Japan's Built-in Lexicon of English-based Loanwords

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Frank E. Daulton

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This book is dedicated to my parents, who loved books.

A note on scripts:
English vocabulary items will appear in the Roman alphabet underlined (e.g. word). Japanese loanwords will appear in the Roman alphabet underlined and italicised (*waado*), using a modified Hepburn Romanisation; occasionally loanwords will appear in their *katakana* forms (e.g. ワード).

Introduction: The Importance of Cognates for EFL in Japan

Sometimes worlds are linked by words. English night, for example, is related to *nuit* (French), *Nacht* (German), *nacht* (Dutch), *nicht* (Scots), *nat* (Danish), *noc* (Czech, Polish), *noch* (Russian), *noc* (Serbian), *nox* (Latin), *nakti-* (Sanskrit), *natë* (Albanian), *noche* (Spanish), *nos* (Welsh), *noite* (Portuguese), *notte* (Italian), *nit* (Catalan), *noapte* (Romanian), *nótt* (Icelandic) and *naktis* (Lithuanian), all deriving from Proto-Indo-European *nekwt-*. Moreover, as a result of the Norman Conquest and other historical events, French and Latin have strongly influenced English, leading to cognates such as promenade and focus. English, in turn, has spread across the globe and is spoken by some two billion people.

Native English speakers are greatly helped in learning related languages because of this web of linguistic connections.

In contrast to English, the Japanese language developed in relative isolation. Japanese belongs to the Japonic language family, which is shared only by the Ryukyuan languages spoken around Okinawa. When the Japanese needed a writing system and to enhance their lexicon, they borrowed from their immediate neighbours, China and Korea. Japanese is essentially spoken only in its homeland, and being fluent in Japanese requires mastery of a complex system of honorifics that reflect the hierarchy of Japanese society. In many aspects, English and Japanese are completely dissimilar languages; we say potato, the Japanese say *jagaimo*; we say tomato, the Japanese say *tomato* (トマト) ...

In fact, while Japanese phonology, syntax, pragmatics and discourse have remained relatively impervious to outside influence, a distant and exotic language – English – has extensively and fundamentally transformed the Japanese lexicon. Through the activities of certain Japanese individuals, a flood of English words have been 'borrowed' to become *gairaigo* (外来語) – Western loanwords in Japanese. Even English-based *poteto* (potato) has arrived as an alternative to Japanese *jagaimo*. The scale of Japan's borrowing of English is virtually unparalleled in the world.

However, Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) has largely neglected this potential resource, and research on loanword cognates has languished; this is unfortunate, in light of the arguably dismal state of English education in Japan.

The State of English Education in Japan

The late Edwin O. Reischauer, renowned US ambassador to Japan, satirically listed Japan's miserable performance in English as one of the Seven Wonders of the World (Honna, 1995). Despite the vast resources devoted to English education, and the vast amount of English circulating in forms ranging from billboards to everyday loanwords, Japan is among the world's monolingual societies where English-speaking visitors have great difficulty communicating.

For more than 100 years, there has been formal English education in Japan – with most Japanese people today having studied it for at least six years. Ninety-nine percent of the Japanese study English for three years at middle school, and about 92% for a further three years at high school (Morrow, 1987). The average Japanese person has had at least 3120 hours of English instruction (Honna, 1995); more if they attended college.

However, Japanese EFL is characterised by not only its dependence on grammar-translation and focus on entrance exams, but by large classes of taciturn students. Sociocultural factors such as self-efficacy, fear of failure, anxiety and intolerance of mistakes afflict learners. Language learners without the confidence to produce require much greater time to achieve any measure of fluency, as they are not actively engaged in theory testing, and have limited reception and production opportunities (Ringbom, 1987). Indeed, Japanese learners lack what Ngeow (1998) calls a 'positive disposition towards learning', which should include: high motivation; risk-taking attitudes; mindfulness or attentiveness; and a sense of responsibility for learning.

Even the linguistic circumstances work against English education, and most Japanese consider English to be very distant and not useful in daily life.

> First, Japan is not a society in which English plays a meaningful role as a language of international communication. The lack of opportunity to use it weakens the motivations of learners to acquire a working command of English. This is true in many places other than Japan. (Honna, 1995: 57)

Indeed, the situation of Finnish EFL used to be quite similar (Ringbom, 1987); learners in such situations spend only a very limited time on learning.

The results of Japan's universal English education system are poor indeed. Loveday (1996: 153) describes the Japanese public as 'basilectal'; 'distant non-bilingual' (p. 95); and having 'a low, pidgin-like level covering only the most basic of needs' (p. 99). Almost no graduate can communicate with foreigners beyond a few formulaic expressions. Not surprisingly, Japan ranks near the bottom of nations in TOEFL scores (Bronner, 2000), and English is one of the most unpopular subjects among students (Loveday, 1996).

The Potential of Cognates in Japanese EFL

Most researchers believe communicative competence is heavily based on the lexicon. Vocabulary acquisition was once the neglected area of language study, but this tendency has been replaced by a growing awareness that a solid vocabulary is necessary in every stage of learning.

> Vocabulary knowledge enables language use, language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on. (Nation & Waring, 1997: 7)

Not surprisingly, vocabulary ability correlates positively with overall linguistic ability (e.g. Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Read, 2000). Numerous studies confirm the crucial role of vocabulary in both L1 (e.g. Carroll, 1972) and L2 acquisition (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Huckin *et al*., 1993; Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997; Schreuder & Weltens, 1993).

Japan's English education system encourages learners to memorise complex and obscure grammar rules, but fails to provide the massive vocabulary expansion, passive and active, needed to attain communicative competence.

It is a maxim that without grammar, very little can be communicated, but without vocabulary, nothing can. For instance, if someone were to ask you on the street, 'Telephone box, where?', you could guess what he or she means, whereas if the questioner does not know the expression 'telephone box', nothing beyond gestures can be communicated; fortunately, almost any Japanese tourist knows 'telephone box', as it exists in Japanese as a cognate (Uchida, 2001a).

Throughout the world, learners' L1 (first language) can be their most important asset in acquiring a second language. This is, for instance, the

case for Korean learners of English, despite their preconception that English is very difficult.

> The effort of vocabulary learning is necessary to achieve a certain result desired by the learner, and the learner may be encouraged by seeing how fast he can go. The learner is interested primarily in accomplishment. He is interested in effort only in so far as it is conducive to the accomplishment which he desires. In particular, with cognates, it is easy for him to recognize the form and meaning of vocabulary items and to produce such sentences as he would like to express. (Lee, 1958: 57–58)

English words in Korean are called *Oi-rae-eo*, which, like Japanese *gairaigo*, means literally 'words coming from abroad'. There are numerous other parallels to English borrowing in Japan, including: transliteration; phonological transformation; and that loanwords have reached almost every aspect of Korean life. It is noteworthy that most English loanwords in Korean, e.g. *kola* (cola), *kopi* (coffee), *plaet-fom* (platform), *cham-pu* (shampoo), *ais-krim* (ice cream), *taeksi* (taxi), *wiski* (whiskey), *nait-klop* (nightclub) and *koktel pati* (cocktail party), also exist in Japan's more extensive loanword lexicon.

For a start, similarities between native language and target language vocabulary can reduce the time needed to develop good reading comprehension (e.g. Odlin, 1989), and enhance motivation and confidence (e.g. Ngeow, 1998; Pea, 1988), both of which are crucial for continued learning.

Most students of English in Japan are at a relatively low level in their studies. For such learners, intralingual cues are unavailable, as they lack target language knowledge concerning phonology, orthography, morphology and syntax (Palmberg, 1987). Contextual cues are likewise problematic as such interpretations are biased by sociocultural perceptions. Fortunately, Japanese can draw upon their previous language knowledge, particularly the phonological and orthographic correspondences that arise through borrowing.

Because of the vast number of English words that have been borrowed, the Japanese have access to countless potential cognates, which include high-frequency and academic words. English loanwords in Japanese are a *built-in lexicon* of English words learners have yet to encounter. Unfortunately, the role of L1 in L2 acquisition has been actively neglected in Japan.

An Investigation

When two distant fields of research are linked, often remarkable possibilities are revealed. Such an important link pertains for Japanese individuals learning English. On the one hand, much has been written about the importance of certain types of English vocabulary, such as high-frequency and academic words. On the other hand, there are an enormous number of English-based loanwords in Japanese. What if the Japanese are already familiar with many of the most important words of English, due to the English-based vocabulary stored in the Japanese lexicon as *gairaigo*?

This book is divided into four parts. The first part will introduce the borrowing of English into Japanese and the modern generation of *gairaigo*. The second part will attempt to resolve the 'paradox of cognates' and clarify the effect of loanwords in Japanese on the learning of English. The third part will examine the common loanwords in Japanese that are based on high-frequency and academic English, and attempt to assess the quality of these cognates. The fourth part will focus on the barriers to Japanese learners of English in utilising their L1 resource, particularly their ability to extend borrowed word knowledge within English word families. The epilogue presents some general principles and concrete suggestions about how to make use of *gairaigo* in teaching.

Japan offers a prime example of lexical borrowing, which relates to the important phenomenon of language transfer (in second and foreign language learning). Many of the characteristics of lexical borrowing in Japan, and its effects on L2 learning, can be found elsewhere in the world; inquiries regarding my research on Japanese loanword cognates have included those from English teachers in Malaysia and Rwanda. Swahili, for instance, has imported a substantial number of high-frequency loanwords from English, mainly key concepts in modern society such as *hospitali* (hospital), *sukari* (sugar) and *tikiti* (ticket) (Ringbom, 2007). Moreover, because of the wide influence of English vocabulary throughout the world, a Tanzanian learning Finnish, for instance, will be aided by the English words (e.g. doctor) that exist in both Swahili (e.g. *daktar*) and Finnish (e.g. *tohtori*) (see Ringbom, 2007: 79, 121).

The insights gained by examining language borrowing in Japan can be applied wherever language contact has occurred and foreign languages are learned.

Part 1

Japan's Importation of English