

Some Problems on the Reception of English Loanwords in Japanese : Concerntrating on the Generation Gap between Univeristy Students and Parents

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2015-05-29 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Asama, Masamichi, Kobayashi, Takehisa, Nishimura, Atsuko, Takatori, Yasuyuki, Okada, Yoshio メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.14945/00008611

Some Problems on the Reception of English Loanwords in Japanese: Concentrating on the Generation Gap between University Students and Parents

Masamichi Asama, Takehisa Kobayashi,
Atsuko Nishimura, Yasuyuki Takatori and Yoshio Okada

Abstract: When we communicate with other people in Japan, we are largely relying on English loanwords brought into the Japanese language. However, while loanwords have been playing an important role in Japanese life as well as in the Japanese language, they have undergone various changes in their pronunciation, meanings, and usage. Thus, it is the case that some people are familiar with certain loanwords while others are not. In addition, many English loanwords in Japanese have a different meaning than the original words in English. As a result, communication breakdowns occasionally occur. In this paper, the writers concentrate on how English loanwords in Japanese are comprehended by different generations and clarify some of the various problems.

1. Introduction

According to Davis (1994), a loanword is “a word that enters a language through borrowing from some other languages.” If we are in line with his definition, we are sure that the Japanese language is also largely owing to loanwords from other languages. Especially after the Second World War, a great many vocabulary words of English origin were adopted into Japanese. Nowadays, 84 % of loanwords are English in origin (Shibata, 1994:418). Since this abundance of loanwords is one of the important characteristics of Japanese, many researchers have studied loanwords in various fields such as linguistics, communication, and language learning. In recent studies, Comeau (1993) and Fujiwara (1996) report on vocabulary building based on loanwords, and in terms of communication and speaking, Goble (1996) studies how to raise students’ awareness of misleading loanwords. Thus the writers would like to make the studies of those initial contributors an occasion to focus on English loanwords in Japanese from the viewpoint of generation gaps in communication, with an emphasis on English loanwords used in

four major Japanese newspapers.

2. The Generation Gap: Statement of the Problem

While loanwords have been playing an important role in Japanese life as well as in the Japanese language, they have undergone various changes in their pronunciation, meanings, and usage. Specifically, their semantic and pragmatic changes are notable, for example, the word ‘*apāto*’ originating from the English counterpart ‘apartment.’ In the Meiji Era (1868-1912), this loanword indicated a luxurious apartment for modern and wealthy people to reside. But, by the middle of the Showa Era (1926-1989), the word implicated a shabby, small, and old apartment (Hida, 1981). Ito (1992) categorizes this semantic discrepancy between the English original and the loanword in Japanese into three components: (1) reduction of meaning, (2) modification of meaning, and (3) cultural modification. Sato’s classification (1994), though, is more accepting of semantic possibilities:

- (1) complete disagreement of meaning
- (2) reduction of meaning

- (3) expansion of meaning
- (4) reduction and expansion of meaning.

These historical changes of loanwords could conceivably cause a discrepancy of their interpretation and usage between different generations. As Kanno (1976) states, the generation gap seems greater and greater these days, and that difference influences our uses of the language.

English loanwords have been used to date by multiple generations in Japanese society as one of the most common methods of communication. However, the conception of these loanwords is quite prone to change as time goes on. Unless we have practice and experience, the way we choose words sometimes differs depending on the generation.

There are some researchers who have focused on generational differences in terms of word choice. For example, Egawa (1977) studies how standard Japanese is used in Tsuruoka, Yamagata prefecture, among various generations in terms of phonetics and morphology. Research by Bunkacho (1997) indicates actual usage of loanwords considering the existence of differences in comprehension between people from different generations. Endo and Ozaki (1988) focus on particular women's expressions such as 'wa', 'da', 'na', and 'ne' endings as used by different generations. In relation to preference of word choice, Imamura (1996) describes how young people are likely to use *katakana* and express themselves differently from older people by utilizing different words. For instance, to express 'kitchen,' older people are likely to use 'okatte' instead of 'kittin' which is mainly used by younger people. Romain (1984) observes multiple negation and finds out that as age increases, the frequency of utilization regarding multiple negation declines. Andersson and Trudgill (1990) show generational differences in terms of the usage of slang. They note that English slang primarily used by adults and slang used by young people is different.

As we can see through the studies of these initial researchers, the ways of utilizing words differ depending on the generation. However, there is hardly any research on the relationship between different word choices among various

generations and the resulting communication gaps. Consequently, our purpose in this paper lies in focusing on this point and thereby contributing to the further understanding of loanwords. As with the researchers previously mentioned, we use as our background research surveys among different generations. By applying the data obtained from our surveys, we intend to clarify how English loanwords in Japanese are recognized among different generations.

3. Survey Design

■ 3.1. Purposes

The purpose of this study is twofold.

- (1) To examine if there will be a generation gap in the reception of English loanwords in Japanese between Japanese university students and their parents
- (2) To examine how English loanwords in Japanese are comprehended by Japanese university students and their parents

■ 3.2. Subjects

The subjects were 200 (m/f: 100/100) undergraduate students (Group A) and 200 (m/f: 100/100) of their parents (Group B) from Shizuoka University, Kyorin University, Tamagawa University, and Kyoritsu Women's Junior College. The age range of Group A is from 18 to 22. The age range from Group B is from 40 to 60. Both groups were randomly selected from the designated age range.

■ 3.3. Survey Form

The form analyzed in this study considers English loanwords widely used in Japanese. They are selected from four major daily newspapers: *The Asahi Shimbun*, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, and *The Sankei Shimbun*. All newspapers were dated May 7, 1998. The Front Page Headlines, General News, International, Political, Economic, Social, and Editorial sections were all considered. Therefore, the content of the surveys presented to the subjects was rather varied. The number of words treated in the form is twenty. They are as follows:

- 1) *hiaringu* (hearing)
- 2) *inshiatibu* (initiative)
- 3) *bijuaru* (visual)
- 4) *obuzābā* (observer)
- 5) *kyarakutā* (character)
- 6) *pātonāshippu* (partnership)
- 7) *komitto* (commit)
- 8) *manyuaru* (manual)
- 9) *pīku* (peak)
- 10) *barometā* (barometer)
- 11) *kabā* (cover)
- 12) *surōgan* (slogan)
- 13) *burando* (brand)
- 14) *kyanpēnn* (campaign)
- 15) *risuku* (risk)
- 16) *taimingu* (timing)
- 17) *gurōbaru* (global)
- 19) *nettowāku* (network)
- 20) *pūru* (pool)

These twenty English loanwords placed in the questionnaire conformed with either the same context or a similar context used by the targeted newspapers (see Appendix).

■ 3.4. Procedure

A multiple-choice test was administered to the subjects in both Group A and Group B. The questionnaire consisted of twenty items, and each item also consisted of two parts, (a) and (b). First, a short sentence, which had the same or approximately close context as the sentence which appeared in the targeted newspapers, was presented to the subjects. However, the targeted English loanwords were blanked out. Second, another short sentence followed. The first question, (a), was to ask subjects to choose an appropriate loanword from four alternatives in line with the given context. The second question, (b), asked the subjects to choose an appropriate definition of the word that they choose in question (a) from four alternatives. These types of questions were imposed for the purpose of clarifying whether the subjects could choose an answer on the basis of their correct comprehension, so confusing alternatives in Japanese were listed (see Appendix).

The questionnaire used casual sentence styles as much as possible by presenting a mixture of the tones used by both males and females. This

was done to allow the subjects to feel relaxed and natural while they answered. The subjects were given twenty minutes to complete the task. First, the survey for Group A was administered during classes, using 20 minutes out of a 90 minute lecture. After collecting all the sheets, the surveys for the subjects' parents (Group B) were delivered to the students. The subjects in Group A were told to hand them to either their father or mother. But they were strictly instructed not to comment on the surveys to their parents except to repeat the instructions which they were given in the classes.

■ 3.5. Scoring Method

If both the answers to (a) and (b) were correct, 3 points were awarded. If either (a) or (b) was correct, 1 point was given. In the case of being unable to give the right answers, no points were given if neither (a) or (b) were correct. With a total of twenty questions, the maximum points possible for each survey was 60 points. Some questions were left blank, in which case they were treated as incorrect answers.

4. Predictions

The following predictions were made for the survey.

Prediction 1: There should be a certain difference in the reception of English loanwords in Japanese between Japanese students and their parents. It is anticipated that there will be a significant difference between those two generations.

Prediction 2: There will be no significant difference between sexes in the obtained scores.

Prediction 3: Uncommon uses of English loanwords, such as in items No. 7, No. 15, No. 17, and 20, in certain contexts may confuse subjects, resulting in a lower score for these questions between the two groups.

5. Rationales

The rationales related to each prediction are as follows:

(1) Rationale for Prediction 1

As English loanwords prevailing in Japan

strongly reflect social backgrounds chronologically, the obtained scores for each item between Group A and Group B will be remarkably varied. As a result, the sum for each group will be significantly influenced.

(2) Rationale for Prediction 2

Social equality for women has improved from what it used to be. Men used to be more exposed to social affairs than women. In other words, men had more exposure to social events than women. Now, both men and women have a tendency to be more active: talking to others about social issues actively, reading newspapers and watching TV news more frequently.

(3) Rationale for Prediction 3

Despite the fact that readers are not acquainted with new English loanwords, such loanwords often appear in the daily newspapers. This is due to the fact that journalists have a tendency to directly quote what prominent speakers say. However, many readers often find it difficult to catch the exact meaning of these new loanwords.

6. Data Analysis

After calculating the total scores for both groups, a statistical analysis was made. This analysis was orientated by the writers' theories about whether there was a significant difference between Group A and Group B. In order to analyze all factors involved in the survey, the writers also considered that there might be a difference between men and women. Therefore, further statistical analysis was performed.

As the writers wanted to clarify which questions had the strongest influence upon the total scores for each group, the distribution rate for the twenty questions for both groups was also calculated (see Figure 1).

7. Results and Discussions

First, the two means between Group A and Group B were analyzed (see Table 1). Second, the two means between the surveyed men and women were analyzed (see Table 2). Third, the two means between the men and women in each group were analyzed (see Table 3). In order to examine the differences between each pair

means, z-tests were used as the statistical analyses, and the following findings were observed:

- (1) There was a significant difference in the reception of English loanwords between students and their parents ($p < 0.01$).
- (2) There was a significant difference between men and women ($p < 0.01$).
- (3) There was no significant difference between male students and female students in Group A.
- (4) There was a significant difference between male parents and female parents in Group B ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviation for Group A and Group B

	N	Mean	SD
Group A	200	32.77	6.32
Group B	200	39.19	8.22

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviation for Men and Women

	N	Mean	SD
Male	200	37.05	8.63
Female	200	34.90	7.18

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviation for Men and Women in Each Group

	N	Mean	SD
Group (M)	100	32.46	6.97
A (F)	100	33.07	5.61
Group (M)	100	41.46	7.65
B (F)	100	36.74	8.07

The data in Table 1 is consistent with the first prediction that a generation gap for recognizing English loanwords in Japanese exists (z value = 8.76, $**p < 0.01$). However, the results did not prove to be fully consistent with the first prediction, because, as Table 2 shows, the second prediction was rejected (z value = 2.70, $**p < 0.01$). This reveals the possibility that a significant difference between Group A and Group B is more or less sexually differentiated. In other words, female parents are less interested in social issues, which are often treated in the newspapers. This gender difference suggests a wide area for future empirical research. Although the second prediction was rejected, we

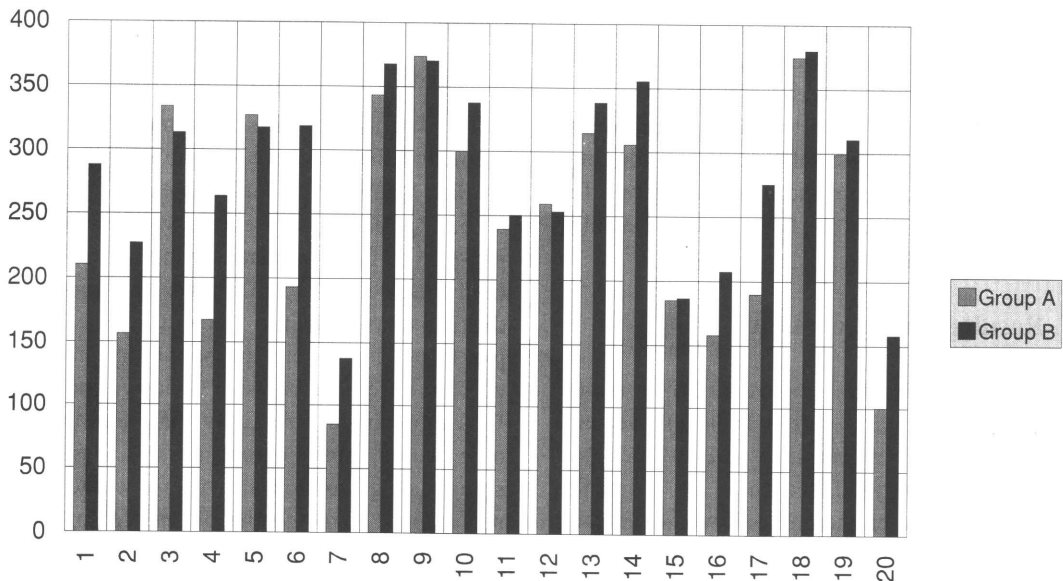
found it interesting that there was no significant difference between male students and female students as shown in Table 3 (z value = 0.68, N. S.). This is probably due to the fact that both male and female students are not interested in current topics due to a relatively undeveloped awareness of social issues.

As for Prediction Three, the results did not prove to be totally consistent. Question 7 and 20 proved to be the lowest scoring questions on the survey, but Question 15 and 17 ranked normal (see Figure 1). As is shown in the bar graph displayed below, the total scores for Question 15 and 17 and which we pointed out in relation to the third prediction did not support our premise. This means that, even though certain English loanwords were unfamiliar to both students and their parents, they had the ability to guess their exact meaning from the given contexts. It can be said, however, students had a tendency to guess the meaning of targeted English loanwords without using context clues. Despite the fact that older people scored higher than younger people, the obtained scores of some items, such as No. 3, No.5, No.9, and No.12, were reversed this norm. Taking this into consideration, it is clear that the recognition of English loanwords in Japanese varies, depending on the given contexts.

8. Conclusion

Our conclusion, our predictions were half proven and half rejected. Upon reflecting on our survey, the major fault seems to lay in the procedures. That is, we failed to correctly match all of the students with their parents. For our further research, we intend to mount another survey in which students and their biological parents are exactly matched. Also, we are going to clarify if there exists a certain correlation between these samples. Although the results of our survey did not totally support our main hypothesis concerning loanword generational comprehension gaps, there should be a significant difference in comprehension and usage of English loanwords between students and their parents. The survey made clear that English loanwords in Japanese which appear in the daily newspapers are not always universally understood by the readers. This phenomenon primarily arises from the fact that journalists often introduce new loanwords in the paper before each loanword is socially recognized. It is, therefore, indispensable to utilize translations at the time when journalists introduce difficult loanwords. In future, the writers would like to propose ideas for using loanwords appropriately in the mass media.

Figure 1. Distribution of the Total Score of Correct Answers in Each Item



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Appendix

日本語の「語い選択」に関する実態調査

各設問には、a, b それぞれ2つずつの質問があります。a.では、「」内に単文が示されています。自分が語ったとしたら、貴方ならどの語を選びますか?。(***)内に入れるのに適当だと思われる語の記号を○で囲んで下さい。また、b. の質問に対する答えとして適当と思われる語の記号もあわせて○で囲んで下さい。

1・

a. 「今度、大学の授業の課題でね、靴の卸売業組合に(***)した結果をまとめてくるように言われたんだ。」

(ア ネーミング イ ヒアリング ウ
カウンセリング エ ダンピング)

b. 下線部の「授業」とは、どんな科目だと思いますか? (ア 英語 イ 心理学 ウ 経営学 エ 法律)

2・

a. 「他国の(***)によって国連決議が揺らぐのもどうかな?」

(ア アンテナ イ バッシング ウ イ
ニシアチブ エ プログラム)

b. 下線部の「他国」とは、どこの国だと思います

すか? (ア 英国 イ ロシア ウ 米
国 エ 中国)

3・

a. 「最近, テレビを見ていると (***) 系歌手を多く見かけるね。」

(ア ビジュアル イ オリジナル ウ イメージ エ スリム)

b. 下線部の「歌手」とは, どんな歌手だと思いますか?

(ア 歌の上手い イ 髪の毛を染めて女装した ウ 服装が軽装な エ 舞台上で熱狂的に踊りまくる)

4・

a. 「今度の打ち合わせに, 体操部の部長にも (***) として参加してもらおう。」

(ア コンサルタント イ ディーラー ウ センター エ オブザーバー)

b. 下線部の「打ち合わせ」とは, 何の打ち合わせだと思いますか?

(ア 運動会 イ 文化祭 ウ 旅行 エ 同窓会)

5・

a. 「来週からテレビで始まるコマーシャルの中心 (***) が決まったそうよ!」

(ア メディア イ リーダー ウ キャラクター エ セールス)

b. 下線部の「決まった」とは, 何を指していると思いますか?

(ア 石鹸 イ 新聞 ウ どらえもん エ プロデューサー)

6・

a. 「アメリカとの (***) 関係を見直すことが日本の将来にとって大切だと思う。」

(ア シェア イ ルール ウ パートナー エ ライバル)

b. 下線部の「関係」とは, どんな関係だと思いますか?

(ア 敵対関係 イ 上下関係 ウ 協力関係 エ 国際関係)

7・

a. 「政府は, 東南アジア諸国の経済安定化のために合計100億ドル近い支援を (***) したみたいだけど,

お父さんは, それについてどう思う?」

(ア エスカレート イ キャッチ ウ コミット エ カバー)

b. 上で選んだ語の意味は, どれだと思いますか?

(ア 明言する イ 財界から募る ウ 追加措置する エ 少し削減する)

8・

a. 「地震にそなえての (***) はあるようだけど, ハイジャックにそなえての (***) なんてあるん

だろうか?」 {注: 空欄 (***) にはいずれも共通の語が入ります}

(ア ビジョン イ カリキュラム ウ トラブル エ マニュアル)

b. 話し手は何を話題にしていると思いますか?

(ア 緊急時の避難経路 イ 緊急時の対応措置 ウ 緊急時の経済対策 エ 緊急時の連絡網)

9・

a. 「朝の (***) 時間帯にでもさしかかったら大変だわね!」

(ア クライマックス イ ゴールデン ウ ピーク エ リアルタイム)

b. 下線部の「時間帯」とは, どんな「時間帯」のことを言っていると思いますか?

(ア 通勤 イ 禁煙 ウ 節電 エ 人気テレビ番組)

10・

a. 「お酒を飲んで顔が赤くなるのは, その人のアルコールの強さの (***) なんだって?」

(ア リミット イ レベル ウ アピール エ バロメーター)

b. 話し手は上で使用した語をどの意味で用いていると思いますか?

(ア 物差し イ 証拠 ウ 自信 エ 限界)

11・

a. 「次の打順が回ってきたら, 前回のバッティングを (***) するようなバッティングをたのんだぞ!」

(ア ポイント イ カバー ウ アップ エ チェック)

b. 下線部の「バッティング」とは, どんなバッティング内容だったと思いますか?

(ア 本塁打 イ 内野安打 ウ 三振 エ 凡打)

12・

a. 「今年の会社の (***) は, 僕たち営業畑の人間にとっては, 随分と意味深だね。」

(ア ガイドライン イ スローガン ウ コピー エ インタビュー)

b. 話し手は上で使用した語をどの意味で用いていると思いますか?

(ア 標語 イ 社内規則 ウ 売り上げ目標 エ 賃金査定)

13・

a. 「大手の自動車会社であるクライスラーがベンツと合併する背景には、ベンツの(***)の力が魅力となっているようにだね。」

(ア メーカー イ メリット ウ ブランド エ ヒット)

b. 下線部の「力」とは、どんな力だと思いますか? (ア 技術 イ 効率性 ウ 販売 エ 知名度)

14・

a. 「秋葉原で、先頃発売された新型コンピュータの(***)を大々的にやってみてほしいよ。」 (ア メッセージ イ シミュレーション ウ キャンペーン エ リセット)

b. 下線部の「大々的にやってみてほしいよ」とは、何が行われていると思いますか?

(ア 操作説明 イ 販売促進運動 ウ 街頭演説 エ 実演)

15・

a. 「(***)の多様化、テクノロジーの進展に合わせて、法律もより合理的な基準に改正して行く必要がある

んじゃないのかしら?」

(ア シフト イ リスク ウ ブーム エ ナショナリズム)

b. 下線部「法律」とは、どんな法律だと思いますか?

(ア 情報 イ 税金 ウ 健康保険 エ 運転免許)

16・

a. 「お母さん、先週、風邪で休んじゃったから授業のレポート、未だ出してないんだけど、今度の授業で

再提出可能な(***)はないのかしら?」

(ア ケース イ スケジュール ウ タイプ エ タイミング)

b. 下線部の「再提出可能」が認められるとしたら、次のどの場面設定が最も可能性があると思いますか?

(ア 先生が授業を休講にした イ 先生の機嫌が良かった

ウ 先生が未提出者に対して理由を尋ねた エ 先生の授業が面白かった)

17・

a. 「橋本総理も、今、(***)な経済問題を抱えて大変だね。」

(ア バブル イ リスク ウ マイナス エ グローバル)

b. 下線部の「経済問題」とは、どんな問題だと

思いますか?

(ア アジアの通貨および金融危機 イ 国内株式市場の低迷 ウ 消費税に対する消費者の不満

エ 減税効果の期待薄)

18・

a. 「携帯電話って意外に狭い(***)内しか届かないみたいだよ!」

(ア デジタル イ オンライン ウ データ エ エリア)

b. 下線部の「届かない」とは、何が届かないと話し手は言っていると思いますか?

(ア 情報 イ 信号 ウ 声 エ 電波)

19・

a. 「自分ひとりでは何とかするよりも、色々な(***)を広げて多くの人から助けを借りながら、良い知恵を

集めた方がいいと思うわよ。」

(ア ニーズ イ ビジネス ウ ネットワーク エ マーケティング)

b. 下線部の「広げる」とは何を広げていると思いますか?

(ア 市場 イ 人脈 ウ 得意先 エ 通信網)

20・

a. 「参加国がそれぞれの通貨発行という国家主権を(***)する形で、「ユーロ」に統一するのは独仏主導の

強い政治の意志の成果だね。」

(ア リニューアル イ プール ウ コレクション エ コンサルタント)

b. 上で選んだ語はどんな意味で用いられていると思いますか?

(ア 再構築 イ 共同管理 ウ 打診 エ 蓄積)