JAPANESE EFL STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF ENGLISH LOANWORD ORIGINS

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Introduction

When learning a second language, it seems almost self-evident that L2 vocabulary acquisition will be easier for an item which has a corresponding cognate in the L1 or which has been taken into the L1 as a loanword. For a native English speaker learning German, the German word *Haus*, a cognate of house, will probably be relatively quickly acquired. Similarly, a native English speaker learning Japanese will probably have little trouble remembering the Japanese word *tsunami*, since it has entered the English language as a loanword.

Japanese has borrowed thousands of words from English. A surprisingly large number of them correspond to words that can be found among the 2000 most frequently appearing words in English. It would seem that these words would be relatively easy for Japanese learners to acquire. However, there are some problems with using loanwords as a vocabulary resource. In this paper I'll look at some of the research and arguments concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using loanwords from the L2, and report the results of a study which tested students' awareness of loanword origins.

Background

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of using loanwords in EFL teaching. Reviewing these studies, Nation concludes that "encouraging learners to notice this borrowing and to use loanwords to help the learning of English is a very effective vocabulary expansion strategy." Among these studies are several which focused on Japanese L1 speakers learning English.

Yoshida (1978) tested the effectiveness of using loanwords to help a Japanese child living in the United States expand his English vocabulary. He concluded that awareness of loanwords aided acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Brown and Williams (1985) explored the relationship between loanwords and listening skills in Japanese college-age students studying EFL. They found that their subjects understood the meaning of loanwords better

than that of words which did not correspond to words in Japanese. Kimura (1989) used a multiple-choice test to determine his college-age students' knowledge of English loanwords versus non-loanwords. His results, like those of Brown and Williams, indicated that students understood the loanwords more often than the words that had not been borrowed from English into Japanese. While not conclusive, these studies suggest that there may be benefits to using loanwords as a vocabulary resource in the EFL classroom. One possible explanation for this comes from Baddely (1990) who, writing on memory research, observed that learning can be seen as "an exercise in which one attempts to find the best way of mapping new learning onto old." Japanese learners' pre-existing knowledge of loanwords helps them to integrate the original English words into their L2 vocabulary and makes them easier to recall.

Daulton has conducted what are perhaps the most extensive studies both of the number of words that Japanese has borrowed from English and of the effectiveness of a teacher's making explicit use of this resource in the EFL classroom. In a 1999 article he shows that, of the 2000 high-frequency words on West's General Service List, 734 have been incorporated into Japanese as loanwords. His research (1998) showed that Japanese EFL students could produce these loanwords in response to prompts more readily than they could produce non-loanwords.

Brown (1995) reached similar conclusions after an experiment in which EFL students were given a choice of completing a cloze exercise with a loanword or a non-loanword. Students tended to choose loanwords over non-loanwords, a response which Brown subsequently dubbed the "borrowed word recognition phenomenon."

Problems with loanwords

While the research cited seems to present evidence in support of the argument that explicit use of vocabulary acquisition strategies involving loanwords could be effective in EFL instruction, some have raised objections to such an approach. Sheperd (1995) points out several potential areas of confusion concerning loanwords. Among these are the following:

1 . Pronunciation of borrowed words is changed to conform to the Japanese phonological system. The results can be so bewildering as to make the loanword unrecognizable to a native speaker of English.

2 . Loanwords are often shortened or combined with Japanese words or other loanwords, resulting in perplexing compounds. A particularly bizarre example is *jomo*, the

"joy of motoring."

3．The loanword is often used as a different part of speech in Japanese．English nouns often become verbs in Japanese with the addition of *suru*.

4．The meanings of borrowed words have often been modified．Especially common is "semantic narrowing," in which only one of several possible meanings of a word is adopted as a loanword.

Simon-Maeda (1995) points out that while students often recognize a word as a loanword, they tend to be familiar only with its colloquial meaning and usage in Japanese．She gives the example of チャームポイント ("charm point")，which is used in Japanese to refer to an attractive quality of a person's physical make-up．This results in sentences such as "What is her charm point?"

Research

Are Japanese EFL students aware of the English language origins of loanwords that have become part of the Japanese language? A simple test was devised in order to examine this question．The test contained 30 words from the 1001-2000 word level of West's General Service List (1953)．Twenty of the test items were words that have been adopted by Japanese as loanwords．Ten of the items were words that have not been borrowed．I used Daulton's List of High Frequency Baseword Vocabulary (1999) to determine whether a word was a loanword or not．The words on the test were chosen at random．The 20 loanwords were:

accident	float	mechanic	bucket	net
shocking	grind	spare	knock	bath
imagination	pause	professional	tough	tail
engineer	refresh	silk	cheer	rock

The 10 non-loanwords were:

| annoy | swallow | dismiss | fold | invent |
| sore | pretend | rubbish | translate | noun |

The test subjects (Japanese college students) were asked to write the Japanese katakana for words which they recognized as words which had been borrowed from English．If they

thought a word was not a loanword they were asked to mark it with an X. The students were given the following example:

sour   <u>サワー</u>   believe   <u>   X   </u> .

   The non-loanwords were included in the test for two related reasons. One reason was to discourage students from trying to sound out every word they saw on the test and then trying to render it into katakana. If students knew that some words on the test were not loanwords they would probably be more likely to mark words they didn't recognize with an X. (The students were not told how many words were loanwords and how many were not.) The other reason for including non-loanwords was to provide a means for checking whether or not a student did try to complete the test by sounding out words and writing them in katakana despite not knowing their meaning. As it turned out, while a few students did try to write one or two of the non-loanwords in katakana, none of them did so systematically, and I think it's safe to say that the test results at least accurately reflect the test subjects' knowledge regarding these particular loanwords.

   The test subjects were female college-age students. There were three groups tested. Each group had a different average score on the TOEIC Bridge Test. The results are in Table 1. A test-taker received one point for correctly writing the katakana for the Japanese word that corresponded to the borrowed English word. Since there were 20 loanwords on the test, the maximum score would be 20.

Table 1.

Group	number of students	average TOEIC Bridge score	average score on loanword test
A	17	106	11.4
B	14	125	13.6
C	18	145	15.3

Conclusion

   The results show some correlation between the TOEIC Bridge scores and the scores on the loanword test. This suggests that the students in group C got the highest scores on the loanword test because of their generally higher skill level in English compared to the other two groups. In other words, group C did not depend on a strategy of analyzing unknown words on the test and connecting them to their Japanese loanword counterparts. How-

ever, the test does not exclusively rule out the possibility that students might have employed such a strategy.

More interesting and useful is the simple observation that there were many loanwords that the students did not know. Even the highest scoring group, group C, failed to identify about 25% of the loanwords. For the lowest scoring group, group A, the figure is close to 50%. If these results are extrapolated to cover all the loanwords in the 1001-2000 word level section of West's list, it would mean that there are 75 loanwords that the students in group C wouldn't recognize and 150 loanwords which would not be recognized by the students in group A. This is a large number of frequently appearing words that are potentially highly learnable.

Other results highlight problems students have with reading and the English spelling system. Of 49 test-takers, only thirteen correctly identified "tough" as a word that has been borrowed by Japanese. Nine of these students were in group C, meaning of the 31 students in groups A and B, only four recognized this word. Yet, if these students had heard the word pronounced, they probably would have recognized it. Similarly, "tail" was correctly identified by only five students, while thirteen transcribed it as タイル, the katakana rendering of the English "tile."

EFL teachers who have seen the negative effects of katakana use in Japanese junior high school English classes may be wary of encouraging students to examine the relationship between loanwords and their origins. However, the pre-existing mental maps that students have for these words make loanwords a latent resource that has the potential to help students rapidly expand their vocabularies. Imaginative, creative, and judicious use of this resource by EFL teachers could be of great benefit to their students and its potential should not be overlooked.

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