japanese poetry with the notion of assonance (vowel identity) in Western poetry. Thus, rhyming units in Japanese Hip Hop lyrics ideally should have an identical number of moras and the corresponding moraic elements should agree in quality. We have noted slight deviations from this scheme, but they are often compensated for by modified pronunciation in performance. We have also noted the use of internal rhymes and bridge rhyming that hint at the complexity of rhyming schemes used by the Japanese Hip Hop artists.

The way in which rhyme has been incorporated into Japanese Hip Hop is enlightening to the discussion of how Hip Hop can simultaneously be realized as both global and local forms of expression. Rhyme, a defining aspect of Hip Hop, is foreign to traditional Japanese verse, and yet it is assimilated into Japanese Hip Hop. One can view its adoption as reflecting a global form of expression characteristic of Hip Hop worldwide. On the other hand, the way in which rhyme is adapted into Japanese Hip Hop is localized to the context and resources of the Japanese language by having it faithfully conform to the notion of mora, a crucial linguistic concept of the language, but not necessarily relevant in many others. Once the notion of rhyme is incorporated into Japanese Hip Hop, we then witness the complexities of rhyming schemes, such as internal rhymes and bridge rhyming shown for Dragon Ash that are found with U.S. Hip Hop artists and undoubtedly with others. In conclusion, we would contend that moraic assonance is a means internal to the Japanese language that allows for the adaptation of the foreign notion of rhyme and reflects with respect to language what Condry (2001b, p. 372) calls "a dynamic process by which the meaning of Hip Hop is reinterpreted to fit into the Japanese context."

Acknowledgments

encouragement and inspiring comments that have been extremely helpful in shaping this chapter. Some of the material in this chapter was presented at the 15th Conference on Japanese/Korean Linguistics held in Madison Wisconsin in October 2005 and we acknowledge the audience there for their comments. Any errors are our responsibility.

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