

Using Phasal Syntax to Make Generalizations in Manchu Vowel Harmony

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BACKGROUND

Manchu vowel harmony (VH) is taught as highly irregular. Manchu L2 learners often have to rely on memorization and looking up in dictionary to conjugate verbs correctly. Is Manchu VH really irregular? Can a formal linguistic account be applied to teaching Manchu VH?

INTRODUCTION

- 1. Vowel Harmony
 - a. Labial Harmony: two syllable-adjacent non-diphthong [ɔ] triggers [+LAB].
 - b. ATR: [a,u,ɔ] trigger [-ATR], [ə] triggers [+ATR], [i,u] are transparent.
 - c. Dorsals also undergo harmony: Velars are [+ATR] and Uvulars are [-ATR]
 - d. Roots with only [i,u] vowels have an arbitrary [ATR] value
- 2. The Imperfective suffix /rA/ acts differently: "transparent" vowels and /u/ are treated as opaquely [+ATR]
- 3. Referenced 5 grammar books and textbooks in Chinese and English; Interviewed 3 manchu teachers

	+ATR	-ATR -LAB	-ATR +LAB
A	ə	a	ɔ
U	u		
I		i	

	Perfective	Imperfective	Caus. Perfective	Caus. Imperfective
/təqtə/ 'to be fixed'	[təqtə-χə]	[təqtə-rə]	[təqtə-bu-χa]	[təqtə-bu-rə]
/ta/ 'to be caught'	[ta-χa]	[ta-ra]	[ta-bu-χa]	[ta-bu-rə]
/te/ 'to live (somewhere)'	[tə-xə]	[tə-rə]	[tə-bu-xə]	[tə-bu-rə]
/tutçi/ 'to come out'	[tutçi-kə]	[tutçi-rə]	[tutçi-bu-kə]	[tutçi-bu-rə]
/ili/ 'to stand'	[ili-χa]	[ili-rə]	[ili-bu-χa]	[ili-bu-rə]
/gasχu/ 'to take an oath'	[gasχu-χa]	[gasχu-rə]	[gasχu-bu-χa]	[gasχu-bu-rə]

	[-HI]	[+HI]
[+ATR]	ə o	i u
[-ATR]	a ɔ	I U

The specification in stems affects ATR harmony, but is neutralized in pronunciation. A phase head forces spell-out: early neutralization; [+ATR] in high vowels

- Phonological Rules (Phase or word end):
- 1) Vowel Harmony (rightward)
- 2) [+HI] > [+ATR]
- 3) Lowering after uvulars
- Phonetic Rules (At end of word):

Implicit Teaching: Vowels are taught as three classes: Yin, Yang, and transparent Neutral vowels. Anything which does not conform to direct VH is irregular. Pedagogies differ on groupings.

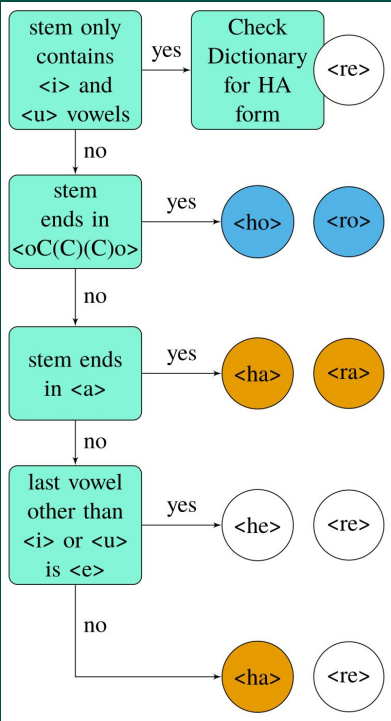
	ə	u	i	a	ɔ	ɔ
De Harlez 1884:13; Haenisch 1961:33	weak			strong/hard		
Adam 1873:15, Paskov 1963:16, Lie 1972:33, Ji et al. 1986:86, Liu et al. 1997:87	yin/weak		neutral/soft		yang/strong/hard	
Aisin Gioro 1983:24	yin		neutral		yang	
Dresher and Zhang 2003:4	+ATR		−ATR			

Explicit Teaching: Either treating -HA and -rA as having the same or different VH rules, 8 - 13 rules are employed to describe all the possible combinations, still with exceptions.

The flow chart created based on our analysis is able to simplify teaching and learning of -HA/-rA conjugation by unifying -HA/-rA conjugation. The number of irregular conjugations compared to traditional teachings is largely reduced.

Examples of verbs traditionally considered irregular:

fali-χa / fali-rə	to tie
gasχu-χa / gasχu-rə	to swear
dzə-χa / dzə-rə	to cut



Fenger (2020) argues that Japanese aspect marker *te* is a phase head, which forces pitch accent (lowering of pitch) to apply prematurely.

	be.distant- (hedata-	PASS- rare	PRS ru)
Pitch Accent	(hèdátá-	ráré	rù)

	be.distant- ((hedata-	ASP- te)	PRS ru)
Pitch Accent	((hèdátá-	tè)	ru)
Pitch Accent	((hèdátá-	tè)	rù)

The Manchu imperfective works similarly with vowel harmony. However the spell out domain contains the phase head in Japanese but not in Manchu.

	report- (ala-	CAUS- bU-	PFV- HA-	REL lA)
Vowel Harmony	(ala-	bu-	χa-	la)
[+HI] > [+ATR]	(ala-	bu-	χa-	la)
Lowering	(ala-	bu-	χa-	la)

	report- ((ala-	CAUS- bU-)	IPFV- rA-	REL lA)
Vowel Harmony	((ala-	bu-)	rA-	lA)
[+HI] > [+ATR]	((ala-	bu-)	rA-	lA)
Vowel Harmony	((ala-	bu-)	rə-	lə)
[+HI] > [+ATR]	((ala-	bu-)	rə-	lə)
Lowering	((ala-	bu-)	rə-	lə)

Selected Works: Fenger, P. (2020) Words within Words: The Internal Syntax of Verbs. University of Connecticut. || Aisin Gioro, U. (1983) Grammar of Manchu. Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press. || Liu, J., Zhao, A. and Zhao, J. (1997) Manju gisun-be hendu sibkihe bithe Haerbin: Heilongjiang Chaoxian minzu chubanshe. || Dresher, B. E. and Zhang, X. (2003) 'Phonological Contrast and Phonetics in Manchu Vowel Systems', Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, 29(1), pp. 485-497

Special thanks to our Manchu educational consultants:
Ulhisu, Biao Jin, and Shiyao Sun.

