Japanized English, its context and socio-historical background

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Japan not only borrows words from English; it often changes them radically

THE PRESENT study reviews both the historical background to contact between English and Japanese and the periods in which English loans entered the Japanese language. Such loans are particularly significant sociolinguistically because they shed light on the exposure of the Japanese to English since they opened up to the world. Discussing the inflow of such borrowings both provides a background to the many English-derived words currently in daily use in Japanese and makes a broader point about the adoption of loanwords as a cultural process involving both acculturation and deculturation.

Introduction

Japan has taken a great number of ideas from foreign countries with which it has had contact at different stages in its history. The Japanese literary and cultural tradition has been enriched by such contact, which is reflected in a great number of loanwords from various languages which influenced Japanese in different historical periods.

During the fifth century A.D., the Japanese began to study their first foreign language – Chinese – at a point when they had not developed a writing system of their own. Chinese orthography was important because it enabled them to import both Confucianism and Buddhism (which was introduced into Japan via Korea in the 6th century). Some Sanskrit words associated with Buddhism were also introduced at that time through Chinese and Sino-Korean influence (cf. Lewin 1976; Miller 1976; Vos 1963).

The Japanese generally do not regard Chinese loanwords as foreign: such words are not only too numerous for that but are also written in Chinese characters, to which the Japanese have long been accustomed (Kawamoto, 1983:61). This reality was acknowledged in 1905, during a session of the Japan Society in Tokyo, which noted that these words were used by the public at large without the least consciousness of their foreign derivation: cf. L.E. (no full name provided), *The Anglo-Japanese Gazette*, June 1905. Miller (1967) notes that many older layers of loanwords from Korean and other Altaic languages are now all but impossible to separate out from Japanese. There are also loanwords from the indigenous Ainu language (cf. Miller 1967) and a range of Malayo-Polynesian elements which appear to have influenced both Japanese and Korean in the early stages of their development (cf. Murayama 1976).

Contacts with speakers of English date from 1600, when William Adams and Timothy Shoten arrived in Oita prefecture, sailing under the Dutch flag. Adams worked in the service of

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the Japanese court, but there is no information available as to whether he taught English or any traces were left in Japan at that time.

Labeling Japanized English

The different stages in borrowing from various languages into Japanese is summarized in the following list, which is based on data cited in Vos (1963). It indicates that English arrived in effect in three distinct waves, two of them in the twentieth century (before and after the Second World War):

Chinese	From the 5th century A.D. onward
Portuguese	1543–1639
Spanish	1592–1624
English 1	1613–1623
Dutch	1609–1854[1]
English 2	1854–1941
English 3	1945 onward

Considering the distance of Japan from the older English-speaking countries, native speakers of the language might be astonished at the number, form, and pronunciation of English-derived vocabulary in Japanese. Both the widespread (though imperfect) teaching of the language in Japan and developments in communication technology in recent decades are among the reasons for a steady increase in the number and use of English loan-words.

Various sources provide historical data and background regarding the *intrusion* of foreign words into the Japanese language. They include: Matsuda 1986; Miura 1979 and 1985; Pierce 1971; Stanlaw 1987; Takashi 1990; Umegaki 1973; and *The New Crown Japanese-English Dictionary* (Sanseido 1968).

We may note in passing that the label *Japlish* is often applied in some contexts to modern Japanese because of the enormous number of words borrowed in recent decades from English (cf. Pierce, 1971:45). The word *Japlish* is coined on the same principle as *Singlish*, contracting 'Singapore English', and both *Gerlish* and *Deutschlisch*: names for German (*Deutsch*) plus English: cf. also *Engleutsch* (English plus Deutsch)[2], among others.

Stanlaw (1987:93) provides a table depicting the development of Japanese- and English-language contact that includes such geographical and historical varieties as *Yokohama dialect* and *Bamboo English*. He notes that 'ever since the initial contact with English in the nineteenth century..., Japanese have borrowed English loanwords in their vocabulary en masse. This borrowing has been so pervasive and so commonplace that a number of rubrics have been coined to describe it: for example, *Japlish*, *Janglish*, *Japangurishu*, and the more neutral Japanized English.'

One of the earliest sources to mention loanwords in the Japanese context was an article by 'L.E.' in the June 1905 edition of the *Anglo-Japanese Gazette*, which reports on a session of the Japan Society at which a paper was presented by Mr K. Takahashi, on the affinity of the languages of Japan, China, and Korea. In the present writer's opinion this was the best interpretation of the subject at that time. An interesting feature of the Takahashi paper was the inclusion of only a few words from other languages (including mainly Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish items, with few examples from French and English). According to Takahashi, such imports were too new to be fully assimilated by the Japanese, and therefore remain *prima facie* foreign words (L.E., 1905:120).

Another early source was a paper by Clement (1930) who, when reporting on educational trends in Japan, mentioned that Professor Sanki Ichikawa of the Imperial University in Tokyo had made a study of the influence of English on Japanese and published his results in 1928 under the following thematic headings:

1 Food and Drink
2 Clothing and Toilet
3 Dwellings and Building
4 Sports and Games
5 School Life
6 Political and Social
7 Family and Religion
8 Literature and Art
9 Science
10 Mechanics and Engineering
11 Commerce and Finance
12 Nautical and Miscellaneous

(Clement 1930:179–180).

According to Miller (1967), Ichikawa identified 1,400 English loanwords in Japanese, of which over 200 were listed under *Sports and Games* (Clement 1930:180). Miller further notes that only two years later in 1930 another (unnamed) Japanese researcher found 5,000 loanwords from English and called them, collectively, *Japanized English*. He also noted that English became a vehicle for the modernisation of Japan and a source of linguistic innovation

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TABLE 1: Some representative English loanwords in Japanese

The Early Tokugawa Period (1613–1624)	The English of this period has left no traces in Japanese
The Meiji Era (1868–1912)	*haikara* 'high collar' (used of someone who follows Western style and customs); *suteshon* 'station'
The Taisho Era (1912–1926)	*mobo** 'modern boy'; *moga** 'modern girl'
Showa Era 1926–1989	*piketto* 'picket'; *defure** 'deflation' (a short form equivalent to 'deflay', *r* typically replacing *l*)
Before World War II	*apato** 'apartment, flat; apart'; *erebeta* 'elevator'; *nekutai* 'necktie'; *rajio* 'radio'
After World War II	*nyufeisu** 'new face' (a new person somewhere); *MP* 'military police'; *ofurimito* 'off limits'; *sandoichiman** 'sandwich man'; *wan man ka** 'one man car' (a streetcar with a driver but no conductor);
In more recent times	*hassuru** 'hustle' (meaning 'to play a game aggressively'); *hott rain* 'hot-line'; *sutorikingu* 'streaking'; *DK** dining-kitchen
Technology	*taipuraita* 'typewriter'; *mini-con** 'mini-computer'; *poke-kon** 'pocket computer'; *paso-kon** 'personal computer'; *mai-kon** 'micro-computer'; *ohu-kon** 'office computer'; *oo-ee** ('OA: office automation'); *haado-uea* 'hardware'; *puroguramu* 'program'

[cf. Kitahara (1983); Matsuda (1986; 1991)[3]; Umegaki (1973), and *Business Japan* February 1990]

during the period known as the Meiji Restoration, and, since that time, was the major donor of words, often replacing loanwords previously imported into Japanese from other languages (Miller 1967).

Matsuda (1986) provides us with a number of avowedly 'fashionable' English loanwords in different historical periods, indicating how they have been used in different fields in their Japanized forms. Table 1 provides some examples of English words used in Japanese at various historical points. The asterisk (*) marks items which are in effect 'made in Japan' English; either distinctively Japanese shortened forms or forms that do not derive from standard expressions in English.

Characteristics of English loanwords in Japanese

Foreign loanwords are usually recognisable because they are written in the katakana script and can therefore be placed according to grammatical function within Japanese syntax. Most English loanwords are nouns, but some adjectives have been adopted. These usually take the suffix *-na* as in *akademiku-na* ('academic') and *aguresshibu-na* ('aggressive'): cf. Matsuda (1986:56). Verbs can be created by adding the Japanese suffix *-suru* to some English loanwords. Ashworth & Lincoln (1973) and Matsuda (1986) give examples of forming verbs from foreign loanwords by adding *-ru*: for example, the loanword *demo* ('demonstration') plus *-ru* becoming *demoru* ('to demonstrate').

Ashworth and Lincoln (1973) claimed that the pattern of forming verbs with the suffix *-ru* from foreign loanwords developed only in spoken language and had not been accepted in writing. However, according to Matsuda, some rather informal borrowed words, such as *ajiru* ('to agitate') and *demoru* ('to demonstrate') can be used in written form by combining the katakana and hiragana syllabary scripts, and are not regarded as slang[4].

An interesting feature of the incorporation of English loanwords into Japanese is that the opposition to it is not as strong as in some other countries (e.g. France, Canada (in Quebec), and Indonesia). However, new loanwords in Japan have to be approved by the Ministry of Education for official use (cf. Hoffer 1980), which bases its opinion on guidelines proposed by the Japanese Language Council in 1954 (cf. Loveday 1996).

From time to time, the issue of the suitability of foreign words as they are used by some Japanese is debated in the press, and surveys on this subject are often carried out by the press or public broadcasting (NHK). A unique

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method is sometimes used to decide on the suitability of a given loanword or acronym in daily Japanese use. For instance, *BG* for 'business girl' was banned from being used on the NHK television/radio stations in 1983, due to the fact that it could have been understood by some as a woman working in a bar or as a prostitute (cf. Sonoda 1983). In response to this decision, the woman's weekly magazine *Josei-Jishin* asked the readers to choose a new acronym for the *BG*. A majority of women voted for the widely-used *OL* ('office lady') as their preferred alternative (*Understanding Japan*, May 1992, vol.1, no.2).

The above example suggests that some of the processes involved in the acceptability of foreign terms are made at a societal level in a rather conscious way, in order to make sure that a foreign lexical item fits appropriate local cultural behaviour. Sociolinguistially, this is a good example of elaboration that takes people's attitudes into account.

With regard to the use of acronyms (such as *ILO* for 'International Labor Organization' and *PKO* for 'peace-keeping operation'), a political dispute surfaced on June 29, 1992. The Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa was reprimanded by the party vice-president Shin Kanemaru for using the acronym *PKO* in front of Japanese people. Reportedly, Kanemaru said 'Government bureaucrats use English for everything. But not all of us are as smart as you are' (*Japan Times*, July 12, 1992: 2). The next day, the Chief Cabinet Secretary declared that the government would find suitable Japanese translations for the English acronyms.

In 1988, NHK conducted a survey on the acceptance of foreign words. They surveyed 2,004 people living within 50 km of Tokyo and found that the acceptance of foreign words was most visible among the younger group of respondents (20–24 years old). Of the respondents, 50% claimed that foreign words were beneficial because they created new images and 33% said that the loanwords could convey subtle nuances which were impossible to express by other means (I. M., *The Japan Times*, 20 Sep 88).

Loanwords as linguistic pollution

An interesting experiment with reference to the use of loanwords was carried out by Morris (1970) while attending a Japanese literary symposium. He set himself the task of counting the number of loanwords used in participants' speeches in Japanese. He gave the most negative rating to a Japanese professor of literature who used one foreign word per every six lines. Second came a foreign scholar who had lived in Japan for some 30 years, with a foreign loanword every nine lines. Morris claimed that it is unfortunate that even literary figures 'pollute' the Japanese language with foreign words. Ironically, he divided *Japlish* into a standard variety and a variety which contributed to 'the linguistic pollution' of Japanese (Figure 2). For him, 'Standard Japlish' was a variety which introduced new concepts or ideas not available in the Japanese language. Loanwords, he considered, should not be used to replace native Japanese words. Indeed, he supplied a list of loanwords that had been used during the conference with their legitimate Japanese equivalents.

> Thus, foreign loanwords may connote prestige and their use may vary considerably between speakers due to different degrees of exposure to English: 'Today the elite of the Japanese society writes under the heavy English lexical and stylistic influence, whether conscious or not: particularly the academics' rigid and formal style reminds us of translations of British and American writings' (Matsuda, 1986:78).

Since the beginning of the Meiji period, English books (works of both literature and grammar) have been successively translated into Japanese, influencing the language in various ways. Some well-known Japanese novelists, such as Soseki Natsume (1867–1916)[5],

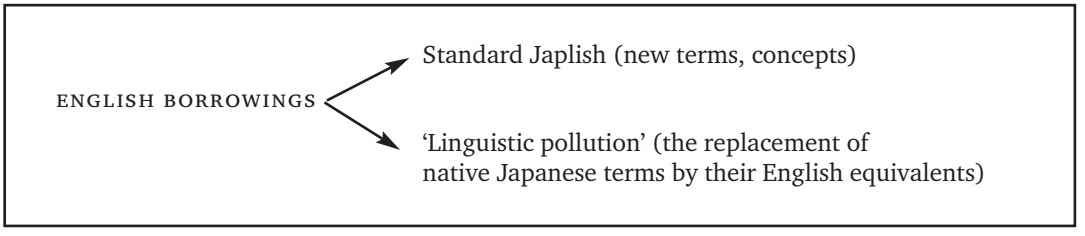

Figure 1

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Junichiro Tanizaki (1886–1965), and Naoya Shiga (1883–1971) were influenced by Western-style writing (cf. Matsuda 1986: *Japan Reports*, Jan/Feb 1986, 20:1). Natsume was himself an English teacher influenced by both George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson. One of his novels, *Kokoro*, contains as many as ninety adjectival clauses which were rather unusual for Japanese novels of the time (Inui 1974, cited in Matsuda 1986:74; see also Kimura 1957, Matsui 1975, and Rayan 1976:264).

Tanizaki, for instance, in 1934 criticised his own use of personal pronouns in the novel *Kojin* (1920), as his intention was to write sentences resembling those of English writing, which was popular at that time in Japan. According to Sanki Ichikawa (1966), 'the too frequent employment of personal pronouns… is foreign to the Japanese idiom and it must be looked upon as a result of English studies' (as cited in Matsuda 1986:72).

Nowadays, the spread of popular culture by means of songs and movies is probably one of the greatest contributing sources for both linguistic innovations and novel behaviour. In this regard, a good example is Vlamidir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955), which was made into a movie. Despite the fact that most Japanese have probably never heard of Nabokov, the movie itself contributed to the 'Lolita complex' and the 'Lolita look' – in which young women dress themselves up using white socks, white aprons and white lacy bonnets, in order to emphasized their youth. In Japanese, this is called *Roricon Fashion,* a blend created from *Rorita conpulekkusu* ['Lolita complex']: two words which gave culturally specific meaning to both fashion and behaviour.

In this regard, it is not the English language which manipulates the Japanese cultural context, but Japanese speakers who manipulate and accommodate English and at the same time acculturate English-derived vocabulary: *roricon,* for instance, would not be understood by an English speaker despite the fact that the blend/coinage is the product of two words used in English. In effect, all such English words go through a process of *deculturisation* before they become loanwords in Japanese. The semantic change in English words can only be understood in relation to the Japanese cultural context – otherwise they have no meaning for English-speaking people.

It can certainly be said that the vocabulary of English has established itself within the Japanese language and that there is a multiplicity of ways in which English influences the Japanese lexicon. Whether the outcome is called *Jangrish/Janglish*, *Japangurishu*, *Japlish*, or *Enganese* (cf. Seward 1983), '[i]t is irrelevant to argue whether such things are misuses of English or whether they pose a threat to Japanese; they are now simply part of the Japanese language' (Professor Keifuku Ueno, cited in the *Asahi Shimbun* 1972:27).

All these terms in a sense symbolise both the modernisation of the Japanese linguistic system and Japan's technological achievements. Indeed, some authorities claim that the English language was the only means of modernisation in Japan, as the shaping of Japanese technical/technological terminology has been entirely based on adopting and integrating English expressions (cf. *hita* 'heater') or on coining internal expressions on the basis of English words (as with *wapuro*, an abbreviation of 'word processor' (Haarmann 1989:16).

According to Neustupny (1983) there has been a clear reason for such coinages: the Japanese written language 'had to liberate itself from its dependence on classical Chinese, and the only way to modernise was in affiliation with the languages of the developed West' (p. 23). Such modernisation did not however necessarily mean the *Westernization* of Japanese culture (Haarmann 1989) or the *Europeanization* of Japanese thought processes (Tsurumi 1986).

At this point it should however be noted that none of the previously mentioned terms for *Japanized English* serve to label any sort of spoken or written English dialect or variety. According to Jorden and Noda (1987:70), 'a loanword – regardless of its origin – is now Japanese and both its Japanese pronunciation and its meaning must be mastered'. One should never assume therefore that one can understand a Japanese borrowing from English on the basis of the meaning of the English original.

The validity of Jorden and Noda's claim can be illustrated by reference to a Japan Airlines (JAL) advertisement in *TIME Magazine* (31 Aug 92), in which there is an example of miscommunication due to different interpretations of the meaning of a loanword by a Japanese and an English-speaking person. The advertisement talks about the Maxwell Trading company, which had recently opened an office in Tokyo. The interior design of the office was

intended to combine the characteristics of East and West. During the reception, Maxwell's Japanese trading partner, a Mr Shimatsu, went up to the American representative and said *Totemo muudii desu*, which meant that the office was very 'moody'. Taken aback, the representative asked Mr Shimatsu whether the colour of the office was making *him* moody? Mr Shimatsu replied that everything was *fine* – and *muudii*. However, the American said, 'But, you know, *moody* means "not happy, downcast".' Mr Shimatsu nearly choked on his coffee, and said: 'I did not mean that! In Japan, *muudii* means pleasant and cosy.'[6]

Matsuda (1986) rightly points out that the status of English as an international language favours the influx of English words into Japanese. Deformation in, and misuse of, English loanwords might cause occasional misunderstanding between foreigners and Japanese, but even so English loanwords greatly contribute to both cross-cultural communication and making Japanese more vivid (p. 79).

It should also be noted here that the constant use of English by the Japanese over the last one hundred and thirty-five years has reinforced the status of English as an international language. Loveday (1986) notes:

> The sociocultural motivation for this contact is highly complex and must also relate to the symbolic value of English ..., its international employment for scientific, academic and commercial purposes, Japanese growing bilingualism in English, internal social desires concerning image and levels of sophistication that seem to be satisfied through an appeal to English linguistic resources (p. 316).

Conclusion

Regardless of the avowed 'pollution' of Japanese by English, we can see that the role of English in Japan is manifold. In the early stages of modernisation, during the Meiji period, the Japanese imported Western ideas through the intensive study of English, which became the official second language as early as 1888, being taught in all schools (Redman, 1929:190). With *modernisation* came *Westernisation* which, after the Second World War, became *Americanization*, all of which has been marked by foreign concepts embodied in foreign loanwords.

English was perceived by many influential Japanese as the key language of new ideas, a state of affairs already noted by Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1859[7]. In his autobiography he wrote: 'As certain as day, English was to be the most useful language of the future. I realized that a man would have to be able to read and converse in English to be recognized as a scholar in Western subjects in the coming time'(Fukuzawa 1934/1960:98).

In the post-war period, English not only influenced Japan but had almost the same impact on other countries, both industrialised and developing. However, the reaction in other countries to English penetration into the vocabulary of the national language was often apprehension, as in the case of both France and Indonesia.

Nowadays, Japanese, German, French, Danish, and Polish are among the most English-affected languages in the world, a fact which endorses its *internationality*. In the case of Japan, however, I would prefer to call the outcome *Japanized English* rather than *Anglicized Japanese*, as it is *English* which is being transformed in Japan – not the reverse. ■

Notes

1 The Dutch were also responsible for the introduction of French military terms, as they trained military personnel before the Meiji era. Nowadays, however, most French loanwords relate to fashion, food, and art (cf. Loveday 1996).
2 Such terms are often contentious, being used to represent both the hybridizing outcome of languages in contact, and (often pejoratively) the way in which the Japanese, French, Germans, and others speak English. The term *Singlish* is particularly problematic because Singapore is a city-state, not a language.
3 Matsuda, Y. (1991), *Nichi Eigo no Koryu* ['Crossover of Japanese and English']. Kenkysha.Tokyo.
4 Sometimes the suffix *-ru* in a foreign loan could be confusing to a learner of Japanese, as to whether it represents a verb. A case in point is the noun *sadoru*, a loanword version of English *saddle* (as the seat on a bicycle, but not a saddle for a horse, for which the traditional Japanese word is *kura* (Kimura 1985).
5 Natsume Soseki was in charge of the Japanese language examinations at the University of Glasgow in Scotland in 1900–1902.
6 A good source to read on the semantic changes of English loanwords in Japanese is Miura (1985).
7 In 1858, Fukuzawa founded the School for Western/European Studies where English was the language of instruction. In 1890, the School became Keio University.

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