

# Historical Changes of the Japanese Adverb *Kamahete*

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## 1 Introduction

The Japanese adverb *kamahete*, which was once commonly used in Japanese but has fallen out of use in modern times, played a significant role in expressing modality. Its etymology remains uncertain, but it is believed to have derived from the verb *kamafu*, which signified the act of assuming a stance and maintaining vigilance while taking action or dealing with something. See example (1) below (estimated year is provided after each example):

- (1) *Hisokani kamahete shasatsu samu* “*Sanpōe*” (10th C.)  
‘Secretly assuming a stance and intending to shoot and kill’

In this example, *kamahete* is a continuous form of the verb *kamafu* and represents the specific action of assuming a stance. It is hypothesized that the

*Japanese/Korean Linguistics 30*

Edited by Sara Williamson, Adeola Aminat Babayode-Lawal, Laurens Bosman,  
Nicole Chan, Sylvia Cho, Ivan Fong, and Kaye Holubowsky.

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adverb *kamahete*'s subjective meanings such as “by all means” or “somehow” derived from this specific action.

- (2) *Kamahete fumi naorite tatereba* “*Uji Shūi Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
‘(He) somehow got back on his feet while not being overthrown’

In (2), *kamahete* is used to convey the notion of “somehow” getting back on one’s feet. It maintains its concrete nature as it relates to a tangible physical action or an ongoing event. Now, let us consider the following example:

- (3) *Kamahete mairi tamahe* “*Uji Shūi Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
‘By all means, please do visit’

In this case, *kamahete* is associated with the realm of “irrealis,” not describing past or ongoing events. It signifies the modality of “by all means,” attempting to fulfill the irrealis world portrayed in the predicate. As this sentence does not describe a current event, the adverb *kamahete* acquires a more abstract meaning.

*Kamahete* played a significant role in highlighting the speaker’s modality across diverse contexts. It was used in both positive and negative contexts, emphasizing the speaker’s modalities. In positive contexts, *kamahete* functioned to express the strength of the speaker’s positive modalities, including notions of “definitely,” “by all means,” and “truly.” Additionally, the reinforced form of *kamahete*, referred to as *ahikamahete*, also served to intensify the speaker’s modalities.

In negative contexts, *kamahete* conveyed the intensified negativity of the speaker’s modalities. For instance, consider the following example (4):

- (4) *Kamahete kamahete arumajiki koto nite sōrō* “*Maigetsushō*” (13th C.)  
‘This should never, never happen’

In (4), *kamahete* carries a negative meaning such as “never.” When used in negative contexts, it can also express concepts such as “absolutely (do not do something)” and “definitely (do not do something).”

Although *kamahete* initially encompassed a diverse array of meanings, it gradually lost its lexical meaning and transformed into a negative adverb.

This paper aims to examine the historical changes of *kamahete*, illustrating the breadth of its meanings in its initial stage and the restricted meaning it acquired in the later stage. Furthermore, it will explore the reasons behind its transformation into a negative adverb, providing valuable insights into the evolution of this linguistic phenomenon.

## 2 Historical Changes of *Kamahete*

This chapter explores the historical changes of the adverb *kamahete*, focusing on two distinct stages: the first stage, up to the 17th century, and the second stage, beginning from the 18th century onwards. All analysis is based on the collected data. A total of 259 tokens were collected in the first stage, and 57 tokens were collected in the second stage. The primary objective is to investigate the historical development associated with *kamahete* in each stage and to shed light on the characteristics of diachronic grammaticalization that manifested during the transition from the first stage to the second.

### 2.1 *Kamahete* Up to the 17th Century

In the first stage, *kamahete* was employed as an adverb of modality in both positive and negative contexts, encompassing a range of meanings such as “somehow,” “surely,” and “never.” The following data from this stage provide illustrative examples of these usages:

(5) *Yorimori kamahete tasuke sase tamahe* “*Heike Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
‘Please, somehow, aid and save us’

(6) *Ahikamahete buji kokyo he hokan iri tozo* “*Genpei Seisuiiki*” (13th C.)  
‘Surely, he must return safely to his homeland’

In the positive contexts above, the utilization of (*ahi-*)*kamahete* effectively conveyed the speaker’s modality, encompassing notions like “by all means” and “no matter what.” This usage was often associated with making strong requests or soliciting the listener’s cooperation. In some instances, the prefix “*ahi-*” was added to further intensify the tone and meaning of the word.

Furthermore, *kamahete* was also employed for lexical negation, where the predicate itself held a negative meaning.

In negative contexts, *kamahete* co-occurred with negative particles and auxiliary verbs such as “*maji* (inappropriate/prohibition),” “*nakare* (ban),” “*na* (prohibition),” and “*bekarazu* (should not).” *Kamahete* in negative contexts held pragmatic significance, strengthening the meaning of a sentence when prohibiting or admonishing the listener. Examples include:

(7) *Kamahete sata suru koto nakare* “*Kōshoku Ichidai Onna*” (17th C.)  
‘Do not take action without careful consideration’

(8) *Aikamahete nembutsu okotari tamau na* “*Heike Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
‘By all means, do not neglect reciting the Nembutsu’



The auxiliary verb “zu” was used in conjunction with *kamahete* to express negation, as demonstrated in (15) below:

- (15) *kamahete ware no shinbō zuyoki niha arazarishi nari*  
“Fugen Fugo” (1895)  
‘It is definitely not due to my patience to live without any troubles.’

In the second stage, *kamahete* was predominantly used in negative contexts, co-occurring with negative particles and auxiliary verbs. These usages served as adverbs with a pragmatic function, emphasizing the speaker’s negative intentions and requesting restraint from the listener. On the other hand, *kamahete* in positive contexts was found only a few. (16) below is one of them:

- (16) *kamahete kamahete oinochi ga daiji nari*  
“Yōmei Ten’nō Shokunin Kagami” (1705)  
‘Really, really, your life is important.’

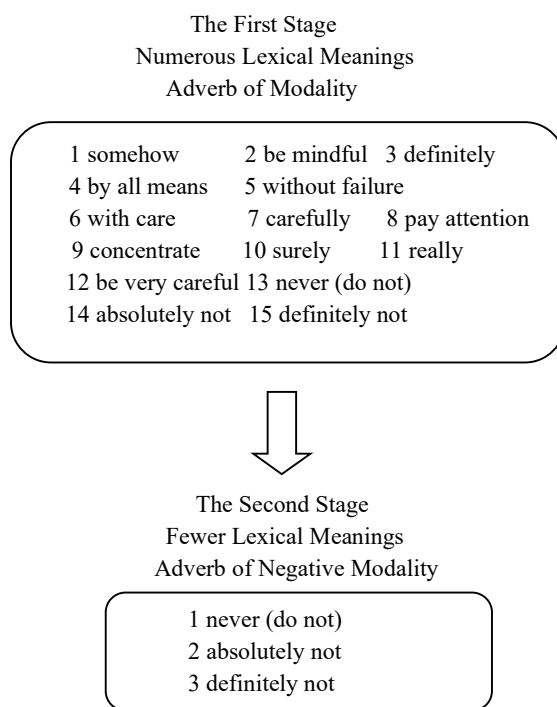
The usage of *kamahete* in the positive context in (16) represents an older sense and usage. Older meanings do not immediately vanish but instead gradually diminish over time, and some coexist with new usages and meanings. This phenomenon is referred to as “layering.” As Hopper (1991) suggests, older layers of meaning are not necessarily discarded but persist alongside and interact with the newer layers. The above example (16) illustrates that a few data of *kamahete* having old meaning persisted within the latter stage.

### 2.3 Reduction of Lexical Meaning

In this section, we delve into the transformation of the lexical meaning of *kamahete* from the first stage to the second stage. Throughout the first stage, until the 17th century, *kamahete* encompassed a broad spectrum of lexical meanings as it was employed in both positive and negative contexts. Contemporary dictionaries provide numerous descriptions of *kamahete*’s meaning, including synonymous words such as “definitely,” “by all means,” and “never,” among others. It is important to note that these meanings are subjectively perceived by the reader. Furthermore, it is common for a single word to have multiple lexical meanings, indicating the presence of diverse interpretations. According to the dictionary definitions, *kamahete* had fifteen distinct meanings in the first stage.

However, during the second stage, spanning from the 18th to the 19th century, *kamahete* ceased to be used in positive contexts and retained only its

negative usage as “never (do not)” and “absolutely not,” etc. Consequently, the number of lexical meanings of *kamahete* that could be expressed through different words experienced a significant reduction, decreasing from fifteen in the first stage to three in the second stage. This change can be visually represented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Reduction of the Lexical Meaning of *Kamahete***

The words illustrated in Figure 1 represent synonyms for *kamahete* in various contexts, with many of them derived from the dictionary definitions of *kamahete*. The transition from the first stage to the second stage of *kamahete* signifies a shift from an “adverb of modality” to an “adverb of negative modality.” This shift ultimately leads to a significant reduction in the lexical meaning of *kamahete*. Adverbs of modality have a broad range of usage contexts and encompass numerous lexical meanings, as they can be employed in both positive and negative contexts. On the other hand, adverbs of negative modality possess fewer lexical meanings, as they are exclusively used in negative contexts.

Why, then, did *kamahete* come to be exclusively used in negative contexts? Negative adverbs in Japanese play a crucial role in signaling that the forthcoming context will be negative. In Japanese sentence structure, the verb appears at the end of the sentence, making it unclear whether the sentence is negative or not until the very end. However, when a negative adverb precedes the verb, it provides knowledge in advance that a negative expression will follow. Accordingly, the Japanese language requires adverbs that serve a grammatical function to induce negative expressions. Examples of such negative adverbs include “*tsuyu*,” “*yume*,” and “*yomo*.” However, these negative adverbs were already in use in Japanese literature dating back to the Heian period and had become archaic by the 18th century. Furthermore, the adverb *kamahete* was primarily employed in works belonging to genres of military chronicles and *setsuwa* collections (e.g., “*Heike Monogatari*” and “*Konjaku Monogatari*”). These works featured a writing style that combined Japanese and Chinese elements, utilizing a mixture of *kanji* and *kana* characters. Within these genres, there were no negative adverbs other than the archaic ones mentioned above at that time. It is plausible that *kamahete* strengthened its grammatical function, transitioning from an adverb of modality to an adverb of negative modality, due to the existence of a vacant space within the lexical system. This vacant space allowed *kamahete* to fulfill the role of a negative adverb. The availability of grammatical functions in language is inherently limited, and as a result, the linguistic elements that fulfill those functions are also constrained. In cases where there are gaps or a need for linguistic elements to serve abstract and grammatical functions, words that have undergone grammaticalization acquire more abstract meanings and functions in order to occupy those linguistic gaps.

#### 2.4 Loss of Syntactic, Morphological, and Contextual Variability

In this section we examine the transformations in the syntactic, morphological, and contextual variability of *kamahete*. During the first stage, *kamahete* could be followed by the particle “*to*.” For example:

(17) *kamahete kamahete to shōsei su beshi*                      “*Mumei shō*” (13th C.)  
       ‘By all means, invite and gather everyone to this occasion’

However, in the second stage, *kamahete* lost its syntactic variability in terms of not being followed by the particle “*to*.”

In the first stage, it was possible to add the prefix “*a(h)i-*” to *kamahete*. Examples of “*ahikamahete*” can be found in the first stage, such as:

- (18) *Ahikamahete, fukaku nageki tamafu bekarazu*  
 “*Soga Monogatari*” (14th-15th C.)  
 ‘Please never mourn deeply’

There were numerous data of *ahikamahete* in the first stage, while in the second stage, only a few data with the prefix *ahi-* were found, as shown in (19) below:

- (19) *aikamahete, sonshi no sue made niō no kuchi he kami uchikomu na*  
 “*Hanashi bon Karukuchi Omae Otoko*” (1703)  
 ‘Do not (never) put paper into Nio’s mouth until the end of Sonshi.’

The existence of this example can be attributed to the gradual nature of change, where some instances retained the old meaning and usage. However, it is evident that the morphological flexibility of *kamahete* in terms of adding the prefix *ahi-* was almost lost in the second stage.

In the first stage, *kamahete* had a broad spectrum of usage in various contexts, encompassing expressions of orders, invitations, requests, prohibitions, and will, etc. The examples below vividly depict the contextual diversity of *kamahete* in this stage.

- (20) *kamahete konokoto shiraba ya* “*Konjaku Monogatari*” (12th C.)  
 Wish: ‘If (you) surely know this.’
- (21) *Kamahete mairi tama e* “*Uji Shui Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
 Invitation: ‘By all means please do visit.’
- (22) *Kogane kamahete horidase* “*Tsukubashū*” (14th C.)  
 Order: ‘Somehow dig out the gold’
- (23) *kamahete sata wo shite kudasana*  
 “*Isshin Onna Kaminarishi*” (1699)  
 Prohibition: ‘Don’t bother yourself and meddle with the matter.’
- (24) *aikamahete higagoto wo seji* “*Genpei Seisuiiki*” (13th C.)  
 Intention: ‘I will never do wrong thing’
- (25) *kamahete ga no koto deha orinai zo* “*Torahiro bon Kyogen*” (16th C.)  
 Will: ‘I will not compromise when it comes to painting.’
- (26) *aikamahete nounou isame san seyo* “*Heike Monogatari*” (13th C.)  
 Request: ‘Please take good care of yourself’



As demonstrated above, *kamahete* was used in both positive and negative contexts in the first stage. However, in the second stage, its usage became restricted to negative contexts such as prohibition, negative request, negative command, and negative intention, as evidenced by the examples provided in (9)-(15) in Section 2.2.

In summary, during the first stage, *kamahete* possessed a rich lexical meaning and was employed in a diverse range of contexts. It functioned as an adverb with flexibility in terms of context, syntax, and morphology. In contrast, during the second stage, the lexical meaning of *kamahete* underwent a significant reduction, and its contextual diversity was lost. Additionally, there were losses of syntactic variability and morphological flexibility. These historical transformations in *kamahete* demonstrate the characteristics of diachronic grammaticalization, including the attenuation of lexical meaning and the diminishment of contextual, syntactic, and morphological variability.

### 3 Disappearance of *Kamahete*

*Kamahete*, in the course of diachronic grammaticalization, underwent a decrease in lexical meaning, limited contextual variation, and the loss of syntactic and morphological flexibility. Eventually, *kamahete* ceased to be used by the end of the 19th century. The last recorded example is shown in (27) below:

(27) *kamahete sato wo seoute saki he yuki tamahu na* “*Hototogisu*” (1898)  
‘Never go ahead with your family on your back.’

The question arises: What led to the disappearance of *kamahete*? Its disappearance can be attributed to the emergence of the adverb *kesshite* (never). Initially, *kesshite* functioned as an adverb of modality in both positive and negative contexts (Takahashi 2018). However, during the mid-18th century and throughout the 19th century, *kesshite* increasingly became predominantly used as an adverb expressing negative modality. Although *kamahete* continued to be employed in negative contexts until its eventual disappearance by the end of the 19th century, there are no records of its usage in the 20th century, indicating its complete disappearance. Conversely, *kesshite*, serving as a synonym for *kamahete*, gained widespread usage as the primary adverb for expressing negative modality starting from the mid-18th century onwards. Therefore, the disappearance of *kamahete* can be attributed to the rise of *kesshite*, which fulfilled its role as the primary adverb for expressing negative modality.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, *kamahete* underwent a transformation into a negative modality adverb to fill a gap within the lexical system of that time. The diachronic process of grammaticalization of *kamahete* advanced further when it was needed to fulfill a grammatical function. The dynamics within the lexical system had a notable influence on the emergence and decline of negative adverbs. Previous studies have shown that negators in many languages can be descended from full-content words with no negative meaning at all originally (Fortson 2003). *Kamahete*, derived from the content word *kamafu*, entirely shed its original meanings and acquired new meanings and functions unrelated to its original senses. Similar diachronic changes can be observed in other adverbs as well. For instance, the Japanese adverb *kesshite* and the English adverb *hardly* were initially unrelated to negation and functioned as adverbs of modality in both positive and negative contexts. However, through the process of diachronic grammaticalization, they gradually became exclusively employed in negative contexts, discarding all positive meanings and transforming into negative adverbs (Takahashi 2016, 2018). The diachronic grammaticalization of *kamahete* aligns with the evolution of other Japanese and English negative adverbs. These findings underscore the dynamic nature of language and the trajectory of negative adverbs. The case of *kamahete* in this study serves as a valuable example, illustrating how adverbs can undergo semantic shifts, relinquishing their original meanings and becoming negative adverbs. Further research into historical changes of negative adverbs across different languages can deepen our understanding of language change and provide insights into universal mechanisms at play.

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