

Casting a new ‘eye’ on an elusive suffix – The use and origin of Eastern Japanese -me

Étienne Baudel – 25th International Conference of
Historical Linguistics (University of Oxford)

Introduction

Introduction

- Some Japonic varieties exhibit a similar suffix *-me*, usually analysed as a **marker of animacy**.

あっぱめ



島ことばを話そう 伝えよう！
Hachijō Board of education,
2013, p. 6

Introduction

- This presentation aims at finding synchronic elements to examine **different possible origins** for this suffix:
 - a diminutive < 女 *me* 'girl'
 - a derogative < め *me* (of unknown origin)
 - a collective < 群れ *mure* 'flock'

(MARTIN, 2004: 830-831)

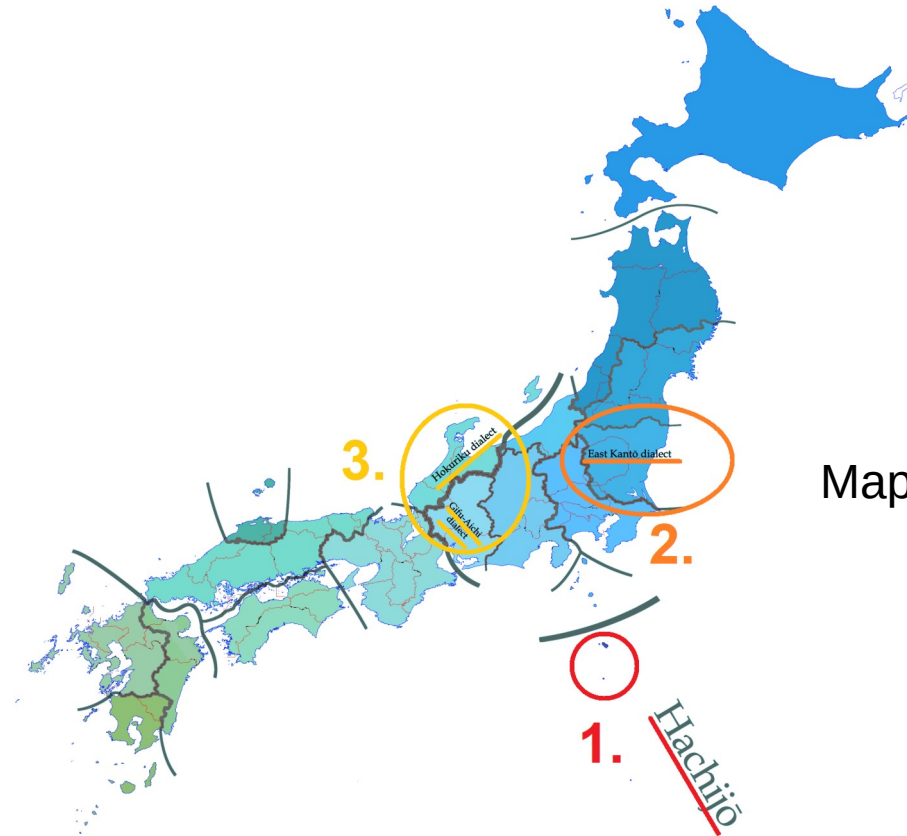
(1) What is the *-me* suffix?

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- A kind of animate *-me* suffix appears to have existed in many Japonic varieties, spreading in at least **3 regions** (NITTA, 2006).
- However, it is not sure whether it is a **shared archaism** or a **parallel innovation** (YAMADA, 1984: ; HAYANO, 1991: 81-83).



(1) – The *-me* suffix



(1) – The *-me* suffix

- This suffix seems to have been very productive, as it can attach to:
 - **many substantives**, incl.:
 - 100+ animal names, ex: *inu-me* `dog`
 - ~30 human names, ex: *appa-me* `baby`
 - a few supernatural figures' names, ex: *oni-me* `demon`
 - **a few pronouns**, ex: *unu-me* `you`
 - **a few adjectives**, ex: *heta-me* `fool`

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- In most cases, it is seen as an **optional suffix** and not as an element of composition, ex:
 - *ushi-me* vs *ushi* 'cow'
 - *tango-me* vs *tango* 'twin'
- However, there are some **limit cases** (*cf infra*).
- In the cases where there is an opposition between suffixed and suffixless form, the **semantic value of *-me*** is not trivial (*cf infra*).

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- *-me* is used **since the oldest sources** (MORISHITA, 1979).
- It is used in **all *strata* of the lexicon**:
 - native words: *hebi-me* `snake'
 - sino-japonic words: *kingyo-me* `goldfish'
 - onomatopoeic words: *kokko-me* `robin bird'

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- There is **no apparent phonological restriction** to its use:
 - it attaches to word of any length, ex:
ba-me 'cow' vs. *kokkenkokeja-me* 'lesser cuckoo'
 - it attaches to words that already end in *-me*, ex:
kame-me 'turtle', *same-me* 'shark'

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- It can also occasionally **agglutinate with other suffixes**, such as the human plural marker *-ra*:
 - *kodomo-me* 'child' → *kodomo-me-ra* 'children'



(1) – The *-me* suffix

- More generally, it is used:
 - in **all varieties**
 - by **all genders**
 - by **all social classes**
 - in **all kind of texts** (conversations, folktales, songs)...
- As a consequence, it is hard to miss!

(1) – The *-me* suffix

共通語	三根方言	大賀郷方言	榎立方言
ごきぶり、あぶらむし	カキジャネ メ・カキジャ リメ	カキジャネ メ・カキジャ ルメ	カキジャリメ

『小動物』

蛙	ケーロメ	ケーロメ・ ケールメ	キヤールメ
鼠	ヨメゴドノ・ アマノヒト・ ユルノ	ユルノヒト	ヨルノヒト
とかげ	ケービヨウメ	ケービヨウメ	キヤーパーメ
どじょう	ジョンジョウ メ	ドンジョウメ	ドンジョウメ
みみず	メメズメ	メメズメ	ネネズメ
蛇	ヘビメ	ヘビメ	ヘビメ
犬	イヌメ	イヌメ	イヌメ
猫	ネッコメ	ネッコメ	ネッコメ

『鳥と動物』

赤腹	コッコメ	コッコメ	コッコメ
目白	メンジメ	メンジョメ	ハナマガリメ・ メンジョメ
阿呆鳥	バカドリ	バカドリ	バカドリ
キジ鳩	ショウトメ	ショウトメ	シャートメ
からす	カラスメ	カラスメ	カラスメ
磯ひよどり	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ
かもめ、うみねこ、 おおみずなぎどりの総称	カブナメ	カブナメ	カブニヤメ

中之郷方言	末吉方言	鳥打方言	宇津木方言	青ヶ島方言
カキジャネ メ・カキジャ ルメ	カキジャリメ	アマミ	カキジャネ メ・アマミ	カキジョウ メ・アマミゴ ロウ・カキ ジャネメ

キヤアルメ	カエルメ	ケールメ	ケーロメ	ケーロメ
ヨメドノ	ヨルノヒト・ ゴレイドノ・ ヨルドノ	ヨメドノ・ ネズミドノ	ネズンメ・ ヨルノヒト	ネズンメ
キヤアビヤ メ	ケービヨウメ	ケービヨウメ	ケービヨウメ	カマチコ・ ケービヨウメ
ドジョウメ	ドジョウメ	?	ドジョウメ	?
ネネズメ	メメズメ	メメズメ	メメズメ	メメズメ
ヘビメ	ヘビメ	?	ヘビメ	ヘビメ
イヌメ	イヌメ	イヌメ・ボチメ	イヌメ	イヌメ・ボチメ
ネッコメ	ネッコメ	ネッコメ	ネッコ	ネッコメ・カ ンヨメ・ゴ ジョウメ

コッコメ	コッコメ	コッコメ	コッコメ	コッコメ
メンジョ・ ハナガメ	メジロメ	ハナガミ	=	メンジロメ
=	バカドリ	シロブ	バカドリ	シロブ
ショアトメ	ハトメ	ショウトメ	ショウトメ	ショウトメ
カラスメ	カラスメ	カラスメ	カラスメ	カラスメ
ピアピアメ	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ	イソゴキ
カブニヤメ	カブナメ	カブナメ・マ トリ・カト ドリ	カブナメ	マトリ・ カトードリ

Examples of *-me*
in YAMADA,
2010: 62-63

(1) – The *-me* suffix

共通語	三根方言	大賀郷方言	榎立方言
ごきぶり、あぶらむし	カキジャネ メ・カキジャ メ	カキジャネ メ・カキジャ メ	カキジャリ

『小動物』

蛙	ケーロ	ケーロ ケー川	キヤール
鼠	ヨメゴドノ・ アマノヒト・ ユルノ	ユルノヒト	ヨルノヒト
とかげ	ケービョウ	ケービョウ	キヤバー
どじょう	ジョンジョウ	ドンジョウ	ドンジョウ
みみず	メメズ	メメズ	ネネズ
蛇	ヘビ	ヘビ	ヘビ
犬	イヌ	イヌ	イヌ
猫	ネッコ	ネッコ	ネッコ

『鳥と動物』

赤腹	コッコ	コッコ	コッコ
目白	メンジョ	メンジョ	ハナマガリ メンジョ
阿呆鳥	バカドリ	バカドリ	バカドリ
キジ鳩	ショウト	ショウト	シャート
からす	カラス	カラス	カラス
磯ひよどり	イソコッコ	イソコッコ	イソゴッコ
かもめ、うみねこ、 おおみずなぎどりの総称	カブナ	カブナ	カフニャ

中之郷方言	末吉方言	鳥打方言	宇津木方言	青ヶ島方言
カキジャネ メ・カキジャ メ	カキジャリ	アマミ	カキジャネ メ・アマミ	カキジョウ メ・アマミ ゴロウ・カキ ジャネ

キヤアル	カエル	ケール	ケーロ	ケーロ
ヨメドノ	ヨルノヒト・ ゴレイドノ・ ヨルドノ	ヨメドノ・ ネズミドノ	ネズン ヨルノヒト	ネズン
キヤアビヤ	ケービョウ	ケービョウ	ケービョウ	カマチコ・ ケービョウ
ドジョウ	ドジョウ	?	ドジョウ	?
ネネズ	メメズ	メメズ	メメズ	メメズ
ヘビ	ヘビ	?	ヘビ	ヘビ
イヌ	イヌ	イヌ・ボナ	イヌ	イヌ・ボナ
ネッコ	ネッコ	ネッコ	ネッコ	ネッコ カンヨ ジョウ

コッコ	コッコ	コッコ	コッコ	コッコ
メンジョ ハナガ	メジロ	ハナガミ	=	メンジロ
=	バカドリ	シロブ	バカドリ	シロブ
ショウト	ハト	ショウト	ショウト	ショウト
カラス	カラス	カラス	カラス	カラス
ピアピア	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ	イソゴッコ	イソゴキ
カブニャ	カブナ	カブナ マトリ・カト ドリ	カブナ	マトリ・ カトードリ

Highlighted
examples of *-me*
in YAMADA,
2010: 62-63

(1) – The *-me* suffix

- However, this suffix is **now disappearing** due to the influence of standard Japanese (MORISHITA, 1979: 142).
- More generally, **its origin and its semantics are still rather unclear.**

diminutive	<	女	<i>me</i>	'girl'	?
derogative	<	め	<i>me</i>	?	?
collective	<	群れ	<i>mure</i>	'flock'	?

(2) An endearment / diminutive suffix

< 女 *me* 'girl'?

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- A common hypothesis states that there is an “**emotional difference**” in the use or absence of *-me* (MORISHITA, 1979: 135).
- That is, *-me* would express a kind of **endearment** (IANNUCCI, 2019: 94).
 - “The reason why we add “me” to the names of animals [...] is that we feel familiarity (親しみ), affection (愛着), and tenderness (愛らしさ) towards them.” (IITOYO et al., 1984: 74)

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- This analysis made NAKAMOTO (1980: 100) suppose that *-me* originates from **OJ** *me* 'girl' 女 :

→ “The “endearing” aspect of “*me*” [girl] extended semantically and became established as a suffix for animals.”
NAKAMOTO (1980: 100)

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- This hypothesis supposes that **-*me* was grammaticalised as a diminutive suffix.**
- A good argument in favour of this hypothesis is the apparent **parallelism between -*me* 'girl' and -*ko* 'boy/child'** in Old / Early Middle Japanese:

- <i>oto-ko</i> 'boy'	/	<i>oto-me</i> 'girl'
- <i>musu-ko</i> 'son'	/	<i>musu-me</i> 'daughter'
- <i>iratsu-ko</i> 'lad'	/	<i>iratsu-me</i> 'lass'
- <i>hi-ko</i> 'prince'	/	<i>hi-me</i> 'princess'
→ <i>yatsu-ko</i> 'servant'	/	<i>yatsu-me</i> guy ' (< *maid?)

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- As a matter of fact, **-ko** also grammaticalised as a **diminutive** in many Japonic varieties (NAKAMOTO, 1980: 100), and sometimes even specialised as an **inanimate diminutive**, ex in Ibaraki:
 - *zeni-ko* 'coin'
 - *chawan-ko* 'bowl'
- Thus, the grammaticalisation of one could have lead to the grammaticalisation of the other in a **chain shift**, with a **specialisation of -me as animate and of -ko as inanimate**.

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- However, there are **several counterarguments** to this hypothesis:
 - the parallel between *-me* and *-ko* is quite shallow (few clear examples)
 - the grammaticalisation of *-ko* (whether animate or inanimate) is **unattested in Hachijō**
 - More importantly, **the “endearing” meaning of *-me* is not clear at all**

(2) – Hypothesis 1: *-me* < *me* 'girl'

- Many occurrences of *-me* (~ 20%) in animal names are seen for **depreciated animals**:
 - *uji-me* 'maggot', *kabu-me* 'mosquito', *hebi-me* 'snake'
- It also attaches to names of **negative supernatural beings**:
 - *oni-me* 'demon', *tenji-me* 'ghost / devil'
- Many suffixed forms designating human beings (~ 50%) are **insults**:
 - *yakko-me* 'bastard', *dongo-me* 'fool'

(3) A derogative / humbleness suffix?

(3) – Hypothesis 2: *-me* < *-me*_{PEJ}

- Therefore, another interpretation is to interpret *-me* in the contrary as a **derogative suffix** (NAITŌ, 1979).
- This would explain the aforementioned uses, as well as the fact that **3 animals that are subject to linguistic taboo never have *-me*** (NAKAMOTO, 1980:100):
 - *katsū* 'bonito'
 - *kona(-sama)* 'silkworm'
 - *yome-dono, gorei-dono, yoru no hito, ama no hito* 'mouse'

(3) – Hypothesis 2: *-me* < *-me*_{PEJ}

- This would also be a **remarkable parallel** with Middle / Early Modern Japanese *-me* expressing contempt or humility (MARTIN, 2004: 830-831):
 - *neko-me* 'darn cat', *karasu-me* 'darn crows'
 - *baka-me* 'fool', *hyakushō-me* 'country bumpkin'
 - *watakushi-me* 'wrenched me', 'my humble self'
- Sadly, the origin of this suffix is **still unclear**.

(3) – Hypothesis 2: $-me < -me_{PEJ}$

- In that case, we can assume that the frequent use ($\sim 50\%$) of $-me$ for children names comes from an original **mark of humbleness**:
 - Pre-Hachijō: **kodomō* '[someone else's] child' / **kodomō-me* '[my humble] child'
→ Hachijō *kodomō* / *kodomō-me* '[any] child'
 - Pre-Hachijō: **tarō* '[someone else's] first son' / **tarō-me* '[my humble] first son'
→ Hachijō *tarō* / *tarō-me* '[any] first son'
- **A closer look at the data is needed** in order to assess this hypothesis.

(3) – Hypothesis 2: $-me < -me_{PEJ}$

- Furthermore, we have to assume that the grammaticalisation extended **from humans to animals**.
- Old sources seem to indicate such an extension could have happened through intensive use of $-me$ with **cattle animals**:
 - Pre-Hachijō: **kodomo-me* '[my humble] child' → **ushi-me* '[my humble] cow'
→ Hachijō *kodomo-me* '[any] child', *ushi-me* '[any] cow'
- Again, **a closer look at the data is needed** in order to assess this hypothesis.

(4) A classifier
< collective 群れ *mure* 'flock'?

(4) – Hypothesis 3: *-me* < *-mure*

- Finally, another observation was made by NITTA (2006: 131-133).
- Namely, when referring to animals, the suffix *-me* seems to be **more common in the terms that have a broad semantic extension**.
- For him, this is the sign that *-me* acts as a sort of **classifier** for animals, which could point toward an **original use as a collective suffix**.

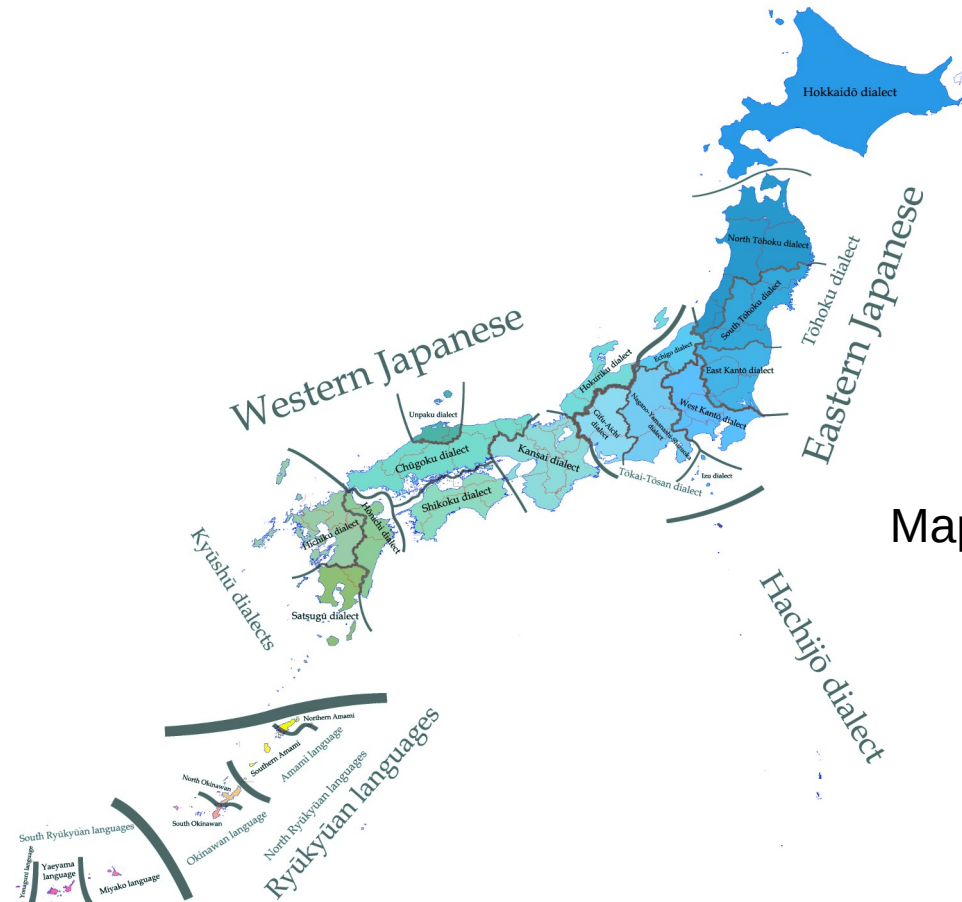
(4) – Hypothesis 3: *-me* < *-mure*

- As a matter of fact, a collective ***-mure*** existed in several Japonic languages and varieties.
- Thus, if we accept this hypothesis, we have to consider that peripheral dialects retain a **shared archaism**.

(4) – Hypothesis 3: *-me* < *-mure*

- For instance:
 - Miyako plural animate suffix ***-mmi*** (SHIMOJI: 2022: 9):
sinsii-mmī=a (mmna) par-i-i njaa-n.
teacher-PL=TOP all leave-THM-SEQ PRF-NPST
"The teachers all left"
 - Kuboizumi plural animate suffix ***-me*** (KINDAICHI, SHIBATA; 1966: 126):
koton-me=nya kimon tsukutte
child-PL=DAT.TOP clothed make.CONJ
"Making clothes for the children.."

(4) – Hypothesis 3: *-me* < *-mure*



Map of Japonic languages
and varieties
Wikimedia

(4) – Hypothesis 3: *-me* < *-mure*

- In standard Japanese, traces of *-mure* are said to be possibly preserved in a few **bird and fish names**:
 - *suzume* 'sparrow', *tsubame* 'swallow'...
 - *aburame* 'fat greenling', *hirame* 'flounder'...
- In all those, **the collective meaning seems to be long gone**.
 - Overall, this etymology is plausible, but **the data for it is scarce. More historical evidence from OJ is needed.**

(5) A mixed origin?

(5) – Hypothesis 4: a convergence

- Finally, I am tempted to assume that **an archaic substantive *me* 'thingy' / *guy*_{PEJ} 'might have existed** at some point in Middle Japanese or at least in Pre-Hachijō.
- Indeed, an element *me* can be qualified by a proposition or a verb in Hachijō:
 - *oso so me=ga ari, dorobō=jo so me=ga ari...*
lie do.ATTR *me*=SUBJ exist.NOM, thievery=ACC do.ATTR *me*=SUBJ exist.NOM...
"since there are guys who lie and guys who steal"

(KANEDA, 1998:27)

(5) – Hypothesis 4: a convergence

- Similarly, after a demonstrative and an attributive adjective:

– *sono wakake me-ra=ga [...] toshoi=ni tsuke-te*

this young.ATTR **me**-PLUR=SUBJ elderly=DAT ignite-CONJ

"these young guys, after igniting [their cigarettes] for the elderly..."

(KINDAICHI & SHIBATA, 1967:231)

(5) – Hypothesis 4: a convergence

- In very few cases, this quasi-independent **me** can also **denote an inanimate**, with a very broad meaning:

- *kogon doa **mei** ware=ni utte shaku=ni sawar-u*

such be.ATTR **me**.ACC me=DAT sell.CUNJ annoyance=LOC touch-FIN

"It annoys me that you sold me such stuff."

(ASANUMA, 1999: 91)

- *manryou-zaru=no gwan doa **me** kago-zaru*

coralberry-basket=GEN like be.ATTR **me** box-basket

"A basket thingy like the ones used for coralberries"

(KANEDA, website)

(5) – Hypothesis 4: a convergence

- In my opinion, if those uses are linked, they could be **cognates of the suffix *-me* 'item'** (ultimately linked to 目 *me* 'eye'), which grammaticalised in several ways in standard Japanese (KAWAGUCHI: 1998), notably:
 - to form ordinals: 一番目 *ichiban-me* 'first one'
 - as a nominalising suffix: 多め *ō-me* 'a lot' (i.e. 'abundant one')

(5) – Hypothesis 4: a convergence

- However, **more comparative and historical evidence is needed**, in order to assess whether it is a Hachijō innovation or the retention of an archaism.



Conclusion

Conclusion

- **The 'animate' suffix *-me* is all but straightforward**, both synchronically and diachronically.
- **It quite likely originates from various sources.**
- However, **further investigation is needed to disentangle the details of its formation.**

おかげさまで！

/ Thank you for your attention!

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