

An Analysis of English Loan Word Inflow into Japanese Language

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Abstract

Japanese language has been evolving with various important changes due to many historical reasons since 1600s. One of the important reasons for which the Japanese language underwent major changes is due to a strong influence of the West during 1900s. Both the policy related to English language education and use, and media's dependence on English words have accelerated the borrowing of English words into Japanese language during the past few decades. It is intriguing to researchers of this field and therefore makes it very important to understand and analyze the reasons to why English loan words have been massively entering into Japanese language to a point where every tenth word used in Japan today is an English loan word. This paper highlights with examples as to why English loan words flow into the Japanese language along with the explanations as to what effect they cause, by investigating the reasons why such adaptation has become unavoidable overtime.

Keywords: English loan words, linguistic adaptation, *katakana* English

1. Introduction

Japanese language is unique in a way that it has a long history of borrowing words from other languages, especially English. Due to the economic, political and cultural influence of the UK and the US on Japan, many loan words have been absorbed and adapted from English into Japanese. These loanwords are used on a daily basis by phonologically modifying them such that it is easier for a Japanese layman to naturally use them. As a result, they become more “intelligible” for Japanese. Languages are not rigid structures belonging to one finite culture but are dynamic and adaptable across time and space (Blommaert, 2010). The adaptations however require conforming to the target language rules of orthography and pronunciation to begin with. The modifications of English loan words adapted into Japanese are both phonological and morphological, in order to provide a smooth assimilation of these words into Japanese language.

Japanese is written in three different scripts: *kanji*, the ideographic characters adopted from Chinese, and the two syllabic scripts: *hiragana* and *katakana*. The Roman alphabet, known as ‘*romaji*’ can be considered a fourth script which makes use of English letters and also optionally makes use of phonetic symbols.

Listed below are few examples of orthographic forms of Japanese language with readable forms and their meanings.

a. *Kanji*

<i>Kanji</i> form	Reading <i>hiragana</i>	in	Reading <i>romaji</i>	in	Meaning
花	はな		<i>hana</i>		flower
山	やま		<i>yama</i>		mountain
川	かわ		<i>kawa</i>		river
塩	しお		<i>shio</i>		salt
砂糖	さとう		<i>satou</i>		sugar
桜	さくら		<i>sakura</i>		cherry blossom
国	くに		<i>kuni</i>		country
写真	しゃしん		<i>shashin</i>		picture
車	くるま		<i>kuruma</i>		car
道	みち		<i>michi</i>		road

b. *Hiragana*

<i>Hiragana</i>	Reading in <i>romaji</i>	Meaning
たべもの	<i>tabemono</i>	food
ひと	<i>hito</i>	person/people
うま	<i>uma</i>	horse
まち	<i>machi</i>	town
でんしゃ	<i>densha</i>	train
しんぶん	<i>shinbun</i>	newspaper
しま	<i>shima</i>	island
ちず	<i>chizu</i>	map

かたち	<i>katachi</i>	shape
がいこく	<i>gaikoku</i>	foreign

c. *Katakana*

<i>Katakana</i>	Reading in <i>romaji</i>	Meaning
ラジオ	<i>rajio</i>	radio
テレビ	<i>terebi</i>	television
グローバル	<i>guroubaru</i>	global
パソコン	<i>pasokon</i>	personal computer
スプーン	<i>supuun</i>	spoon
テーブル	<i>teiburu</i>	table
マジック	<i>majikku</i>	magic
サッカー	<i>sakkaa</i>	soccer
バレーボール	<i>barei-bouru</i>	volleyball
アイスクリーム	<i>aisu-kuriimu</i>	ice cream

The ‘*hira*’ in ‘*hiragana*’ means ‘ordinary’, or ‘common’, as this script was considered a writing system for general use or non-government documents (Shibatani, 1990; Akizuki 2005). Due to its non-official status, *hiragana* was enthusiastically taken up by literary-minded women, who were discouraged from learning the more complicated *kanji* characters which were associated with official documents and other sources of male power (Shibatani, 1990). As a result, *hiragana* has been used for casual writings and personal texts which is referred to as ‘women’s hand’ (Ishikawa, 2007). *Katakana* was used in Buddhist Monasteries for helping the Monks in understanding the pronunciation of Chinese characters, as a form of annotation (Akizuki, 2005). The word ‘kata’ means ‘part’ and ‘kana’ means a written form. Due to the dependence on the *katakana* and *hiragana*, they have become widely popular. *Katakana* serves as the main vehicle in orthographical adaptation for loan words to take a place in Japanese language, wherein English loan words, with few exceptions, are always represented using *katakana*. Also, the pronunciation of loan words undergoes changes according to the syllabification in Japanese language. Japanese follows a mora timed phonology so consonant clusters usually get reduced by adding necessary vowels to be adjusted to get mora-timed pronunciation.

All the words coming from other languages can be termed as ‘*gairaigo*’ (foreign words). The extent of English loan word usage makes us wonder as if Japanese people prefer using English loan words in place of native Japanese words which are translatable or have native linguistic equivalents, giving birth to made in Japan English (Norman, 2018). Further, the huge influx and a rapid adaptation of English loan words into Japanese has led to a phenomenon of semantic modification. Various Japanese expressions are coined by using an English loan word partly and by mixing it with a native Japanese term. These terms are referred to as *wasei-eigo*.

The Japanese term for English is *eigo* and the term we use to connote Japanized English is *wasei-eigo* (Irwin, 2011). The peculiarity of *wasei-eigo* is that they are not simple loan words from English but are blended with Japanese words. So, the meanings are derived from both Japanese and English to give rise to a new term. Such coinages although have taken many decades to evolve, they have been rampant over the last few decades for various reasons which we will discuss in the following sections of this paper. The alteration of the word structure both phonological and morphological is a common process in adaptation. Also, if we examine the evolution of any language, it is known to us that the spoken form comes first. When the necessity of written form arises, it is often the fact that the orthography favors simple borrowing from the donor language. Added to orthographic adaptation and phonological changes, loan words also undergo morphological changes. Few examples are given below to demonstrate morphological changes the loan words undergo in the process of nativization into Japanese.

1. *dejikame* – ‘Digital Camera’

‘digital’ has three syllables. ‘camera’ has three syllables.

In construction, apart from phonological changes, both the words ‘digital’ and ‘camera’ are reduced to two syllables (clipped) and blended to form a new term.

2. *kaanabi* – ‘Car Navigation’

‘car’ has one syllable. ‘navigation’ has four syllables

In construction, apart from the phonological changes, the word ‘navigation’ is reduced to two syllables and are blended together to form a new term.

Further a term like *kaanabiapuri* – ‘Car Navigation Application’ has been in use recently where the word ‘application’ is reduced to three syllables and blended similarly as in above examples.

As above examples demonstrate that the borrowings are not only simple but gradually loan words get nativized, ‘Japanized’ in this case. In the following section, we shall look at the reasons why the borrowings have been taking place in the present context.

2. Reasons for Borrowing

Taking various sources from the internet, media, music, advertising and real conversations as sources of data for this study, we have examined the patterns of borrowing. The real conversations have always been authentic without a specific intent of research but the frequently occurred English loan words have been noted down for analysis. By cross verifying these patterns with the fields they frequently appear in, we have outlined the reasons why word borrowings take place.

2.1 Filling the Lexical Gaps

When we do not have a lexical item to explain ourselves in our own language mainly in the advanced fields of medicine, technology, fashion etc., we depend on a lexical item from usually a superior language like English to fill that idea gap. This happens due to importing of fresh ideas or concepts. As Japan advanced technologically, loan words from English came into conveying new technological ideas. Further, if these terms are combined with the native Japanese terms, they give birth to new *wasei-eigo*.

2.2 Fascination to New

Some native Japanese terms have become archaic as they are nearly completely replaced with their English loan word equivalents. For example, the word ‘*shocked*’ (to be shocked), is far more frequently used than its native equivalent ‘*odorokimasita*’, by saying ‘*shokku-shita*’. Among the common people, such usage induces an intensity of the feeling attached to the loan word which is fresh and new compared to the mood its native word would convey. Also, in the field of research, as a researcher comes across a new idea or a concept by studying the research published in English language, there are far higher chances that such concepts are taken as they are from English and used in Japanese, even though they can be conveyed in Japanese language. Sometimes this is done unintentionally to emphasize on the freshness that idea brings without intending to replace the native words, however, usage of such terms overtime makes them more common. Kitchen is different from a ‘*daidokoro*’ where the loan word ‘*kicchin*’ makes the experience new, as Japanese kitchens have actually undergone a radical change in recent times with more modern equipment used for cooking.

When we perform Google Search, we enter a search word and get results by clicking the ‘search’ button. In Japanese these results can be said as ‘*kensaku-ni-ataru-kekka*’, however it is more frequently said by people as ‘*hitto-suru-kekka*.’ The native phrase translates to ‘search

results’, but the coined phrase gives more freshness to this phrase by saying ‘results that are being hit.’ Similarly, for the term ‘to browse’, natively speaking it is ‘*etsuran-suru*’, however people more often use ‘*burauzu-suru*.’

2.3 Linguistic Superiority

Prestige is connected with the individual language use. In sociolinguistics we refer to this as individual language variation either connected to the idiosyncrasies of the speaker or connected to the social status of the speaker. Also, there are variations connected to age and gender. The aspiration of learning English in Japan has significantly grown due to its status as lingua franca. Expertise or intelligence can be portrayed by English loan word use as opposed to native terms.

This establishes a superiority in social settings. Historically, Japanese elites have shown a strong preference to this type of borrowings. The Sino-Japanese terms called ‘*kango*’ are now integral to Japanese elite classes as they exclusively belong to the upper echelons of the society and make certain novel concepts incomprehensible to commoners. Due to its popularity, English loan words took over the ‘*kango*’ terms. However, the phenomena of protecting such elite ideas continued among the elites until about the time of Tokyo Olympics of 1964. Soon after that due to the globalization, common people also started showing high preference to such words to sound stylish and sophisticated as they did not want to be left behind in the process of globalization.

2.4 Ideas Promoted by Advertising Industry

‘*barentain-dei-choko*’ and ‘*howaito-dei-choko*’ can be considered as good examples for the terms coined for gaining commercial attention by the advertising industry. These terms translate to ‘Valentine’s Day Chocolate’ and ‘White Day Chocolate’. The word ‘chocolate’ is added to ‘Valentine’s Day’, to introduce the idea of presenting your near and dears a chocolate to celebrate the Valentine’s Day. Further, ‘White Day’ is a relatively new concept that falls on the 14th of March on which a chocolate is presented in return to what has been received on the 14th of February. Arguably these concepts are rather created by the advertising industry as these days were not celebrated in Japan traditionally.

‘*menzu-fasshon-koudineito*’, translates to ‘men’s fashion coordinate’, which does not directly make a clear sense when used in English without adding ‘colour coordinate’, or ‘style coordinate’. But a term like this is coined in Japanese to promote fashion industry, emphasizing on the coordinating factor, which attracts consumers.

2.5 Replacing Taboos

Taboos are social stigmas that prevent common use of certain words. In some cultures, terms related to ‘death’ cannot be directly used. English loan words are also used as acronyms and

metaphors to symbolize or indirectly imply the meaning instead of directly using the word. The acronym 'NG' is commonly used in everyday life to connote 'bad', as the word 'bad' can be taken as offensive. 'NG' stands for 'not good'. 'NG' functions to insinuate that something is not right.

In English we use 'between the jobs' to indicate that someone is 'jobless', as it is harsh to use 'jobless'. In Japanese, the phrase '*jyobu-hantingu-chuu*' can be used as a milder version of saying 'I'm now looking for a job.' There is social stigma attached to the word '*shakkin*', which is to loan money. More commonly, the word '*loon*' is used.

Talking directly about love and affection publicly is also not very common in Japan. A common way of indicating affection between two people is '*rabu-rabu*', in place of using native equivalents.

2.6 Economy, Politics, Science and Technology

The language of science is also the language of larger communication. Borrowing words from a language which allows for communication of broader ideas is likely to get incorporated in the local language in circumstances when the native language is not a language of wider communication. This is because the local language is used by lesser percentage of world population, particularly in the fields of politics and economy. As people get familiar with political or economic terms of other languages, the process of borrowing sometimes becomes unavoidable as those concepts are either new or cannot be translated. Even if such words could be translated, it is easier for such terms to be adapted as loan words due to restrictions of orthography. Reading or paying attention to the media is one way of becoming acquainted with vocabulary borrowed from other languages (see David, Kuang and Qaisera, 2008; Lau, 2008; Kuang and Ng, 2008). Further, mainstream media is a major factor of influence, and foreign news, locations, people, and events will not be genuine, precise, or up to date until new phrases and vocabulary are incorporated to accurately depict activities being reported. Language has a vital part in the media as it helps common people familiarize themselves with newer concepts about various domains.

Furthermore, incorporating linguistic borrowings is almost unavoidable when we talk about science and technology. To find or create the linguistic equivalents of newer terms brought about by science and technology is a humongous task. Also, considering the pace at which these words keep adding, it is another great challenge to create orthographic form in native script. Therefore, borrowing become the only choice. The amount of new vocabulary added to Japanese in the field of science like *uirusu* (virus), *wakuchin* (vaccine), *masuku* (mask) etc. and in the field of computer technology like *pasokon* (personal computer), *mausu* (mouse), *kiiboodo* (keyboard) etc., are few basic examples.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, Japanese language continues to grow in the aspect of loan word use and the mechanism of borrowing is not always the same. Some loan words have linguistic equivalents called ‘cognates’ while some other words are used differently having no semantic relationship with the original words of English, called ‘false cognates’. Also, some loan words take a permanent place in Japanese, while some other loan words get blended with Japanese to form new terms. These multiple possibilities of linguistic borrowing processes make Japanese a rapidly expanding language allowing Japanese to adapt new words smoothly. Also, the Japanese society on the other hand has democratized the use of language and common people continue to contribute to this expansion (Hosokawa, 2015). By doing so, the status of English in Japan continues gaining greater importance making it unsurprising why English language education policy of Japan has been strengthening. Although it comes with its own set of challenges, for pedagogical purposes, these loan words are rather potentially useful processible inputs to learning of pronunciation of English vocabulary allowing the EFL education to explore on new methods of vocabulary instruction (Nishi, 2019). On the other hand, for the learners of Japanese language having prior English knowledge, understanding the similarities among English loan words and their Japanese cognates have pedagogical implications that contribute to areas like material development and methods of learning of Japanese as a second language (Gakkula & Tengse, 2021).

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