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A STUDY OF JAPANESE NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE
SPEAKERS' PERCEPTION OF *GAIRAIGO* AND THE
FUTURE OF *GAIRAIGO* IN THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with language change in Japanese in relation to loanwords. Japan has a tradition of borrowing from other languages, in particular, from the Chinese language. This tradition continues to the present day with borrowing from Western languages. This thesis first looks at the historical background of loanwords in Japanese. It then sets out to ascertain what the current perceptions are of both native speakers of Japanese and non-native speakers of Japanese in regard to *gairaigo* from the English language, and what they predict the future holds for *gairaigo* from the English language in Japanese.

The Japanese will use English more as they become increasingly reliant on international trade due to the downturn in the Japanese economy. This thesis will investigate any effect that *gairaigo* from English might have on Japanese language acquisition by non-native speakers, and determine what effect *gairaigo* have on native Japanese speakers and their acquisition of English as a second language. It is suggested in this thesis that *gairaigo* in Japanese that have come from English will in future be used as English by the Japanese. In other words, this thesis suggests that one main purpose of *gairaigo* may be to facilitate the acquisition of English as a second language by native Japanese speakers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The following is a study of loanwords in the Japanese language, in particular, loanwords coming from the English language. It investigates how a historical tradition of borrowing words has contributed to language change in Japan. A focus of this study is on the methods the Japanese have used to facilitate the borrowing of words, and what the native Japanese speakers' opinions are on loanwords in Japanese. Another focus is the perceptions that non-native Japanese speakers have of loanwords, and on both groups' predictions of what the future of loanwords might be in the Japanese language. This thesis concentrates mainly on loans from the English language, coming mainly from either the United States of America or from the United Kingdom. However, in order to understand the process of borrowing from English, it is necessary to look at the history of loanwords in Japanese as a whole. Therefore, the first section of this thesis deals with the history of loans that have come from the Chinese language, what was involved in this process, and how the experience of borrowing words from the Chinese language relates to the borrowing of words from the English language. It will become apparent to the reader that the recent influx of borrowed words coming from the English language, and the methodology behind borrowing words, is just part of an ongoing historical process of language change in Japan.

Chapter 2 will present a literature review, investigating what previous research has

been done on loanwords in Japanese. This chapter is divided into nine sections. Section 1 is the history of loans that have come from the Chinese language, dating from the borrowing of the written language that took place around the 4th century A.D. Section 2 looks at the spoken language and how loanwords have been accommodated into spoken Japanese. This section also deals with the development of the Japanese writing system and how loanwords were at the very core of this development. It then deals with problems separating older loans from Japanese native words. Section 3 looks at Japanese grammatical features, and examines the aspects of the Japanese language that have facilitated the ease of borrowing from other languages. Section 4 deals with the *katakana* script, and Section 5 considers recent Japanese history, specifically the Meiji Restoration, and the influence it has had on loanwords, as well as the reasons behind this. Section 6 examines loanwords that come from languages other than Chinese or English. This section includes discussion on what the other languages are that the Japanese have borrowed from, what types of words have been borrowed, and what percentage of words in present day Japanese come from each language.

Section 7 investigates the possibility of loanwords having an influence on the Japanese people's acquisition of English as a second or foreign language. Section 8 deals with English loanwords as they appear in different types of popular culture, and how they feature in different sports and information technology. Section 9 presents the amount of loanwords present in contemporary Japanese language, and information concerning survey results is shown, as well as the percentage of loanword usage concerning different types of media. This section also provides a

literature review of other surveys that were conducted relating to *gairaigo*.

Chapter 3 contains the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the results of the first survey, and Chapter 5 the results of the second survey. Chapter 6 compares the results of similar questions in the two surveys, and outlines the differences in opinion concerning *gairaigo* between the Japanese native speaker and the non-native speaker of Japanese. Chapter 7 contains the conclusions and implications of this study.

1.1 Motivations for the study

In contemporary urban Japan, you do not have to look far to find evidence of the strong influence the English language has had on modern Japanese. Café-goers in Tokyo can be observed ordering a ロイヤルミルクテイ *royarumirukutei* (royal milk tea) or a バナナセーキ *banana seeki* (banana shake). Advertising billboards, shop signs, magazines, and television commercials increasingly are mixing English words and phrases into their Japanese, either written in the Japanese phonetic *katakana* script, or – as commonly seems to be the case more and more these days – directly using the Roman alphabet, in their usual English form. It is not difficult to understand the modern Japanese person's attraction to English – it is, after all, the language spoken in the United States, a country that has loomed large in the cultural landscape of Japan, and indeed the rest of the world, in the last 50 years. It is also the *de facto* language of international commerce, and although not the most widely-spoken language in the world (that

honour goes to Mandarin, with over one billion speakers), it is the world's most popular second language (The Learning Web 1999-2000). Therefore, English is the language that people from different countries are most likely to have in common either as a first or a second language. As international links become increasingly important, from both a commercial and cultural standpoint, it is not surprising that in Japan, as in other parts of the non-English speaking world, English is very hard to ignore.

However, amongst the Japanese, there appears to be something more than this going on – borrowed words from English are being used in place of perfectly good Japanese equivalents. Why would the Tokyo café-goer describe their choice of drink as a ミルクテイ (milk tea) when perfectly good Japanese words already exist for milk and tea? Or, for more traditional foods, use *raisu* ライス for rice or *tsuna* ツナ and *shichikin* シチキン for tunafish? *Gairaigo* use in Japan continues to increase, yet more English words and phrases are constantly being introduced into Japanese - not, for the most part, because Japanese is lacking in equivalent words and phrases, but seemingly for their own sake. Are the Japanese people deliberately trying to transform their language into something closer to English? How does the average Japanese person feel about this torrent of new words being poured into the national lexicon?

In recent years, the Japanese Government has strongly encouraged the teaching of English at both primary and secondary school levels. Yet, despite this, and despite the fact that urban Japanese are bombarded with English words and phrases on a

daily basis, the level of facility with English amongst the Japanese public still appears to be fairly low, particularly with regard to speaking ability and aural comprehension. However, at the same time Japanese are being exposed to more and more English, both in the form of *gairaigo* and in its native form. Does the average Japanese person really understand all these new words entering the language? How is it that a Japanese person can be fluent in *gairaigo* use and yet be unable to communicate to any useful degree in English? Do they recognize these new words as being English in origin, or is that connection not being made? What are the links between *gairaigo* use and the acquisition of English as a second language, and are the Japanese public aware of any connections that may exist in that respect? Could this phenomenal influx of new *gairaigo* be somehow related to the recent drive to increase the level of English facility amongst the general public?

These were the questions that motivated the research underpinning this thesis. Additionally, I was interested in investigating the perspective of others who, like myself, were witnessing this phenomenon from the standpoint of being a speaker of Japanese as a second language – of the non-native Japanese speaker. How were they coping with these rapid upheavals in the language? Assuming that most speakers of Japanese as a second language will possess at least a reasonable level of fluency with English already, does the large amount of English-derived words in modern Japanese facilitate Japanese acquisition, or does it merely serve to confuse the issue? What is their general opinion of the anglicisation of Japanese? From an outsider's perspective, are the Japanese really serving their own best

interests with all this new *gairaigo*, or is it disfiguring the language?

Regarding the history of borrowing words in the Japanese language, I was interested to see what insight could be gained into this phenomenon through the study of what has happened in the past, in particular, with regard to the legacy of borrowed words from Chinese. The influence that Chinese has had on Japanese in the past is, in many respects comparable to the influence that English is exerting at present. This legacy of Chinese influence has, in many ways, enriched the Japanese language, but it has also produced in Japanese a convoluted writing system, infamous for its difficulty and complexity, which in many ways was not at all complimentary to the language at all. Now the language is once again in rapid transition, where will it end up this time? Is the Japanese language on the right track, or is it headed for a train wreck? What does the future hold for Japanese? For *gairaigo*? For the English language in Japan? This is what I set out to investigate.

Upon researching this subject, it soon became apparent that while there is a great deal of literature devoted to the study of *gairaigo* in Japanese, these studies often concentrate on the historical adoption and development of *gairaigo*, and on the amount of *gairaigo* in the language, rather than giving information about the Japanese native speakers' present view on *gairaigo*. Similarly, there has been little research into what non-native speakers of Japanese think of *gairaigo* in Japanese, and what effect it has on their acquisition of Japanese as a foreign language. Therefore, it was necessary to research this subject directly, and so, two surveys

were created for the purpose of gaining an insight into the perception that both native and non-native speakers of Japanese have concerning *gairaigo*.

Impetus to conduct the two surveys arose firstly from a general curiosity concerning the differences between how Japanese native speakers perceive *gairaigo* and how non-native speakers of Japanese perceive it. The realization that the Japanese themselves could often not understand *gairaigo* raised the question of how much value *gairaigo* had in the language, and why it is so popular. Motivation to find out more about perceptions concerning *gairaigo* led to an interest in the predictions of Japanese language speakers on the future of *gairaigo* in Japanese. Both areas seemed to have been neglected in previous research on *gairaigo*.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it examines two groups of Japanese language speakers. It investigates both Japanese native speakers and non-native speakers on their cognizance of *gairaigo*. This study then compares and contrasts the results of the surveys, and in analyzing the results establishes strong patterns that underline the contrariety in *gairaigo* use between different groups of speakers.

During the researching of this thesis, the central inference that I was able to make, namely, that *gairaigo* is being used as a medium for the Japanese to learn English as a second language, is also, I believe, of special importance. It is, to the best of

my knowledge, the first time that this hypothesis has been formally proposed, however, the large amount of research data I was able to collect at first hand has supplied plenty of evidence on which to build a case for this proposition. The study also includes estimates on the feasibility of this occurring, and highlights arguments relevant to this estimation. The implications of this, as discussed in the concluding section of this thesis, are of special significance not only to teachers of Japanese as a foreign language but also to teachers of English as a second language who have Japanese students.

1.3 Terminology

Loanwords other than the Sino-Japanese loans are called *gairaigo*, which has the literal meaning of “foreign coming words”. This includes words originating in Korean, Ainu¹, Thai, Indonesian etc, and includes words that have been created that are hybrid words from two different languages. There are two terms used for native Japanese words, these are *wago* “Japanese Words” or *Yamato-kotoba* “Yamato Words”, Yamato being the ancient word for Japan. The term *kango* “Chinese words” is used for loanwords that originated in China. Every other word that has been borrowed from any other country falls under the category of *gairaigo* “foreign coming words”. This thesis concentrates on *gairaigo* borrowed from the English language, and survey respondents were required to answer

¹ Although Ainu is also native to Japan, being the language of Japan’s earliest inhabitants, and therefore not geographically foreign, it is considered here to be an external influence on the language referred to as “Japanese”.

questions about *gairaigo* from only the English language. The Hepburn system of romanization of Japanese words is adopted in this thesis.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions in this thesis are as follows; for native speakers of Japanese;

- (1) Does *gairaigo* from English have a positive effect on the language and does it have a good image?
- (2) Does the amount of *gairaigo* in the Japanese language weaken the language or have a negative effect on the Japanese language?
- (3) Does your knowledge *gairaigo* have a positive effect on your understanding of English as a second language?
- (4) What is the future of *gairaigo* in the Japanese language?

The three research questions for non-native speakers of Japanese are;

- (1) What is your general level of understanding of *gairaigo* in the Japanese language?
- (2) Does the existence of *gairaigo* in the Japanese language effect your Japanese language comprehension?
- (3) What is the future of *gairaigo* in the Japanese language?