

ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN JAPANESE TV ADS

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Historically speaking, linguistic borrowing is a common phenomenon in the evolution of a language. However, unlike countries where English was adopted as an institutional variety as a result of a linguistic legacy, the English found in Japan—specifically in television advertising—is a particularly intriguing linguistic puzzle. Although most of the English one sees on products and garments is often incomprehensible, pointless, or simply rude, advertisers/copy writers do have the power to manipulate the English language and ‘engineer’ changes to satisfy their own utilitarian purposes. (Regardless of the six years spent studying Standard English at school, this is the English that the masses are exposed to!) Surprisingly, the English loanwords are used in a very systematic way:

- As a lexical gap when there are no corresponding words in Japanese
- As euphemisms to refer to unpleasant topics (*toire* is preferred to *benjou*, meaning toilet)
- As strategies to avoid direct expressions
- To refer to western images and concepts (to create a modern touch)
- In set phrases/lexical chunks
- As special-effects givers (attaching new cosmopolitan images to products and services)
- As brand, shop or product names
- To refer to technical terms

The major features of these borrowed English words can be described as follows (the examples are all romanized for readability):

1. Rephonalization (pronouncing English with a Japanese accent, according to Japanese syllabary): earth becomes *aasu*, headphone becomes *heddohon*, manager becomes *maNEjya*, McDonald’s becomes *makudoNARUdo*, radio becomes *rajio*, and ticket becomes *chiketto*.
2. Truncation (shortening English words): contact lenses become *contakuto*, department store becomes *depaato*, food extract becomes *Ekisu*, illustrations becomes *illusto*, mass communication becomes *masukomi*, and remote control becomes *remokon*.
3. Semantic narrowing (only one of the possible English meanings is used): *Naïve* only means ‘sensitive’ when used in a Japanese context, *manshon* (mansion) means ‘a block of flats’, *furonto* (front) means ‘reception desk’, *toranpu* (trumps) means ‘a deck/pack of cards’, *baikingu* (Viking) means ‘a buffet meal’, *potto* (pot) means ‘thermos flask’, and *shiiru* (seal) means ‘sticky label, sticker’.
4. Hybridization (blending of English and Japanese words or when part of an English word is written in Japanese): *bejitaberu kurakka* means ‘vegetable crackers’ [the first word contains *taberu*, meaning ‘to eat’, so there’s a play on words: eat your vegetable crackers!], *haburashi* (ha = teeth + brush) means ‘toothbrush’, *imeji chizu* (chizu = map + image) means ‘diagram’, *roorupan* (rooru = bread roll + pan) means ‘bread’.
5. Mock-Japanese linguistic creations (when English words are invented or take on different meanings in Japanese): *consent* (electrical socket), *feminist* (a man kind to women), *hair manicure* (hair dye), *pair look* (matching clothes), and *wanpiisu* (one-piece--a dress).