

## English loanwords in Japanese

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**ABSTRACT:** As a result of the economic, political and cultural influence of Britain and the US, and the emergence of English as an international language, many world languages have absorbed loanwords from English, especially during the twentieth century. Japanese contains thousands of such borrowings, many of which are well-established and in universal use. A domestic phonetic script is available to both represent and distinguish non-native sounds. This paper outlines the historical and cultural contexts of borrowing from English into Japanese, processes of nativization, and functions served by English loanwords. Orthographical, phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic modifications to borrowed words aid their assimilation into the native language. However, linguistic and cultural borrowing is to some extent kept separate from native language and culture, resulting in a Japanese/Western dichotomy in Japanese life and language.

### INTRODUCTION

Contacts with European powers from the sixteenth century resulted in loanwords being borrowed from several Western languages into Japanese. Japan's first contact with a Western country was when Portuguese traders and missionaries came to Japan in the mid-sixteenth century. The European loanwords therefore came from Portuguese. Some have not endured to the present – for example, the former word for glass *bidoro* (from Portuguese 'vidro') became replaced by *garasu* (from Dutch). However, many remain in universal use; examples are *pan* (bread), *tabako* (cigarette), and many words relating to Christianity, which was introduced into Japan by the Portuguese. Later in the sixteenth century, the Spanish were in Japan for a few years, lending a small number of words from their language. The English were in Japan for only ten years (1613–1623) and there are no records of words from English entering the Japanese language during that time. The Western nation which has had longest contact with Japan is Holland. The Dutch arrived in the early seventeenth century, and were allowed to continue trading with Japan even during the period of national seclusion from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, contributing a large number of words to the Japanese vocabulary, many of which remain in use. Examples of such words are *kōhī* (coffee), *bīru* (beer) and many words relating to medicine and science, which the Japanese actively studied from the Dutch during that time.

Japan's isolation from the West was ended when US warships arrived in what is now Tokyo harbour in the mid-nineteenth century. The nation was forced to accept American demands to open trade and diplomatic relations with the US. In subsequent years, Japan signed trade treaties with several Western nations. In 1868, a new government was formed, the Emperor was restored as the symbolic Head of State, and the name of the era changed to 'Meiji' (Enlightened Rule). In the same year, a Charter Oath was issued, declaring that 'knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of Imperial Rule'. The principle of modernizing society while maintaining Japanese values was expressed in the slogan 'Western technology, Japanese spirit'. Japan initiated and

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effectively pursued a policy of rapid modernization that would allow the nation to compete with foreign industrial and military powers on equal terms. The policy of isolation from Western culture had quickly been replaced by the resolution to learn as much as possible from Western countries. Japan began intensive study of contemporary Western science and technology, and related terminologies were constructed or imported (as loan translations or borrowings). The subsequent adoption of many Western customs and aspects of its culture was accompanied and aided by an influx of foreign terms into the everyday language, mainly from German, French and English. Foreign culture was studied from the Western nations which were considered to excel most in certain fields; therefore, medicine was studied from the Germans, commerce from the British, and cuisine and fashion from the French. During the late 1860s and early 1870s, Japan's elite class began to adopt certain aspects of the Western lifestyle, such as in dress, dining and home furnishing. During the Taisho era (1912–1926) Western ideas and philosophy came to be accepted and admired by some of the country's leading intellectuals. The general population also began to gradually add certain aspects of Western culture and customs to their traditional lifestyle.

In the 1930s, a government policy of resistance to imported foreign culture led to the official exclusion of foreign words from the language during the war years. However, during the period of US occupation for the six years after the war, the rebuilding of Japanese society was overseen and greatly influenced by the US. Japan once again made concerted efforts to Westernize. Previously banned words were reinstated in the language, and the 'boom' in adopting foreign culture which became renewed in that period has continued to this day. The study 'Nihon no Sankōtoshō' (Reference Books on Japan'), published by Nihon Toshokan Kyōkai (Japan Association of Libraries) in 1980, showed that over half the 25,000 loanwords in *Kadokawa's Loanword Dictionary* entered the language after World War Two, most of them from English. Since 1945, aided by an expanding mass media, thousands of English loanwords have been absorbed into Japanese.

### LINGUISTIC CHANGE IN BORROWED ITEMS

When elements of a foreign culture and language are 'borrowed' into the culture and language of another, they became adapted to their new cultural and linguistic context. Most English words taken into Japanese show orthographical, phonological, structural or semantic integration into the native linguistic system. Some distinguishing features of these processes of nativization are described below.

#### *Orthographical change*

Early foreign loans were assigned Chinese characters according to their pronunciation and/or meaning. For example, the word for Asia, *asia*, can be written either phonetically using katakana, or with three Chinese characters originally used to represent the syllables *a*, *ji* and *a*. Chinese-derived root words are still available as a resource for creating new terms, in much the same way that English can construct new words from Greek or Latin elements, but it has become more usual to simply transcribe the word into katakana according to its sound. Almost all loanwords are now written in the distinctive Japanese phonetic script, katakana. Examples of borrowed words given in this paper are romanized for convenience, using the 'Hepburn' system of romanization developed by the American doctor and missionary, J. C. Hepburn in the nineteenth century, and now in standard use.

Generally, there is consensus over the katakana spelling of loanwords, though some

words have variant spellings; for example, *iaringu* and *iyaringu* (earring). Sometimes, an English word has given rise to two forms with different meanings, such as *airon* (a pressing iron) and '*aian*' (a golf iron). The transcription of the former is unusual, as it was apparently influenced by the spelling, not the pronunciation, of the English word. It also sometimes happens that two different English words give rise to the same transcription; thus, both 'bath' and 'bus' become *basu*, and 'grammar' and 'glamour' are both transcribed as *guramā*.

The existence of a domestic phonetic script gives an immediate capacity to absorb any foreign word into the Japanese linguistic system, even on a temporary basis. One use of katakana is to show the approximate pronunciation of non-loan foreign words, such as in the study of languages and the transcription of foreigners' names into Japanese. In this case, the borrowed words undergo a simple phonetic modification. However, loanwords which enter the everyday Japanese vocabulary are open to additional types of linguistic change, which are described below. Such change is more liable to occur than with native words, whose pronunciation, meaning and usage have been fixed in the language by centuries of use.

### *Phonological change*

Speakers of one language often have difficulty reproducing the sounds of another language which do not exist in their own. The borrowing of lexical items containing such sounds usually entails adaptation of their pronunciation. An example from English is the anglicization of the 'r' sound in word such as 'restaurant' borrowed from French. Similarly, most foreign words inevitably undergo phonetic change when transcribed into Japanese.

The Japanese sound system is based on a pool of about 100 syllables. Apart from five pure vowel sounds (*aiue* and *o*) and the 'n' sound, all others are consonant-vowel syllables. Borrowed words are adapted to this system. Consonant clusters in English (except those beginning with 'n') are broken up with vowels, as in *tekunosutoresu* (technostress), and English loanwords ending in a consonant other than 'n' must end in a vowel, as in *beddo* (bed). Some vowel and consonant sounds in English which do not exist in Japanese are represented by the nearest Japanese equivalents; for example, 'th' is usually represented by 's' or 'z', and the 'schwa' sound which is so common in English is replaced in Japanese by one of the Japanese vowels, such as 'a'. Examples of phonological changes in English consonants are given in the table below:

<i>Sound change</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Japanese</i>
ti → chi	ticket	chiketto
ji → di	radio	rajio
th → s	thrill	suriru
si → shi	taxi	takushi
zi → ji	limousine	rimujin
fo → ho	headphone	heddohon
v → b	van	ban

However, a remarkable development in modern Japanese is the general and official (1980s) acceptance of new syllables created specifically to enable words of foreign origin to be pronounced closer to their original sound. Most of these have become popularized only during the last few years, and therefore particularly affect the spelling and pronunciation of words which have entered the language recently. Some are rarely used. Examples of loanwords using these special syllables are given in the table below, with the new syllables underlined.

<i>English</i>	<i>Japanese</i>
teacup	<i>tīkappu</i>
disk	<i>dīsuku</i>
chain	<i>chēn</i>
fax	<i>fakkusu</i>

Some loanwords are initials written in Roman script; for example OL (from office + lady – a female clerical worker) and CD. These are always pronounced however, according to the Japanese pronunciation of the English letters, in this case, *ōeru* and *shīdī*. Acronyms, too, are pronounced as Japanese words; for example, GATT is *gatto*.

### *Morphological change – abbreviation and combination*

The need to add extra vowels to English words to accommodate them to the syllabic structure of Japanese results in some of them becoming very long in the borrowing. Loanwords are often abbreviated, either on or after entering the language. Usually this involves backclipping, where the last part of a word is omitted. Blending is also common – the combination of abbreviated words to produce new terms which do not exist in English. Some examples of backclipping and blending are given below.

Backclipping of a word :	akuseru (accel[erator])
Backclipping of second word in phrase :	masukomi (mass commu[nication])
Backclipping of first word in phrase :	omuraisu (ome[let] + rice)
Backclipping of both words in phrase :	pansuto (pan[ty] sto[cking])

Front-clipping is rare; examples are *nisu* ([var]nish), *taoruketto* (towell[ing] + [blan]ket) and *hōmu* ([plat]form).

*New combinations of words.* There are many unique combinations of English words. These neologisms are known in Japanese as *wasei eigo* (literally ‘English which has become Japanese’).

<i>Loanword</i>	<i>Derivation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
pureigaido	play + guide	ticket office
wanpīsu	one + piece	dress
opun kā	open + car	convertible
pēpā tesuto	paper + test	written test
ōdā sutoppu	order + stop	last orders
hai sensu	high + sense	good taste in fashion
chīku dansu	cheek + dance	slow dance
baton tacchi	baton + touch	passing the baton

There are also a large number of loanblends; combinations of words from two different languages.

<i>Loanblend</i>	<i>Derivation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
haburashi	J tooth + brush	toothbrush
rōrupan	roll + Portuguese pāo	bread roll
denshi rēnji	J electronic + range	microwave oven
denwa bokkusu	J telephone + box	telephone box
natsumero	J nostalgic + melo[dy]	nostalgic melody

kābonshi	carbon + J paper	carbon paper
kafusu botan	cuffs + Portuguese botão	cufflinks
asashan	J morning + sham[poo]	morning shampoo
chōnekutai	J butterfly + necktie	bowtie
wagomu	J circle + Dutch gom	rubber band

Many words borrowed from basic English vocabulary occur only in compound phrases, their corresponding Japanese word being used to represent the meanings of the words on their own. Examples are the word parts deriving from man, woman, boy, girl, baby, car, home, air, tree, sun, food, etc. Examples of words incorporating these basic items are; *sararīman* (salaried man), *kyaria ūman* (career woman), *bōifurendo* (boyfriend), *erebētā gāru* (elevator girl), *bebībeddo* (baby bed = cot), *patokā* (patrol car), *hōmusutei* (homestay), *eakon* (air conditioner), *kurisumasu tsurii* (Christmas tree), *sangurasu* (sunglasses) and *fāsuto fūdo* (fast food). The loan item *fūdo*, for example, is never used on its own to refer to food in general.

### Semantic change

Borrowed words inevitably acquire culture-specific meanings, to varying degrees. It would be difficult to find a borrowed word which has retained exactly the same meaning or context of use as its word of origin. Even a straightforward loan such as *konpyūtā* (computer) has acquired a different context –Japanese computers have bilingual Roman/katakana keyboards and a Japanese-language operating system.

The extent of change in meaning varies from a slight change in nuance, to a completely different meaning. Some examples of the latter are given below:

Loan	Derivation	Meaning
manshon	mansion	high-class block of flats
furonto	front [desk]	reception desk
toranpu	trump	playing cards
baikingu	Viking	buffet meal
potto	pot	thermos flask
ekō	echo	acoustics
shīru	seal	sticky label

Some loan phrases have a different meaning from their original, possibly because the component words were taken in separately, and recombined by chance. Examples are *mōningu sābisu* (morning service) which in Japanese means a set breakfast served by a restaurant, *shōto katto* (short cut) which is a short haircut, and *torēningu pantsu* (training pants) which in Japanese refers to sweat pants.

Loanwords may acquire a narrower, more specific, meaning in Japanese than they have in their language of origin, or in their Japanese equivalent term. Examples are *fuirumu* (a roll of film), *ekisutora* (a film extra), *mishin* (only a sewing machine), *tsuna* (tinned, not fresh tuna), and *purin* (referring only to caramel custard pudding). Another very common type of semantic change is where the loanword denotes Western style; the following words refer only to Western-style versions; *resutoran* (restaurant), *kappu* (cup), *tēburu* (table). Foods which have a Japanese name may be called by their foreign-derived name when prepared Western-style; the Japanese for apple is 'ringo', but apple pie is *appuru pai*.

The existence of words borrowed from a variety of European languages sometimes gives rise to a choice of synonyms and collocations. Words from different languages, but with the

same Latin or Germanic root, have sometimes acquired variant meanings, such as *gurasu* (from English glass: a drinking glass) and *garasu* (from Dutch 'glas': glass as a material); *kappu* (from English 'cup': a cup) and *koppu* (from Dutch 'kop': a tumbler).

### *Syntactical change*

Loanwords are easily incorporated into Japanese sentence structure, for example, by affixing Japanese grammatical elements. The paradigm 'this is a pen', used to teach basic English, translates into Japanese as 'kore wa pen desu' (Japanese this+subject particle+pen+Japanese is). Most loanwords are nouns, which do not take inflectional endings. However, many are used as verbs with the addition of Japanese 'suru' (roughly meaning 'to do') as in 'shoppingu suru' (to do some shopping). Loanwords which are adjectives take Japanese adjectival endings, for example *ereganto-na* (elegant), and when used as adverbs take the adverbial ending 'ni', as in *ereganto-ni* (elegantly). Loan words fit into the Japanese syntactical structure as if they were native words, being ascribed particles such as subject and object markers where necessary. An exception is when a whole phrase is borrowed, as in the expression *redī fāsuto* (ladie[s] first) and *man tsū man* (man-to-man, one-to-one). In rare cases, such as in an advertising slogan, a whole sentence can be written using English loanwords in the order they would appear in English.

## CAUSES OF CHANGE IN BORROWING

### *Changes in form and meaning*

Words often take on adapted meanings to serve the needs of a changing society. Loanwords are especially open to modification, both on entering the language, and with time. One reason is that the meaning or usage of a word in its original language may not be fully understood; nor need it be, as loanwords are used without reference to their source words. Another is that, with words of foreign origin, there is no deep cultural motivation to protect their original meanings. The flexibility of form and meaning of loanwords enables them to adapt easily to the structure of the host language, and current trends and needs.

Foreign words written in Japanese script represent one interface between Western and Japanese society. The existence of katakana facilitates the introduction of foreign words, both linguistically and culturally.

### *Linguistically – the practical use of katakana*

Using a domestic phonetic script to transcribe foreign words is clearly more convenient than creating new combinations of Chinese characters, which would require a consensus or official approval before they could come into general use. It gives any individual the ability and freedom to write an English word in native script, without having to assign or learn characters for it, nor know its spelling in the original. Transcription is based on the sound of the English word, and any foreign word can therefore easily be transcribed into katakana. Thus, Japanese can write down a foreigner's name immediately by its sound, and, in foreign-language dictation exercises, students may write what they hear first in katakana, and then transcribe back into the foreign language at leisure, after thinking about the possible meanings of the words and their spellings. Practically, there is no linguistic barrier to the absorption into Japanese of words from other languages.

A rapidly developing society constantly requires new vocabulary. When this is taken pre-

dominantly from other languages, the subtleties of native words can be protected. Modern Japanese society is searching for ways to express itself while maintaining Japanese traditions, no matter what the degree of contact with Western culture. Incomplete linguistic assimilation of foreign loans helps allow Japanese traditional concepts and culture to be maintained.

In many aspects of daily living, Japanese people can freely choose a traditional Japanese or Western lifestyle. An example of this distinct separation of the two cultures is the Japanese home, which normally has both Japanese- and Western-style rooms, clearly defined by their structure and furnishings. A house may be basically Japanese style, but have one or two Western-style rooms; allowing its occupants to enjoy aspects of a Western lifestyle within a basically Japanese living arrangement. There are also homes which are basically Western-style, but have one or two Japanese-style rooms. However, the principle is the same – a clear compartmentalization of the two cultures. The language used to describe the fittings and furnishings of the two types of room is different; Western-style rooms, for example, having curtains (*kāten*), while Japanese-style rooms usually having paper sliding screens, *shoji*, at the window. Similarly, the menu of a Western-style restaurant or coffee shop may be written almost entirely in katakanized loanwords, whilst the menu of a Japanese-style restaurant will consist mainly of native words written in Chinese characters.

#### *Culturally – the Japanese/Western dichotomy*

The katakana symbols derive from parts of Chinese characters, and are immediately recognizable in Japanese writing by their bold and simple lines. Katakana therefore physically separates loanwords from those of native or ancient Chinese origin by representing them in a conspicuously different script. Keeping foreign words compartmentalized in this way allows the language to gain maximum benefit from their addition to the lexical pool, while protecting the native vocabulary from change. The orthographical separation of loanwords thus enables Japan to develop a Western vocabulary to accompany and assist its Westernization, without threatening the basic integrity of the native language.

Although loanwords are adapted to the Japanese sound system, many are recognizable as foreign-derived on hearing, for various reasons; (i) they may contain certain sequences of syllables which are not common, or unknown in Japanese, (ii) the word may contain a larger number of syllables than is common for Japanese words, (iii) the words may contain non-native syllables created specifically to allow foreign words to be rendered in a form nearer to their original (described earlier in this paper, under *Phonological change*).

English loanwords are therefore visually, and to some extent phonologically, recognized as different from the native vocabulary. This ability for loanwords to be so easily contained may be one factor why there has been very little attempt to limit their number.

Westernization which exists alongside the home culture, rather than replace it, allows Japanese people a chance to experience aspects of another culture while still having full access to their own.

#### *Transference of loanwords to Japanese English*

The existence of a large number of loanwords derived from English provides a Japanese person, regardless of English proficiency, with a resource for communicating with English speakers who do not know Japanese. To what extent, however, are these words comprehensible to non-Japanese? The adaptations in pronunciation, form and meaning described

above can be a cause of misunderstanding, or non-understanding, of lexical items. However, there is no doubt that a large corpus of English-derived words within one's own language has the potential to aid communication with English speakers, in a similar way that a native speaker of English can often comprehend words in the romance languages such as French, due to their similarities to Latin or French-derived words in English.

However, the influence of English loanwords in Japanese on understanding or production of English can also be disadvantageous. There is a general awareness amongst Japanese people that English loans differ from their derivative words, but individuals may not be aware in detail as to how. Examples of such information about loanwords are:

- a) whether it is a loanword at all; especially when it is written in Chinese characters, and has a native-like pronunciation
- b) the language the loan comes from
- c) the word the loan comes from
- d) the spelling, pronunciation or meaning of the loan in its original language

As a result, there is often transference from loan usage to English, leading to incorrect expressions in Japanese English. Typical examples are, 'I have to go to my arbeit after classes finish' from the word *arubaito* (German 'Arbeit') meaning a part-time job in Japanese, and 'Do you live in a mansion?' from the loan *manshon* (English 'mansion'), meaning a block of flats in Japanese and 'He works as a cock in that restaurant' from the loan *kokku* (Dutch 'kok') and 'I'll meet you at the front of the hotel' meaning 'at the reception desk', which is *furonto* in Japanese.

#### *The function of English loanwords in the Japanese language*

- a) Many English loanwords name imported things or ideas which did not exist in Japan or Japanese culture previously, such as terminology for Western sports or fashion. The adoption of Western ideas has also been accompanied by loanwords, such as *puraibashi* (privacy), which does not have an equivalent term in Japanese.
- b) Loanwords are often associated with a sophisticated, Western lifestyle, and may be used in place of Japanese words of equivalent meaning because of their foreign appeal. Their modern image often makes them preferable to domestic equivalents, where these exist
- c) The existence of many loanwords which have Japanese equivalents provides an alternative tone of discourse. The use of English loanwords is not only a reflection of modern Japanese culture, but also helps serve it by creating a modern atmosphere. They are especially prevalent in advertising, product names and youth culture.
- d) Loanwords are sometimes used for special effect, especially in writing, where the angular katakana script catches the eye, and the 'foreign' words catch the attention.
- e) In commerce they can be of practical use, not only in advertising and marketing, but also to aid exports; for example, the creation of the name 'Walkman' has, in addition to giving the product a modern image for Japanese people, perhaps also helped with advertising the product overseas.
- f) With rapid international information exchange such as news reports, and competition and cooperation in technology, the availability of a common vocabulary is helpful.
- g) English loans do not have as deep undertones of meaning as native words, and can be used more easily to express sentiments or describe situations which may be difficult to talk about in Japanese. Loanwords can have euphemistic value, such as in phrases containing the word *shirubā* to denote old-age, in expressions such as *shirubā shīto* (silver + seat), a seat for elderly people by the door on public transport.

There is a tendency for the use of loanwords to approach the English usage over time – for example, automatic steering/transmission in a car used to be described by the 'made-in

Japan' term *no kuracchi* (no + clutch), but this term was replaced by *otoma* (from an abbreviation of 'automatic'). Those with a good knowledge of English tend to use some loanwords with meanings more closely approaching those of the original.

English words can easily be borrowed, as they are in the names of companies or products, as with an accompanying katakana reading, customers can read and pronounce them, although often to an approximation of the original pronunciation. Sometimes a loanword and its derivation appear together, such as in a poster headed with the English word 'Bargain Sale' accompanied by *bāgen sēru* in katakana.

New foreign loans quickly become popularized by Japan's highly developed mass media. Japan has a highly literate population, a very large number of weekly and monthly publications, almost everyone has a television, and there is a wide variety of goods in the shops. There are annually published books of telephone directory size explaining terms which have recently entered the language. So new words quickly become known, and easily evolve with changing needs.

Whereas in the Meiji era Western lifestyles were adopted only by the elite, now they are available to everyone, at all levels of society. Whereas English as a foreign language still tends to be spoken mainly by the intellectual elite, the use of loanwords from English is not a class marker. They are used across all society, not as a separate language, but as part of the native language.

The loanword vocabulary, mainly from English, continues to expand and evolve, serving the changing linguistic needs of modern Japanese society, and fulfilling an essential role in the development of contemporary Japanese language and culture.

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