

English words and loanwords in Japan: The effect of English learning

SLS 380

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Introduction

Japanese is unique language which adopts foreign words and makes new Japanese words. According to estimate of Hogan (2003), 10% of Japanese vocabularies, 13% of daily used vocabularies, and 25% of texts in general interests weekly published consist foreign words (p.43). Because Japanese keep adopting foreign words, especially from English words, the number of loanwords is keep increasing every year and it causing the problem that people cannot understand the meaning. Recently, I read an article which is about 71 olds man sued NHK which is the Japan's broadest TV station, for using so many English words, on the ground that he cannot understand the program and he was mentally tortured. TV programs and publications for public are supposed to use the words everyone can understand, but the loanwords create the gap between publishers and receivers' common knowledge. Age difference also affects the gap because younger people are more familiar with loanwords.

I raise one question, "if younger people are familiar with English words, then Japanese people's English ability should be better as compared to before". However, the TOEFL score of Asian countries tells that Japan's average score is still close to bottom according to score of 2010. Japan adopts so many words from English, but still people's English skill is very low compare to other Asian countries.

This paper will talk about: where the loanwords came from or who spread it, why

people use English words, what is different from loanwords and English words, and how loanwords can use for vocabulary learning.

Origin of English loanwords

First of all, I'd like to start from where the loanwords came from. It is difficult to track back all English loanwords, but according to Stanlow (2010), most of words are used first by academics, government bodies, and the media (p.48). Also, Olah (2007) claims mass media has strong influences, especially fashion magazine and commercial advertisement which 23% of words are English words (p.179). They use English words even though receivers don't understand the meaning. The survey in Stanlow (2010) proved that university students could understand only quarter of loanwords and people works at NHK could understand 50% even though they thought they could understand 77% before the survey. Then why the media keep using English words if people won't understand? Stanlow (2010) provided two cases of English usage in publication. One is writers won't translate foreign words because the readers won't understand the translation anyway except certain fields of people. Another case is when English loanwords are used in TV program, there are some clues to figure out the meaning, but somehow half of audiences don't catch the clue.

Usage of English loanwords

There are many reasons for using English loanwords. The simplest usage of

loanwords is because translatable words were never existed in Japan. After the World War II, Japan started to adopt English words as well as American life styles. Since Western goods takes over Japanese goods, people needed to use English words like bed, kitchen, and skirts. Moreover, using English words could be expression of admire to American life style. “While some words have been introduced to fill a semantic void or lexical gap that existed in Japanese, most LWs initially made their way into Japanese because Western languages were seen as symbolic of progress and modernization” (Olah, 2007, p.178). The idea of progression of western countries also helped Japanese to use English words more to be look like western countries. Even though Japan became one of modern and progressed country, “LWs still maintain their allure to the Japanese as language which is fashionable, cool and generally appealing” (Olah, 2007, p.178). The result of interview of Hogan (2010) also states that English loanwords are more modern and cosmopolitan unlike Japanese words sound old-fashioned and country side. Because of these ideas of loanwords, fashion, media, and music tend to use English loanwords even more and more.

Because of idea of attractiveness and modernized fashion, English words are frequently appeared in Japanese pop music especially from 1990's. Moody (2006) provides the result of studies of analyzing Japan's weekly top 50 charts in 2000. As a result, 62% of songs contain English words and 35% of songs contain only Japanese words. As the data prove, most of popular songs contain English words and songs only written by Japanese are

less, but it depends on what kind of music. For example, most of J-pop music is influenced by Western music, that's why song writers tend to use English words to sound like modern, but if it is Enka, Japanese traditional song, they never use any English phrases. Moody (2006) categorized English usage into four different types. First one is Musical Filler which is like "yeah" or "ah". This type of word is appeared in many songs even the songs don't contain any other English phrase. Second is Single Words and Phrases which is words like "kiss" or "love", it doesn't interrupt grammatical structure. Sometime these words are written in Japanese katakana form and can be interpret as loanword. This type is also very common in J-pop music. Third one is Clauses and Sentences which is usually one whole line is written in English. This type is usually appeared in rap, rock, and R&B style and singer is familiar with English language. The last category is called Code Ambiguity which sounds like both languages. For example, a phrase "I 罌 B wi θ U" can be read as "I wanna be with you" because Japanese 罌 is read as "wanna". One more example is "I, I, I, I surrender" can be sound as "*aisarendaa*, I'll be loved". This type is rare category, but writers using English and Japanese languages artistically blending. Now, Japanese people using English as part of their language and even using creatively by blending with Japanese language.

As the observations prove, Japanese tend to use loanwords often, but it doesn't mean all Japanese people have positive attitude toward loanwords. A survey from Olah (2007)

proves many people feel there are so many loanwords and they don't understand more than half of loanwords used in media. Loanwords can cause miscommunication between young people and older people or people live in city and people live in countryside. Even though loanwords may cause problems, surveys from Olah (2007) and Matsuda (2003) shows people most of people have neutral attitude toward loanwords. The interviewees understand there are positive and negative faces in loanwords. Surprisingly, people think loanwords enrich Japanese languages and expanded the ways of expressing. This interviewees' age may reflecting this result, the interviewees are university student and high school students, but many people agreed that loanwords help to create social distance and talk about social sensitive topics. People use loanwords as code-switching, depend on the situation, they use Japanese or English words. For example, when young people speak to older people, they use Japanese words because it sounds more polite and avoid miscommunication. On the other hand, they use more loanwords with peers because loanwords sound casual. Some Japanese words have negative image such as sexual topics. In Japanese society, talking about sexual topic is considered as taboo, but loanwords are not sound as heavy as Japanese words, so people use loanwords because they feel more comfortable when they talk about socially negative topics. Interestingly, there are many people who understand loanwords are not real English, so people should not use loanwords or Japanese English when they are speaking in English. Matsuda (2003) interviewed private high school where have few

exchange students, so they have more chance to interact with real English, so this result may not reflect to majority of Japanese people, but I feel people should know it, so they won't have miscommunication when they are speaking with English speakers.

Differences between Loanwords and Original English

From the research result, Japanese use English words more and more. It should be advantage for Japanese to learn English easier and vis-à-vis. However, many Japanese still have hard time to learn English and Japanese loanwords confuse English speakers to learn Japanese. The study of Olah (2007) claims two problems in loanwords: phonological change and semantic change. Also, Maeda (1995) categorized loanwords into seven groups. Both author mentioned shortened words and pronunciation changes. Japanese tends to shorten the words and sometimes combines two words, so even the words were come from English, English speaker don't understand the meaning. For example, air conditioner = *eakon*, mass communication = *masukomi*, cutlet = *katsu*. Because Japanese people learn and use shortened loanwords, many people don't know the original words or not knowing the loanwords they are using are shortened version of loanwords. The other phonological problem is because of different sound systems of Japanese and English, it is difficult to adopt exact sound from English. As a result, some loanwords sound different from original English and two loanwords sound same. For example, bus and bath = *basu*, mouth and mouse = *mausu*, right and light = *raito*. Other than phonological differences, there are

semantic changes in loanwords. Some loanwords consist completely different meaning from English, so it makes confuse both Japanese speakers and English speakers. Also, some loanwords expand from original meaning and used for the context which English speakers normally don't use. For example, mansion means condominium, pants means underwear, handle means steering wheel, viking as buffet, sign as signature, *demo* (shortened for demonstration) as group protest. In English, the script of name called signature, autograph, or sign. But in English loanword, people only use "sign" because signature and autograph are not used as loanword. Furthermore, Japanese tend to use word "memo" often. In English, people use "note" for writing down important information. There is loanword of "note" but it only refers to notebook. Even computer have program called note pad, but in Japanese it called memo pad. Olah and Maeda share mostly same idea, but Maeda (1995) adds few more categories of loanwords. First is the compound words which don't exist in English such as *ensuto* (engine stop), *gattsu poozu* (guts pose), and *gooru in* (goal in). Another is words from British English, for example, bonnet, sellotape, spanner. The loanwords from European languages are frequently used in Japan like *avec* from French, *arbeit* from German, *kop* from Dutch. Those are not from English words, but some Japanese assume all loanwords are from English. I have experience that I thought loanwords from European languages are English words when I just started to learn English. Those loanwords are frequently used in Japan and even I knew it is not from English, I didn't

the equivalent English word. From the result, even though Japanese use many loanwords, those are not exactly same as original English. Because of many factors, it doesn't make easy to learn English and even cause confusion for having different sound and meaning from loanwords and original English.

Using loanwords as teaching resource

As previous section explained, there are several differences between loanwords and original English words. However, loanwords can be good resource to learn English even though those are not real English. As Nation (2001) states "encourage learner to notice this borrowing and to use the loan words to help the learning of English is a very effective vocabulary expansion strategy" (p. 5). Also, Underwood (1998) found that students are able to recognize English words which are commonly used as loanwords, with high accuracy than the words that are not used as loanwords. As two studies prove, loanwords could serve as good resource of vocabulary learning because people can guess the meaning from loanwords. Underwood (1998) provides some strategies using loanwords for English teaching. First method is making students to aware the differences between loanwords and original English. As I stated previously, there are many differences such as pronunciation, shortened term, and borrowed from another languages. Because of Japanese sound system, it is difficult to pronounce exactly same as original English sound, but some loanwords are able to sound closer to English sound. For example, loanword of energy is *enerugii*. The "r" became

consonant rather than part of vowel of ner, so it is adding one more sound. Even in Japanese sound system, it is able to sound similar to energy. Also, telephone can be closely sound as “*terefon*” not “*terehon*” which many Japanese sounds. As same as alcohol, Japanese sounds “*arukooru*” they don’t sound “h” so add one more consonant and sound “*arukohooru*”. Even loanwords from another language like virus can pronounce as English. Loanword of virus is German sound “*uirusu*” so teacher can mention that English sound is “*vairasu*”. Another thing student need to aware original form of shortened terms. Because Japanese make words shortened and use, so some people don’t know the original form. There are similar shortened terms such as *rimokon*, *mazakon*, *pasokon*, and *bodikon*. Those words have *-kon*, but original form of these words is remote controller, mother complex, personal computer, and body conscious. In shortened term, they share same *-kon*, but in original form those *-kon* consist totally different meaning. Therefore, it is important to know the original form to make sure students won’t mix up different words. The last thing to aware is loanwords from another language. There are many loanwords came from other than English and people think all loanwords are come from English. Therefore, it is important to let students to know some words are not from English and teach them English form. Therefore, translation activity would be helpful for students to notice differences between loanwords and English. Teacher can provide English words and students translate them into loanwords or other way around. At doing this activity, it would be better to

include different types of loanwords. Some words can directly translate, but some words are from other than English and some are shortened term. To use loanwords as teaching resource, teacher can assign students to find loanwords. Because Japanese language has so many loanwords and the number is still increasing, so there are many resources in daily life to expand English vocabulary. From students' finding, students can analyze its origin and where and how the words are used to gain students' understanding of loanwords.

Furthermore, teacher can use prefix or suffix to expand students' knowledge of vocabulary. For example, start from common loanwords, stainless and look for words contain suffix -less such as powerless, hopeless, useless, codeless, wireless, and careless. Even teacher can ask to find words which contain contrast of -less, -ful such as cheerful, powerful, careful, and useful. Since there are so many English loanwords are around in Japanese society, there are so many ways to use loanwords as tool of learning English. When I was a junior high school student, I paid attention to song lyrics because I mentioned previously, more than half of Japanese song contain English word or phrases. I tried to translate the phrase and if I find unfamiliar word, I looked at dictionary and found out the meaning. Also, TV game use English words for name of magic or move, so it was interesting to see how the name and the effects are related. Therefore, English loanwords are all over in Japanese society and it may motivate students' learning if the topic relate to students' interest.

Conclusion

By doing this research, I could gain how loanwords are influencing people's life and differences between original English. Because of gap of knowledge, loanwords may cause miscommunication, but still loanwords provided benefit to Japan such as making it easy to talk about socially sensitive topics more freely. Also, loanwords increased more ways of expression and used artistically in music and advertisements. Moreover, loanwords can be good teaching resource if people use them properly. It is more important to think about benefit of having many loanwords in Japanese language and how to use them effectively rather than thinking about problems caused by having loanwords.

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Reflection

By doing this research paper I have gained a lot about loanwords: why people are using them and how it is different from English. While I was doing this research I could look back when I just started learning English. Right now I could notice there are many loanwords used differently from English, but before or when I just started learning English, I couldn't notice and I couldn't distinguish which loanwords are from English and which are from European languages. If I look back I can understand why people think that way and why people make mistake. Also, I could look back how I expanded vocabulary: from music and TV game.

I had hard time to find resources because there are so many resources relates to loanword and it is very broad so I had to focus what kind of sources I'm looking for and to do that I had to read most of papers to decide to use or not. Moreover, I had difficulty with how to use the research resource and organize the paper. Some papers have similar information, so I had to decide which paper to use in which section of paper and how to connect the sources to my writing.

I accept the advice or suggestion I received and tried to reflect it to all of my paper such as little bit change the organization, what information would be necessary and fix the citation.