

# ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN JAPANESE AS A BRIDGE TO VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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## Introduction

The English language historically has made extensive use of vocabulary absorption from other languages, mainly European languages. However, in the post-World War II era, English has become the predominant source of vocabulary adoption by other languages. Like English, the Japanese language has developed over time through contact with other languages and absorption of vocabulary from foreign sources. Until contact with the West, the most significant influence on the Japanese language came from Chinese, whose ideographic script *kanji* (Chinese characters) had been adopted into the language. Two syllabic scripts, *hiragana* and *katakana*, coincide with *kanji* to form the writing system of Japanese. Though no genealogical relationship with Chinese exists, the Japanese language contains numerous words of Chinese origin. Since the opening of the country to the West in the nineteenth century, Japanese society and culture have opened their gates to an inundation of Western influence. The Japanese language is no exception to this inflow of Western influence, as Japanese has borrowed a prolific amount of words from outside sources, mainly English. After World War II, the bulk of loanwords, referred to as *gairaigo* in Japanese, comes from English. This phenomenon has come about as a result of the American cultural influence on Japan. The pace of borrowing words from other languages has seen a rapid rise in recent years. Sanseido's 1991 edition of *Concise Dictionary of Foreign Words* contained 33,500 entries of loanwords, whereas its 2010 edition listed over 56,300 foreign words in the Japanese language. In the short span of two decades, more than 20,000 words, mostly English loanwords, were added to the repertoire of foreign borrowings into Japanese.

With the onset of globalization and Internet communication, the influx of foreign words into the Japanese language continues to grow at a rapid pace. Modern Japanese has an extensive lexicon of English words, many of which include commonly

used English words, computer and technology related terms, and academic vocabulary. As such, these English loanwords provide a valuable source and useful tool for Japanese learners of English. Nonetheless, there are some pitfalls in blindly accepting English loanwords in Japanese as simply English, because transformations such as phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactical change can occur when an English word enters the Japanese language (Kay, 1995). Some scholars argue that English loanwords hinder the ability of Japanese people in acquiring English skills. However, this is where the role of English language teaching comes in. Using English loanwords in Japanese as a source of vocabulary building exercise, English language teachers can fill in the gap by clarifying any differences between a loanword and its actual English counterpart, thereby enhancing English vocabulary acquisition for Japanese learners. This paper examines the development, functions, adaptations and effects of English loanwords in Japanese and purports that by recognizing and understanding these influencing factors, the Japanese lexicon of English cognate words can be approached as an effective tool in English language acquisition.

### **Development of English Loanwords in Japanese**

Japan's first contact with Western languages occurred in the mid-sixteenth century through Portuguese traders and missionaries. Portuguese words related to Christianity, Western science, technology and products entered the Japanese language during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Words such as *kuristo* (Christ), *Iesu* (Jesus), *tempura* (deep-fried seafood/vegetables) *tabako* (tobacco/cigarette) and *pan* (bread) are derived from Portuguese. Though there was a short presence of English traders in Japan in the early seventeenth century, the influence of English words on the Japanese language was sparse and minimal (Cannon, 1996). The western country with the longest contact with pre-modern Japan was Holland. The Dutch entered Japan in the early seventeenth century and remained even during Japan's period of national isolation from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. After Japan closed off its ports to Western traders, the Dutch continued to trade with Japan through the port of Nagasaki and became Japan's main source of information about Western culture and science. A new school of thought known as *rangaku* (Dutch Learning) developed, through which Japanese scholars studied European medicine, astronomy, botany and chemistry from Dutch theoretical and scientific texts (Rosenhouse and Kowner, 2008). Many of Dutch vocabulary borrowings into the Japanese language are still used today, such as *biiru* (beer), *koohii* (coffee), *pistoru*

(pistol), *mesu* (scalpel) and *orugooru* (music box).

The borrowing of English words into the Japanese language began in the nineteenth century. English influence on the Japanese language began to take hold after Japan was forced to reopen its ports with the arrival of US warships in 1854, thus bringing its era of isolation from the West to an end. Japan succumbed to the demands of the American military to establish trade and diplomatic relations with the US. The forced opening of the country showed the weakness of the Tokugawa shogunate and eventually led to its overthrow. In 1868, the Meiji Period was ushered in with the restoration of the Emperor as the nation's head of state. Japan then embarked on a path of Westernization and modernization. The Meiji government promoted modernization to catch up with the West and stand on equal level with Western nations in industrial and military might. Nonetheless, many proponents of modernization emphasized the concept of "Japanese spirit and Western technology." The study and adoption of Western science and technology were seen as bringing Japan into the modern world. In the process of modernization, many new words and terminologies for Western customs and concepts were created or adopted into the Japanese lexicon. Revitalization of Western learning prompted Japan to adopt aspects of Western culture, through which foreign words from German, French and English entered the Japanese language. "Meanwhile, the growing volume of intercultural contacts and international commerce enhanced still more the importance of English. Most Japanese leaders identified with the goals of modernization, and chose English as a means to achieve their goal." (Rosenhouse and Kowner, 2008)

Western ideas and philosophies and their terminologies continued to exert influence on Japanese culture during the Taisho Period (1912-1926) and the early Showa Period (1926-1941). During World War II (1941-1945), the Japanese government officially banned the use of English. Many of the English loanwords that had become part of everyday Japanese were replaced with Japanese words in *kanji*. The removal of foreign words from Japanese was short-lived. With Japan's surrender at the end of World War II and the ensuing US occupation period (1945-1952), the use of English loanwords was revived. With the growing influence of American culture on Japanese society in the postwar era, the pace and influx of English loanwords into Japanese have accelerated with relative ease. Globalization, mass media and technological advances in communication have further saturated foreign words, mainly English, into

the Japanese lexicon. At present, English represents the overwhelming majority of loanwords in Japanese.

### Transcription of English Loanwords

Besides Chinese ideograms, *kanji*, Japanese has two phonetic syllabaries, called *hiragana* and *katakana*. It is the *katakana* syllabary that is used to represent foreign loanwords of non-Sinitic origin. The *katakana* script allows foreign loanwords to be transcribed and integrated into Japanese and distinguishes adopted foreign vocabulary from words of native Japanese *wago* and Chinese origin, *kango*. In addition, the Roman alphabet *romaji* can also be used for foreign loanwords, but the spelling reflects the sound of the *katakana* transcription. The Roman alphabet is also used in acronyms and company names. Nonetheless, *katakana* is the script of choice for representing foreign loanwords and this phonetic script makes it possible for foreign words to be conveniently absorbed into the Japanese vocabulary. Also, the distinctive angular characteristic of this script stands out, making it easy to identify foreign loanwords in Japanese. Besides representing foreign loanwords, *katakana* is also used for transcribing non-Japanese proper names and onomatopoeic vocabulary. In 1934, Japan's Ministry of Education established the National Language Council [*Kokugo Shingikai*] to set guidelines for the proper transcription of foreign words. In 1991, the council released a new guideline for transcribing foreign words using *katakana* to make written renderings of loanwords closer to their original pronunciation by creating new compound phonemes with existing letters to represent sounds like *di*, *ti*, *fa*, *fe* and *fi* and by recognizing accent marks to denote the *v* sound. These phonetic adjustments are exclusive additions to the *katakana* syllabary. This revision to narrow the gap between loanwords and their original source in pronunciation reflects the desire to make modern Japanese a more communicative and international language (Carroll, 1997). "Official encouragement to write non-Chinese loanwords with *katakana* can be justifiably regarded as institutional approval of loanwords. The government's initiative to assign a special syllabary to loanwords, to continuously improve and elaborate on it, allowing better phonetic transcription, can be regarded as part of a language policy that accepts and actually encourages the importing of loanwords." (Rosenhouse and Kowner, 2008)

### Role of English Loanwords

Modern languages are fluid and subject to change, as they develop and come into

contact with other languages. Linguistic borrowing arises from the interactive exchange of language and culture. The ubiquity of English loanwords in Japanese is a result of Japan's contact with Anglo-American culture. In rebuilding its nation in the aftermath of World War II, Japan strived to emulate the US and achieve economic and technological power in line with the progress of the US. As Japanese society and economy developed, the use of foreign words, particularly English words, has gained prestige and its appeal has grown. The popularization and use of foreign loanwords in Japanese, especially words from English, import a sense of progress, modernity and cosmopolitanism. The mass media is the primary engine of disseminating English loanwords, especially in advertisements where loanwords are often employed to attract the attention of the public. Loanwords have become an intrinsic part of the Japanese lexicon, which continues to gain momentum in absorbing new words. New words are often introduced into Japanese to meet the changing needs of society. English loanwords take on one of three main functions in Japanese: to fill a lexical gap, to provide an alternative term for native equivalents or to serve as euphemisms. The primary function of borrowing a word from a foreign language is to give a name to items and ideas which have no equivalents in the native language.

#### *Lexical Gap Filler*

When a new item or concept comes into Japanese culture and life for which no native equivalent word heretofore is available to describe it, a loanword may be adopted into the language to fill a lexical gap. Absorbing a new loanword into the language to denote a new thing, idea, event, social phenomenon, technology, etc., can be simply more efficient and effective than creating a new totally native word or expression. During the early days of the Meiji Period when the country embarked on the process of industrialization and modernization, Japan came into contact with many Western items or concepts. Numerous Sino-Japanese words using *kanji* were coined to describe them, such as *denwa* (telephone), *yakyuu* (baseball), *hyakkaten* (department store), *kurabu* (club), *keizai* (economy) and *tetsugaku* (philosophy). At that time, borrowing new words using *katakana* coincided with coining *kanji* terms for imported items or concepts, especially when no suitable *kanji* representation was available or possible. Words such as *rajio* (radio), *shatsu* (shirt) and *baketsu* (bucket) entered the Japanese language using the *katakana* script. However, the coinage of Sino-Japanese words is no longer a popular or convenient choice of assigning vocabulary for new things and ideas from abroad. Rather, *katakana* has become the predominant means

of incorporating new loanwords into the Japanese lexicon. In some cases, two terms in Japanese, one using *kanji* and one using *katakana*, are available to describe the same thing as in *hyakkaten* and *depaato* for department store or even the same term is represented by both a *kanji* and a *katakana* version as in *kurabu* for club and *ajia* for Asia. Since the twentieth century, the preferred choice is to use *katakana* for transcribing foreign loanwords, even when an alternative *kanji* term is available. Thus today, the *katakana* version of *kurabu* and *ajia* is preferred over that of their *kanji* counterparts and the use of *depaato* is more common than *hyakkaten*.

When no pre-existing Japanese word exists for items introduced in Japan, linguistic borrowing occurs. Importing English vocabulary often takes place for technical terms in a wide array of fields from science to sports. Words like *terebi* (television), *erebeetaa* (elevator), *bureeki* (brake), *konpyuutaa* (computer), *sofutowea* (software), *mania* (mania), *sukii* (ski) and *futtosaru* (futsal) are a just few examples of English loanwords that have entered the Japanese language directly, forgoing the necessity or cumbersomeness of translating them into Japanese or coining a new native Japanese term for them. The Japanese language's flexibility and adaptability in absorbing new English terminologies have been further propelled by the onset of the computer age and access to the information highway on the Internet. The adoption of English loanwords provides Japanese with an international vocabulary tool in communication in the era of globalization.

New English word borrowings in Japanese have also come about as a result of changes in lifestyle and emergence of new social phenomena. Words like *sutoresu* (stress) *puraibashii* (privacy), *kajuaru* (casual), *insentibu* (incentive), *sutoraiki* (labor strike) and *rasshu* (rush hour) have been introduced into the language to describe some of the features of modern life and concepts. Traditional Japanese society saw no such phenomena as to warrant a need for such terms. New words have been also adopted to describe and bring attention to the existence of social problems which heretofore had no name. Words such as *homuresu* (homeless), *metaborikku shindoroomu* (metabolic syndrome), *sekuhara* (sexual harassment) and *suroo hoodu* (slow food) have raised awareness of new social phenomena among the public for which there previously were no such expressions in Japanese. Other examples are English loanwords such as *dei saabisu* (day service), *kea waakaa* (care worker), *bariahurii* (barrier free) have come into play to reflect Japan's aging society.

*Alternative for Native Equivalents*

The second role for importing new English loanwords into Japanese is to provide alternative terms or expressions in the place of Japanese terms that describe the same thing. One reason for using a loanword is that the message has a stronger impact than a native equivalent. Politicians use words such as *riidaashippu* (leadership), *manifesuto* (manifesto), *akauntabiriti* (accountability), *misshon* (mission), *ajenda* (agenda), *refarendamu* (referendum), *inishiatibu* (initiative), *paatonaashippu* (partnership), etc., because they project a more effective and impactful image than their native *kanji* counterparts. In the business world, the appeal of English loanwords is also seen in job titles with *katakana* names for positions such as *fainansharu purannaa* (financial planner), *shisutemu anarisuto* (system analyst), *interia dezainaa* (interior designer), *purodakuto manejaa* (product manager) and *jeneraru manejaa* (general manager). Though equivalent Japanese words for these professions exist and do not have any negative connotations, the *katakana* version sounds trendier and more modern. In promoting their products, Japanese manufacturers generally favor using English names for their products over Japanese ones, because English words evoke positive stereotypes towards things from the West, with which the Japanese associate qualities and values of a modern industrialized society such as comfort, prestige and reliability.

English borrowings can also be used to repackage and give a new image to something that already exists in the vernacular. For example, words like *ribiingu* (living room), *kicchin* (kitchen) and *beddoruumu* (bedroom) are increasingly used to describe rooms inside the house though their Japanese equivalents, *ima*, *daitokoro* and *shinshitu* are also available. These English alternatives are particularly preferred for modern houses and apartments with Western-style layouts. In addition, words like *appuru*, *sutorooberii* and *piichi* (peach) are used to describe fruit flavors or fruit dishes and products, whereas their Japanese equivalents, *ringo*, *ichigo*, and *momo* usually refer to the fruit itself. As such, English loanwords can be used to impress the difference between a new style or version and a traditional Japanese one.

*Euphemism*

Loanwords can also have a softening effect and serve as euphemisms for words or expressions in the native Japanese language that may sound too overt or direct. This technique of assigning loanwords as a glossing effect is particularly true with today's

aging society in Japan and the rising need of medical care for the elderly. For example, using terms like *sirubaa shiito* (silver seat – priority seating for senior citizens on public transport), *sirubaa raifu* (silver life – senior citizen life), and *sirubaa tsuaa* (silver tour – tour for senior citizens) sounds softer and less obtrusive than directly translating them into Japanese. The expression *taaminaru kea* (terminal care) appears less threatening and foreboding than its direct translation using *kanji*. In society, words like *shinguru maza* (single mother), *nyuu haahu* (new half – transvestite or transsexual) and *haroo waaku* (hello work – public employment agency) do not come across as blunt and harsh when expressed in *katakana*. Banks and consumer finance companies prefer not to use the Japanese word *shakin* and instead use *roon* (loan) to advertise their service to their customers. The English borrowing of *roon* sounds less intimidating than the word *shakin*, which traditionally conjures the negative image of indebtedness. Honna notes the following intention of using loanwords for euphemisms in the Japanese lexicon.

…the institutionalized limitation imposed on the use of Chinese characters discouraged people from taking advantage of this centuries-old lexical system to manipulate the Japanese language. At the same time, collectively accumulated knowledge of English shared by a vast majority of the population encouraged people to take advantage of English-borrowed words for the purpose of linguistic prudery, hypocrisy, evasion and deceit – functions that constitute the use of euphemisms. (Honna, 1995)

As such, English loanwords can serve as a language tool to ameliorate the directness and severity of an idea or thing that may sound harsh or negative if expressed in a Japanese translation or native equivalent term.

### **Adaptation of English Loanwords**

When an English word is borrowed into Japanese, it usually undergoes some transformation to adapt to the distinctive characteristics of its new home language. The adopted word's pronunciation may be adjusted to fit within the phonological scheme of the host language. The loanword may also take on a new spelling or phonetic representation. Words may be abbreviated or combined for the sake of simplicity and convenience. The meaning of the loanword may also be newly adapted to meet the linguistic needs of the host language, from a slight modification of the



original meaning to a complete change in semantics. Finally, when a word is borrowed, it needs to fall in line with the grammatical structure of the host language.

### *Phonology*

When a loanword is adopted into another language, transformation of pronunciation takes place in order to contextualize it in its new lexicon. English loanwords in Japanese undergo phonological transformation in one of three ways or a combination thereof: sound change, vowel insertion and stress assignment. With only five vowel sounds (a, i, u, e, o) and nine consonants in Japanese, the Japanese language follows a simple pronunciation pattern in which all words end either with one of the five vowels or with a final “-n” sound. The language is restricted in the number of phonemes, vowels and consonant clusters. Generally, all foreign words adopted into the Japanese language must be adapted to fit within the bounds of this pronunciation scheme. All English loanwords undergo phonetic transformation when they enter the language.

As a general rule, when transferring a loanword into the Japanese lexicon, the phonetic change is based on the sound of the original word rather than the spelling. Some sounds in English that do not exist in Japanese are converted to their nearest approximates available. The “l” and “v” sounds are replaced with “r” and “b” when an English loanword with these letters is integrated into Japanese. For example, “living room” is rendered as *ribingu* in Japanese. In the same manner, the “th” sound is often replaced with either “s” or “z”, as in *seorii* (theory), *serapii* (therapy), *suriru* (thrill), *buusu* (booth) and *sumuuzu* (smooth). When the “r” is followed by another consonant as in the words “cart” and “court”, the “r” is omitted and the preceding vowel sound is stretched. As such, “cart” and “court” become *kaato* and *kooto*. As Japanese sounds generally follow consonant-vowel patterns, vowel insertions are used to avoid consonant clusters from the borrowed word. Lengthening of syllables is also another characteristic of adapting foreign words to suit Japanese pronunciation. As there are no closed consonants in the final syllable other than words ending in “n”, vowels are added to localize the imported word. Examples of this phenomenon include *basu* (bus), *bureeki* (brake), *boruto* (bolt), *fiidobakku* (feedback), *firumu* (film) and *pasuwaado* (password).

As mentioned earlier, exclusive phonetic additions, such as *di*, *ti*, *fa*, *fe* and *fi*, to the *katakana* syllabary have widened the range of choices to represent sounds closer to

the original foreign loanwords, which makes it possible for words like *disukasshon* (discussion), *tisshu* (tissue), *fakkusu* (fax), *fea* (fair) and *fikushon* (fiction). However, words that were adopted into the language prior to this new writing convention still retain their traditional method of phonological transformation, as seen words like *chiimu* (team), *chippu* (tip) and *chikketo* (ticket). Even though the phonetic addition of *ti* can make the pronunciation of these words closer to the sounds of original English, their domesticated pronunciations have become ingrained in the Japanese language and thus are difficult to alter.

In Japanese, word accent differs completely from English. In adopted words, stress on syllables may diverge radically from the pronunciation of the word's original source. Haraguchi identifies two types of loanwords: those that attempt to observe the original accent and those that follow Japanese accent principles. However, only a small minority of adapted English words in Japanese fall into the first type. The majority of loanwords generally conform to Japanese accent assignments (Haraguchi, 1991).

### *Morphology*

Due to phonological adjustments in importing English loanwords into Japanese, some borrowings can become quite lengthy and cumbersome to pronounce due to the extra syllables added. Upon or after entering the Japanese lexicon, some multisyllabic words, whether the original English form is long or the converted form becomes long due to vowel insertions, are shortened to simplify the pronunciation. The most common type of abbreviation is the omission of the final part of multisyllabic single words. Examples of abbreviated loanwords include *apaato* (*apaato*), *apuri* (application), *intaa* (interchange), *inhure* (inflation), *inhura* (infrastructure) and *risutora* (restructuring). For compound loanwords, the tail part of one word or both words are often clipped and the two words are merged into one word, as seen in words like *eakon* (air conditioner), *dejikame* (digital camera), *pasokon* (personal computer), *masukomi* (mass communication), *sekuhara* (sexual harassment), and *tsuaakon* (tour conductor). For some compound words, the second word is completely omitted, leaving only the first word in the borrowed form, such as *aisu* (ice cream) and *rasshu* (rush hour). Sometimes, even the remaining first word of the compound undergoes another step of back clipping. Examples of shortened compound words include *kombini* (convenience store), *depaato* (department store) and *rosu* (Los Angeles).

Through various techniques of syllabic abbreviation, loanwords become simplified and thus easier to pronounce for the Japanese speaker. After shortening, the meaning of the original English words is retained in the remaining syllables rather than the entire words themselves. This retention of meaning through syllables in English loanwords in Japanese contrasts with the function of syllables in English, which serves as sound indicators and do not carry any independent meanings. The changes in morphology show the open and flexible attitude towards adopting foreign words, where syllables are treated as building blocks of new word creation. “Here too, as with the phonetic adaptation of loanwords, the dual approach of domesticating loanwords to the point of detaching them altogether from their original context, while maintaining their culturally constructed foreignness as a communicative attribute, is prominent.” (Rosenhouse and Kowner, 2008)

#### *Semantic Change*

As discussed previously, English words are borrowed into the language to fill semantic voids in the Japanese lexicon. Another distinctive feature of English loanwords in Japanese is the adaptation of meanings to accommodate the lexical needs of the Japanese language. When English words are borrowed into the language, the meaning of loanwords may undergo semantic modification, from minor change to complete deviation in meaning from the English cognate. Some English loanwords in Japanese have narrow or restricted meanings, compared to their original counterparts. Examples of limited scope in meaning can be seen in words such as *imeeji* (image – mental picture of a thing), *baiku* (bike – motorbike), *betaran* (veteran – expert) and *renji* and (range – a cooking stove).

Sometimes, loanwords can deviate drastically from the original English word in meaning or even take on new meanings in Japanese. In such cases, when the English word is borrowed into the language, the word’s meaning is transformed to serve the linguistic context or void in Japanese. The coinage of English loanwords with extended meanings or original, localized meanings is referred to as *wasei eigo* or “Japanese-made English.” Examples of semantic manipulation of loanwords or “Japanese made English” include *kuuraa* (cooler – air conditioner), *baikingu* (Viking – all-you-can-eat buffet), *kanningu* (cunning – cheating), *furesshuman* (freshman – new employee), *manshon* (mansion – western-style apartment or condo), *snakku* (snack – small drinking establishment), *smaato* (smart – slender or sleek), *shaapu pen* (sharp

pen – mechanical pencil) and *tarento* (talent – celebrity). This inventive coinage of English loanwords can also be combined with Japanese words of native or Chinese origin to create new expressions, as seen in words like *karaoke* (karaoke: *kara* – Japanese for “empty” + *oke* – clipped form of “orchestra”), *shou ene* (conserve energy, *shou* – Japanese for “conserve” + *ene* – clipped form of “energy”), *denshi renji* (microwave oven: *denshi* – Japanese for “electric” + *renji* – range), *ikemen* (handsome man: *ike* – shortened Japanese of *ikeru* for “cool” + *men* – men, used as a singular noun) and *ikumen* (man involved in raising a child: *iku* – shortened Japanese of *ikuji* for “child rearing” + *men* – men, used as a singular noun).

Another creative adaptation of meaning is the attachment of *appu* (up) or *daun* (down) to nouns to mean “an increase/decrease in (noun)” or “improvement/worsening of (noun)”, as in *reberu appu/daoun* (level up/down), *kosuto appu/daun* (cost up/down), *gureedo appu/daun* (grade up/down) and *imeeji appu/daun* (image up/down). Acronyms are also frequently used as a means to simplify the pronunciation of adopted or Japanese coined English loanwords and even native Japanese expressions, as in CG (computer graphics, pronounced *shii jii*), OB (old boys, pronounced *oo bii*, meaning “alumni”), OL (office lady, pronounced *ooeru*, meaning “female clerk”), VIP (very important person, pronounced *bippu*) and KY (Japanese expression, *kuuki ga yomenai*, meaning “cannot pick up or understand the vibe, atmosphere, situation, etc.”) These locally coined vocabulary using English inspired loanwords or acronyms reflect the originality, ingenuity and flexibility of the Japanese language in creating and incorporating new words into its lexicon. The colorful interplay of English and Japanese in the creation of “Japanese-made English” exemplifies the Japanese cultural pliability in integrating foreign elements while at the same time retaining its linguistic distinctiveness.

### *Grammar Adaptation*

In order for English loanwords to be blended into the Japanese vocabulary, they must be adapted to the syntactical structure of the language. The grammatical features of the Japanese language accommodate the relatively smooth inflow and adaptation of loanwords. Loanwords that are nouns directly enter the language without any major syntactical changes, as there are no classifications or suffixes to indicate change in gender, case or number in Japanese grammar. As such, nominal loanwords can easily fit into the Japanese parts of speech in grammar. However, loanwords can be

conveniently converted into verbs by adding the generic Japanese verbal indicator, *suru* (to do). Examples of verb transformations with *suru* include *shawaa suru* (take a shower), *shoppingu suru* (go shopping), *kuria suru* (clear or complete), *shea suru* (share) and *charenji suru* (challenge oneself or challenge something).

English adjective loanwords commonly enter the Japanese lexicon by attaching the *-na* adjectival indicator to the end of words. When modifying nouns, the affixation of the *-na* ending is employed, as in *tafu-na* (tough), *haado-na* (hard), *sibia-na* (severe), *ricchi-na* (rich) and *torendi-na* (trendy). In the same way that English adjectives can become adverbs by adding the suffix *-ly*, English adjective loanwords can easily be changed to adverbs simply by adding *-ni*, as in *tafu-ni* (tough), *haado-ni* (hard), *sibia-ni* (severely), etc. Through the addition of suffixes or morphemes, loanwords can be assimilated with relative ease into the Japanese syntactical structure. “The Japanese language features an apparatus for ‘instant adaptation’ of loanwords, and this has greatly facilitated the import of loanwords throughout the centuries. The ease and simplicity of this process have certainly influenced the uninhibited cultural attitude to the borrowing of foreign words and to their ever-ingenious assimilation into the local language.” (Rosenhouse and Kowner, 2008)

### **Vocabulary Building Bridge**

English serves as a key source of loanwords that have been integrated into the Japanese language itself. Beyond compensating for the lexical gaps, English loanwords also enrich the language by providing alternate expressions for native Japanese expressions and serve as a linguistic tool for coining new terms. As such, English-derived loanwords in Japanese present a significantly large repertoire of vocabulary that can serve as a bridging tool in English language acquisition and a potential aid in communication with English speakers. By recognizing the omnipresence of English loanwords in Japanese, especially those presented in the media, learners of English can tap into their latent knowledge of borrowed words from English and transfer this to building up their English vocabulary. By systematically arranging English loanwords into genres or categories and using them as a learning tool, it can be a very effective method of vocabulary building for Japanese learners of English. Numerous resources on the topic of English loanwords abound in books and dictionaries as well as online materials.

However, a key point in vocabulary building through English loanwords is the recognition of differences in pronunciation and meaning. When English loanwords are introduced into Japanese, transcription in *katakana* often alters the phonological and orthographical structure of the original English cognate, often due to the addition of extra syllables or syllabic abbreviations. A consequence of these phenomena is that some loanwords are transcribed and pronounced differently than the original English words. Some scholars argue that the pronunciation transformation presents a major hurdle for Japanese students when it comes to learning English. One way of overcoming this pronunciation impediment is for English teachers to explain the process of phonological transformation when a loanword enters the Japanese language.

By understanding the common techniques and patterns of sound adaptations, Japanese learners of English can take advantage of their knowledge of English loanwords in Japanese and produce the correct pronunciation of the original English counterpart. Teachers can use comparative lists of English loanwords in Japanese and their respective English derivatives to demonstrate and inculcate the differences in spelling and pronunciation. For English language learners, building recognition of phonological and orthographical differences and conducting pronunciation drills of real English words are keys to grasping proper English pronunciation, thereby improving communication skills.

Another point to bear in mind is the semantic change that English loanwords may undergo when imported into the Japanese language. However, the majority of English loanwords retain their original meanings, either in whole or part, giving Japanese students of English a predisposed advantage in vocabulary acquisition. In certain areas, such as food names, flora and fauna, mechanical terms and computer and technical terms, a large majority of the vocabulary consists of English loanwords. Even in domains where there are already native Japanese terms in existence, such as names of fruits, vegetables, flowers and animals, English loanwords have replaced indigenous terms or have gained higher preference for usage than native words. Making Japanese students cognizant of their predisposed advantage may boost their confidence in and enthusiasm for expanding their vocabulary range.

There are occasions where loanwords can take on completely divergent meanings or where loanwords are used as a tool to coin original new vocabulary additions to the

Japanese language, as with “Japanese-made English.” Again, semantic divergence is not the rule, but the exception in vocabulary borrowing. In English language instruction, teachers should point out to students the similarities and differences in semantics between the Japanese rendition of loanwords and their original English counterparts and use them as practice drills. “Japanese-made English” words and expressions can be used as a stimulating and practical source for vocabulary recognition and building exercise, as well as clearing up misunderstanding and misuse of loanwords. Sometimes, Japanese speakers unknowingly believe that “Japanese-made English” words are actually real English words. For example, some Japanese mistakenly use English loanwords such as *furesshuman* (freshman – new employee), *manshon* (mansion – western-style apartment or condo) and *smaato* (smart – slender or sleek) when speaking to native English speakers, often drawing blank reactions or perplexing the listener. Classroom exercises using “Japanese-made English” words can be effective in preventing such encounters of misunderstanding.

Analogies and drills in the semantic characteristics of English loanwords in Japanese and their English base words can reinforce students’ understanding and application of vocabulary meaning and usage. Raising consciousness of such similarities and differences is an essential step in students’ vocabulary skills improvement. Awareness of the correlation between loanwords and their original English counterparts will lead Japanese students to make a critical scrutiny and analysis when they encounter loanwords. Understanding the correlation between loanwords and cognates will thereby lead Japanese learners to improve their usage of real and appropriate English diction.

English loanwords can aid students in the correct understanding and further acquisition of the extended meanings of loanwords for which students already know their meanings in the Japanese context. Loanword knowledge can encourage Japanese students to build up meanings of loanword cognates and widen their range of vocabulary usage. As such, native knowledge of Japanese and its inclusive English loanwords give Japanese students an advantage because they already have English words in their repertoire, which is an effective tool for enhancing the acquisition of English derivatives from which they originate. More attention should be paid to the importance of loanwords in formal English education in Japan. Often, Japanese students have a general notion that English loanwords differ from their cognates, but

they may not specifically know how these borrowed words differ. English language teachers can clear up this ambiguity of a loanword by explaining the language origin, the spelling variation between the loanword and its original source, the meaning or meanings of the loanword, and the syntax and usage of the loanword. The role of English language teaching should be focused on making students aware of the built-in loanword resource that they already have and building their confidence in and penchant for further vocabulary acquisition.



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