The aim of this study is to analyze Japanese truncation formation from a phonological viewpoint. In Japanese, the phenomenon of compound truncation is defined as a clipping process where a change from a "word-word compound" into a "stem-stem compound" takes place. The unmarked type of compound truncation combines the first two morae of each constituent, resulting in a four-morae output (e.g. e.n.ji.n + su.to.p.pu > e.n.su.to ‘engine stall, where [.] indicates mora boundaries).

A full year's data at an interval of 10 years were collected from fashion magazines aimed for adolescents. Our analysis has indicated that nearly 90% of the truncation forms attested in all data collection result in a four morae output (LLLL, LLH, HLL, HH). This finding suggests that the unmarked four-morae output remains dominant throughout in processing truncated compounds in Japanese. However, a subtle diachronic change can be observed during the 20 years, especially if we focus our attention on the three-morae outputs. Only 6.7% of the data in 1988 were of the three-morae compound forms (6/105), but the percentage increased to 12% in 1998 (27/227), and to 14.5% in 2008 (47/324). Theoretically, the three mora items can take the form of the following syllable type combinations: 1) light+light+light syllables (LLL); heavy + light syllables (HL); light + heavy syllables (LH). However, an asymmetric relationship exists among the three patterns in that the first two combinations (LLL, HL) are fairly general, whereas the third pattern (LH) is not commonly observed.

This "diachronic change" in terms of an optimality perspective can be accounted for by the reranking of the constraints ALIGN-L and PARSE-syllable, as summarized below:

1988 NON-FIN » PARSE-syllable » ALIGN-L » MAX
1998 NON-FIN » PARSE-syllable, ALIGN-L » MAX
2008 NON-FIN » ALIGN-L » PARSE-syllable » MAX

Keywords: diachronic change, adolescent language, compound truncation.