

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

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

a. Labial Harmony:

two syllable-adjacent non-diphthong [ɔ] triggers [+LAB].

b. ATR: [a,ʊ,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 /ʊ/ are treated as opaquely [+ATR]

3. Referenced 5 grammar books and textbooks in Chinese and English; Interviewed 3 manchu teachers

	Perfective	Imperfective	Caus. Perfective	Caus. Imperfective
/təqtə/ 'to be fixed'	[təqtə-χɔ]	[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	ɪ ʊ

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]

Phonetic Rules (At end of word):

3) Lowering after uvulars

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.

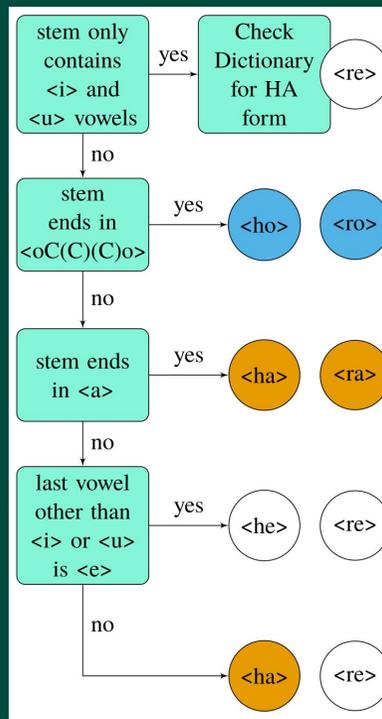
	ə	u	i	a	ʊ	ɔ
De Harlez 1884:13; Haenisch 1961:33	weak			strong/hard		
Adam 1873:15, Paskov 1963:16, Lie 1972:33, Ji et al. 1986:86, Liu et al. 1997:87	yin/weak		neutral/soft		yang/strong/hard	
Aisin Gioro 1983:24	yin		neutral		yang	
Dresher and Zhang 2003:4	+ATR		-ATR			

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
dzɔ-χa / dzɔ-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 [+HI] > [+ATR]	(ala- bu-	χa-	la)	
Lowering	(ala- bu-	χa-	la)	

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

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