

Understanding English Loanword Phonology in Japanese Language for Pedagogical Use

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Abstract

This paper examines some key linguistic adaptations in syllabification and their pedagogical application with regard to English Loanwords in Japanese and the advantages they offer to Japanese EFL students. Status of English language with regard to language education has changed overtime and has attained a significant importance in the formal educational system today. Users of English language have increased manyfold in the past decade due to increasing work opportunities in the context of globalization. Japanese people are required to have a business level English proficiency and sometimes an expected level of TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) test score, to be able to secure a job position with foreign based companies operating in Japan or aboard. This paper argues that awareness of linguistic processes in syllabification of loanwords or *katakana* English helps language learners and instructional designers in better familiarizing the learner group with the phonological adaptations, and their pedagogical application could help them learn their target language better.

Keywords: Japanese, phonology, syllabification, loanwords, *katakana* English, pedagogical application, TOEIC.

Introduction

Japanese language has a long history of borrowing words from other languages, especially English. Due to the economic, political and cultural influence of US and UK on

Japan, many loan words have been absorbed and adapted from English into Japanese (Backhaus, 2011). These loanwords are commonly used with phonological modifications making it easier for a native Japanese speaker to naturally utter them without much difficulty, by adapting the English words into the phonotactics of Japanese. This paper proposes that understanding the similarities in nativization of loanwords could have pedagogical implications that could contribute to areas like material development and methods of learning of Japanese as a second language. Also, an understanding of syllabification of loanwords could aid better learning of English by initially familiarizing the learners with the target language phonology.

Historical events and a fast paced globalization have exposed Japanese society to foreign cultures at various points of time. Yet, preserving its own culture, Japanese has the phenomena of borrowing of loanwords as an essential process for its society to merge with the global society allowing them to find new ways to express themselves without replacing their original language. In Japanese language, borrowed words are written in a Japanese orthographic form called *katakana*.

Loanwords in Japanese are referred to as *gairaigo*. A classification of *gairaigo* has been done in a previous research by Irwin (2011), where *gairaigo* is broadly classified into three distinct areas:

- (1) 英語外来語 (*eigo-gairaigo*/English words coming from outside),
- (2) 英語外国語 (*eigo-gaikokugo*/English foreign words) and
- (3) 和製英語 (*waseieigo*/made-in-Japan English words).

The first classification refers to words that have been fully integrated into Japanese language system, in terms of phonology, syntax, morphology etc. The second refers to loanwords that are used in Japanese which are not so popularly found in daily use. Such words keep largely appearing in specific domain areas like manufacturing, medicine, finance etc. The third term entails the words that have been created in Japanese originally from English language elements, for example salaryman → *sarariiman* which refers to a white-collar worker in Japanese. (see Irwin, 2011 for a detailed description of these loanword varieties). These categories are further referred to as English Derived Words (EDWs) (Hatanaka & Pannell, 2016). For a linguistic discussion, it can be noted that the former classification is better for understanding and analysis, while for a pedagogical discussion, the latter can be observed to be a convenient one, especially when applying the term for vocabulary materials development or in broader terms, for instructional design. It should be

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acknowledged that no single term is of a higher importance than the other as each of these terms carries its own research value and importance.

Linguistic Adaptations

In the process of adaptation of English loanwords into Japanese language, loanwords undergo phonological changes viz., palatalization, voicing/devoicing etc., the result of which allows for a loanword transformation to become intelligible for native speakers.

Examples: Japanese

- i. bus → *basu*
- ii. comment → *komento*
- iii. performance → *pafomansu*
- iv. special guest → *supesharu gesto*
- v. video clip → *bideo kurippu*

These modifications are beyond phonology and orthography as there can also be further changes at morphological level which are not too difficult to assimilate for a second language learner of Japanese language having a prior knowledge of consonant-vowel syllabary as L1 plays a role in second language learning (Nation, 2008). For instance, unlike in English, a syllable in Japanese does not allow consonant clusters. In words borrowed from English, when English consonant clusters are broken up with vowels, they tend to become too long to pronounce. So, loanwords in Japanese are often abbreviated, either on or after entering Japanese. The changes undergone could be clipping where the last part of the word, usually a syllable or two, get reduced as in examples (i) and (ii). Here, the final and/or the penultimate syllables are clipped as Japanese does not allow the consonant cluster of the fricative and the nasal in "-tion". Further, two clipped words can be combined to form a blended word as in examples (iii) and (iv).

Examples:

- i. collaboration → *korabo*
- ii. television → *terebi*
- iii. smart phone → *sumaho*
- iv. professional wrestling → *puroresu*

Above examples demonstrate the phonological adaptation paving a way for a smooth assimilation of these words into Japanese language.

Syllabification of English Loanwords in Japanese

For a fundamental analysis of syllabification, a sample data of loanwords from English in Japanese has been taken and the patterns of phonological changes have been

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observed. Vowel insertion, insertion of a glide and gemination are the most commonly observed changes. Japanese language does not allow a coda in word-final position. Therefore, we can notice examples of vowel insertion in word final position of the borrowed word, as in Table 1 below. Even while the words in English end with a consonant sound, the borrowed version of these words in Japanese and Telugu end with a vowel sound. For instance, "mask" in English ends with the consonant / k/ while in Japanese it ends with the vowel /u/ to satisfy no-coda condition.

Similarly, instances of glide-insertion in words like "camp" are found. Since, Japanese language does not have the sound /æ/, the glide, /y/ is inserted between the initial consonant and the following vowel, /a/, to get *kyampu*.

We can also observe gemination of consonants when words like "cup" are borrowed. In Japanese, there is gemination of the plosive /p/ to derive the loanword, /kappu/. However, it is interesting to note that while we do not see gemination of nasals and fricatives in Japanese, “gum” /gamu/ and “bus” /basu/.

	English	Japanese
1	mask	<i>masuku</i>
2	soup	<i>suupu</i>
3	camp	<i>kyampu</i>
4	cup	<i>kappu</i>
5	bus	<i>basu</i>
6	image	<i>imeiji</i>
7	milk	<i>miruku</i>
8	lamp	<i>rampu</i>
9	table	<i>teiburu</i>
10	stage	<i>suteiji</i>

Table 1: Syllabification with sample data of Japanese loanwords

Discussion

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The process of nativization of the borrowed words from English into Japanese from both a linguistic and a pedagogical point of view has been a potential area to explore for both language teaching practitioners and instructional designers. From a research point of view, it is intriguing to see these processes of assimilation making it ever challenging for the research community to capture a concise picture of linguistic phenomena related to loanwords in Japanese. Considerable amount of work has been done through research in loanwords at a fundamental level focusing on linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pedagogical issues of loanwords (Kay, 1995; Miyaoka & Tamaoka, 2003; Daulton, 1998, 2008; Irwin 2011; Olah, 2007; Inagawa, 2015). However, no significant work has been done in the area of applying these linguistic analyses in the area of syllabus/instructional design. For a practitioner, capitalizing on these for syllabus and instructional design is both interesting and rewarding for maximizing the results of imparting foreign language vocabulary knowledge at a relatively earlier stage of learning. Previous research has revealed crucial challenges of loanwords related to semantic equivalence of the word use in language of origin with their cognates in the target language. It is found in a study that the lexical representations of English equivalents are not processed by Japanese speakers while using loanwords (Miyaoka & Tamaoka, 2003). Also, in a study related to students' attitudes towards loanwords, Olah noted the reality that "If Japanese have a negative attitude toward loanwords then using them as an aid for teaching spoken English would be difficult" (Olah 2007, pp. 182). However, there has not been any considerable research undertaken to examine the issues of learning Japanese language by experimenting with the loanwords particularly in case of non-native Japanese speakers learning Japanese language. Taking up this research thoroughly can help many Japanese EFL learners and practitioners in discovering and emerging with more effective learning materials and methods.

Conclusion

Considering the present context, the growing motivation to learn English has been a notable one due to growing economic ties of Japan with the outside world. The belief that loanword phonology in Japanese helps learners understand English word phonology at a relatively earlier stage is further strengthened by the fact that there is a major size of lexicon that makes learning English frequent words easier due to largely used English frequent words in Japanese in the form of loanwords or *gairaigo*. Further, considering the vocabulary learning theory of vocabulary chunks (Nation, 2001), English loanwords in Japanese being not only single words but also sometimes multiple words which either have been taken directly from, or made of word compounds from other languages, supports the vocabulary acquisition principle of learning in chunks.

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As the process of borrowing continues and if the learners/teachers of English expand on the prior knowledge of loanwords, they can prove to attain a first set of active vocabulary knowledge in retention and use. Depending on how the word semantically behaves in Japanese, it is believed to be a comfortable language learning experience which helps in acquiring phonological and semantic knowledge of a large set of English vocabulary with a relatively less effort. Both, knowledge of syllables and English use, is believed to contribute to a blended understanding of how English phonological form can be easily broken down to an intelligible syllabic form used in Japanese. Such ability is believed to enhance a Japanese language learners' accuracy of pronunciation as it would call upon the pre-existing phonological systemic knowledge in the learner's active use (Nation, 2001; Meyer, 2008).

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