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Globally Speaking
Motives for Adopting English Vocabulary in Other Languages

Edited by
Judith Rosenhouse and Rotem Kownar
Chapter 13

Japanese: The Dialectic Relationships Between ‘Westerness’ and ‘Japaneseeness’ as Reflected in English Loan Words

ROTEM KOWNER and MICHAL DALIOT-BUL

A somewhat anecdotal yet revealing editorial in the Japanese daily Japan Times recently mentioned the linguistic sensitivity of Koizumi Jun’ichiro, then prime minister of Japan. Koizumi reportedly erupted in anger while listening to a presentation by his telecommunications minister, which was so full of English loan words that it became almost incomprehensible (Japan Times, editorial, 19 January 2003). A few months later the National Institute for Japanese Language (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo), affiliated with the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, established a Loanword Committee (Gairaigo Linkai) designed to encourage the replacement of gairaigo [loan words] with native words (on this committee see http://www.kokken.go.jp/public/gairaigo/). Ironically perhaps, when Prime Minister Koizumi was asked how he hoped to implement such a reform he answered that he intended to utilise the masukomi [mass communication] – a very common term in contemporary Japanese, yet another English loan word (19 August 2002; NPR morning edition).

Such expressions of personal resentment towards English loan words, as well as some institutional attempts to purify the Japanese language, are intriguing. Hitherto, extensive use of loan words in the government-sponsored media and government publications in Japan suggested that even if postwar official policy on loan words was not targeted at promoting and actively encouraging their use, nothing was done to prevent it. English loan words, in fact, have become so prevalent in contemporary Japanese that an estimated one out of ten words used today in Japan are English loan words (cf. Stanlaw, 1992).

Efforts at reform of the Japanese language sparked by an enraged prime minister provide an excellent opportunity to rethink the cultural position and the function of loan words in Japan. As we shall show, historical as well as political conditions have greatly affected the origin as well as the popularity of loan words. Nevertheless, we argue that the prevailing receptiveness in Japanese of loan words in general and English ones more specifically is also the result of linguistic practices shaped over many years of intercultural contacts. These practices do more than endow the speakers with technical tools to introduce and use loan words, as they mould, produce and then reproduce in a reciprocal feeding cycle an enthusiastic openness to loan words, while gracefully disarming the threat imposed by loan words to the unity and cohesion of the Japanese language.

Linguistic practices regarding loan words in Japanese situate words of foreign origin as wholly available stylistic points of reference, and nurture an uninhibited seedbed for domestic creativity that sometimes reminds the observer of pure play (Goldstein-Gidoni & Daliot-Bul, 2002). This total availability, however, has its own rules. A semiotic differentiation of waigo [Japanese words], kango [Chinese words] and gairaigo [foreign (Western) words] is resolutely maintained, providing protective cultural barriers between the ‘native’ and the ‘foreign’, even if the latter has been fully domesticated. Yet rather than yielding an authentic, unbiased description of the etymology of different words, this differentiation is highly manipulative because the cultural boundaries between Japanese, Chinese and Western words are continuously shifting (Tobin, 1992). Such manipulations exhibit a dialectical relationship between what is considered ‘Japanese’ as opposed to ‘foreign’ in Japanese language. More than anything else they seem to reflect an ongoing cultural construction and, indeed, efforts to cultural preservation of an imagined local identity and its boundaries against an imaginary ‘foreign’ (Befu, 1995; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001). This sort of ‘strategic hybridism’ aims to discursively construct an image of an organic cultural identity, ‘Japan’, which absorbs foreign cultures without changing its cultural core (Iwabuchi, 2002: 53).

Linguistic Contacts: Historical Perspective

The first Japanese encounter with English speakers was in 1600, when the illustrious navigator William Adams arrived in Japan (Corr, 1995). At that time, Japan had been exposed to Iberian trade and culture for more than half a century, so the effect of the few English mariners and
merchants was rather limited, especially since England cut its commercial ties with Japan in 1623 (Loveday, 1986; Nish, 1994). Eventually, 17 years later, Japan sealed its gates to any European trade, except for the Dutch, who kept a trading station at the port of Nagasaki. During this initial contact with Europe the Japanese language borrowed a limited number of loan words from European languages, mainly theological concepts and terms for new foodstuffs, clothing and technological items that were introduced to Japan at the time. English lexical items, however, were very sparse in Japanese at the time, and the effect of Japanese on English was similarly slight (Cannon, 1996; Ogino, 1988).

After the closing of Japan the Dutch legation in Nagasaki became the primary source of information in the country about recent events and scientific developments in Europe. An important school of thought known as rangaku [Dutch learning] evolved around the theoretical knowledge and scientific books the Dutch had brought (Goodman, 2000). Scholars of rangaku studied devotedly written Dutch, and became experts in European medicine, astronomy, botany and chemistry. Dutch loan words remained the most significant legacy of these contacts until the mid-19th century.

The American forced opening of Japan’s ports in 1854 facilitated the reappearance of Western visitors and merchants, this time predominantly from English-speaking countries. English, or a form of it, soon became established as the lingua franca at the newly opened Japanese ports (cf. Fukuzawa, 1981). The re-encounter with the West demonstrated acutely the weakness of the shogunal regime and accelerated its demise. In 1868 Japan underwent one of the most dramatic events in its long history. In a revolution, known as the Meiji Restoration, a movement of samurai from the periphery managed to overthrow the military dictatorship of the Tokugawa shogunate. The spectacular Westernisation and modernisation project the government embarked on was highly motivated by the Japanese elite’s bitter feeling of inferiority to the Western world powers; a deep sense of discrimination combined with fear led to a new sort of nationalism (Coulmas, 1990; Ivy, 1995). In the eyes of those who strongly opposed the government policy, the growing cultural import from the West represented a threat to the cultural identity of Japan. Not long after, calls for balancing ‘Japanese spirit and Western technology’ [wakon yosai] were heard. But this idea that foreign technology could be domesticated without affecting the integrity of the Japanese spiritual heritage was not altogether new. It was the same kind of narrative advanced by scholars a thousand of years earlier during the era of massive cultural importation from China.

The modernisation process that Japan embarked on prompted the need for a new vocabulary as well. During the first decades after the Meiji Restoration thousands of Sino-Japanese words were added to the Japanese lexicon. Many of these were coined as loan translations (calkues) of new concepts introduced from the West. So impressive was this ‘Chinese’ revival, in fact, that those responsible for language reform in China a few decades later resorted heavily to recently invented Sino-Japanese technical lexemes from Japan (e.g. Cousland, 1908). Meanwhile, the growing volume of intercultural contacts and international commerce enhanced still more the importance of English. Most Japanese leaders identified with the goals of modernization, and chose English as a means to achieve their goal. Already in the 1870s it was very trendy among students to ornament their conversation with English vocabulary. Examples are (Umegaki, 1975-76):

sore ja, peji toenti kara peji sachi made kimi ni yaro
Well, we’ll have you prepare pages twenty to thirty.
sore ni tsuite, jitsu ni ridityurasu na hanashi ga aru no sa
As a matter of fact, I know a really ridiculous funny story on that one.

Some people found the process of acquisition of numerous loan words too slow and inadequate. In the mid-1870s, Morii Arinori, one of the leading educators and political figures of the Meiji era, who became the first Japanese education minister in 1886, asserted that the Japanese language allowed only a weak and obscure mode of communication. For this reason, he suggested, it should be replaced by English as the national language (Miller, 1977; Twine, 1991). Even certain members of the Meikokusha, an influential study group founded by scholar and educator Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1873, wondered if it was not in the best interest of Japan to give up its illogical and feudalistic language in favour of the more rational and modern English (Tobin, 1992). Their efforts were ultimately doomed, but they still represent an important indication of the mood of those times.

During the 1880s many schools incorporated English language programmes [eigaku] in their curriculum, the process of adoption of English loan words intensified and the concept of loan words (gairai-go) was coined (Howland, 2001). A report published by the Ministry of Education in 1874 stated that during that year 82 English schools operated in Japan. In those schools, attended by some 6000 students, English was taught by 254 Japanese teachers and 56 foreign teachers. Although these developments targeted the higher social strata,
this new phenomenon attracted public awareness, as attested by a popular folk song from those days (Umegaki, 1975: 73):

*hunmeika no nihon de, sumoru boi ya gyaru made*  
*shikiri to, eigo wo benkyo suru.*  
kodomo no benkyo minnate  
oyaji mo korekara e bi shi.

In the opening civilisation of Japan, small boys and even girls  
Are earnestly learning English.  
Watching the learning children,  
From now on, fathers will start learning as well: A, B, C.

English, however, was not adopted exclusively by the intelligentsia. In fact, before the institutional reorganisation took place to meet the growing demand to study English, contacts in the seaports between local people, mostly merchants, and foreign seamen produced a local pidgin based on a mixture of English and Japanese (Bolton & Kachru, 2006; Kinney, 1873; Leland, 1879). Those English words that were incorporated into the everyday language of the docks, such as *kamensai* [come inside], *kanisho* [commission] or *uenuma* [welcome], were learned from hearing, and consequently involved many pronunciation mistakes. Some expressions originating in misunderstanding took root. One such amusing example is the naming of Western dogs *kameya* [come here] (Umegaki, 1975).

At the beginning of the 20th century, mastering English became a status symbol, and had practical consequences too, especially when applied to international trade or politics. An increasing number of Japanese went abroad to study foreign languages and their knowledge was instrumental in further accommodation of English loan words (Stanlaw, 1992). Many loan words used earlier as means of self-demarcation due to the special connotations they elicited became neutral and unmarked during the short Taishō era (1912–1926). In 1926 the Ministry of Education published new guidelines for the transcription of loan words in Japanese that were devised to allow a better approximation of their original pronunciation (Umegaki, 1975). In accordance with the hedonistic spirit of the 1920s in urban Japan, many new loan words referring to sports, technology and fashion were introduced. During the first part of the Shōwa era (1926–1941), loan words nicknamed *modōgo* (modern words) were especially popular. These were actually English-inspired vocabulary items conceived and created in Japan,

which were later to be known as *wasei eigo* ['English made in Japan'] (Storry, 1987).

The cultural dominance of the liberal left in the early 1920s, and the recent developments in mass communication, notably the radio and the printed media, contributed dramatically to the introduction and immediate spread of these new modern expressions. Many of them contained either *gāru* [girl] or *ero* [erotic] in them. Such were expressions like *ero gāru* [erotic girl] and *ero ki* [erotic atmosphere], or *erubēto gāru* [elevator girl, namely a female elevator operator], *ojisā gāru* [office girl, namely a young woman employed in minor clerical tasks] and notably *modō gāru* [modern girl, referring to an urban, up-to-date, stylish, and liberal young woman], which was soon shortened to *moga*. The ‘modern words’ phenomenon drew so much public attention that many dictionaries for modern words, as well as special supplements to popular magazines on modern words, were published and snapped up by an excited readership (Umegaki, 1975).

The early Showa era (1926–1941) held the all-time record of gairai introduction to Japanese until 1972, with a skyrocketing number of loan words from English. Yet, the popularity of English was not unanimous. At the height of the modern words phenomenon an enraged opposition was calling for *eigōka haishiron* [abolition of English language studies] as a move to block the influx of English words and Anglo-Saxon culture into Japan. Still, it was only the Pacific War (1941–1945) that succeeded in suppressing effectively the enthusiasm for Western ideas, fashions and words. Before and during the war the government exerted much effort to ban the use of English – the language of the enemy. English loan words that were already part of colloquial Japanese were replaced by Sino-Japanese words (Stanlaw, 1992). The radio news broadcasts, for example, known since the late Taishō era as *nyūzu* [news], were thereafter announced with the *kango* word *hōdō*. Radio broadcasters, called until then *annaunsu* [announcer], were renamed *hōsōin*. All signs in English were removed from train stations. English inscriptions, such as ‘WC’ and ‘Post’, were removed from public toilets and mailboxes respectively. Ironically, while linguistic censorship went immediately into effect in radio broadcasting, the word ‘radio’ itself – the most important mass-communication medium of those times – remained *raijō* (Umegaki, 1975).

The purge of English vocabulary from Japanese did not survive long. Japan’s surrender in August 1945 transformed this tendency instantly. During the subsequent Occupation era (1945–1952) official as well as non-official channels of intercultural communication were re-established.
In addition to many new technical words in English that were introduced into Japan by the occupation forces, two pidgin versions of the so-called ‘Bamboo English’ were invented. One served the communication between the American soldiers and the shop owners and government employees with whom they came into contact, while the other served the communication needs of GIs with local women who entertained them. These two pidgin forms withered after the end of the Occupation era and the Korean War, leaving behind a few expressions such as *mama san* [a woman owner of a bar or the woman in charge of a bar’s hostesses] (Stanlaw, 1992).

In postwar Japan English quickly regained its prewar status. In 1947 the study of English became obligatory in schools (Obata-Reiman, 1996). Moreover, during the 1950s the Far-East American Military Radio broadcasts, as well as American movies and later on American television, performed an important role in the introduction of material and popular American culture to Japan, to the point that it became the rage of Japanese popular culture (Tobin, 1992). A survey of the usage of words in English, as well as the practice of codeswitching in Japanese popular songs since 1931, indicates a steeply rising tendency from the Pacific War to the present (Nishimura, 1997; Obata-Reiman, 1996). The outstanding economic achievements of Japan during the 1960s and the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 in particular marked the complete recovery and international readmittance of Japan.

With the emergence of a full-scale consumer culture in the mid-1970s, globalisation, and the technological developments in the communication industries of the late 20th century, a popular culture saturated with Western, mostly English, loan words has emerged in all areas of daily life in Japan. At present the ratio of *gairaigo* has probably surpassed 10%, of which about 90% of the words are from English. English loan words are even more prevalent in the mass media, and their omnipresence in advertisements is not matched, perhaps, in any language other than English itself (Haarmann, 1984, 1986, 1989). The above ratio is a great increase over the 1.4% of *gairaigo* in the Genkai dictionary published in 1859, the 3.5% in the *Reitai Kokugojiten* dictionary published in 1956, and even the 7.8% in the *Shin Meikai Kokugojiten* dictionary published in 1972 (Carroll, 1991; Shibutani, 1990). In absolute terms the omnipresence of *gairaigo* seems perhaps even more impressive. The 1972 *Sanseido Gairaigojiten* [Sanseido Dictionary of Loan Words] contained approximately 33,000 entries, the 2003 third edition of Sanseido *konsaiu katakanago jiten* [Concise Dictionary of Katakana Words] contains 45,000 entries and 7,500 acronyms. Some scholars predicted, in fact, that gairaigo may gradually

replace all the Chinese vocabulary in the Japanese language (Ishino, 1977; Passin, 1982).

**Attitudes to English Loan Words in Contemporary Japan**

The use of *gairaigo* vocabulary, particularly words originating in English, has a special connotation in contemporary Japan. It often denotes prestige, and has an additional connotation of modernity, open-mindedness, internationalism and the Western lifestyle. The mass media use *gairaigo* to appeal to readers’ and viewers’ feelings of attraction, arousal and self-esteem rather than to transfer information (Haarmann, 1989; Stanlaw, 1992). Further, the present use of English loan words symbolises modernity rather than modernisation, and expresses one’s level of acquisition of Westernness (Loveday, 1986, 1997).

In spite of the torrent of *gairaigo* in present-day Japan, the number of fluent speakers of English is relatively low, so the effect of *gairaigo* on acquisition of foreign languages and even the openness to foreign languages seems very limited (Inoguchi, 1999). One partial explanation is that the frequency of usage of *gairaigo* by laymen is lower than that of native words (Shibata, 1989), but it is probably similar to use of loan words in many other languages. The ambivalent attitude to English as a whole might better understood if we examined the discourse of national identity in contemporary Japan and the role language plays in it. Since the 1960s Japanese society has been in quest of a cultural redefinition of its identity, together with exhibiting a strong need for the invention of tradition. This is reflected in the vast literature about ‘Japaneseness’ known as *nihonjinron*, whose volume swelled significantly from the 1970s onward (Minami, 1994; Befu, 2001). In this literary genre ‘Japaneseness’ is defined and located as the inverse image of an imaginary ‘Westness’, attesting to the importance of a culturally constructed ‘West’ in the ongoing invention of a Japanese identity.

The Japanese language has become a major component for *nihonjinron* proponents and many of them use supposedly indigenous Japanese linguistic terminology as prototypical concepts around which they develop their theses about ‘Japanese uniqueness’ (e.g. Kondaichi, 1957; Watanabe, 1974). A large number of writers contrasted Japanese with English, using extreme dichotomies such as vague versus clear and intuitive versus logical (e.g. Araki, 1986; Tobioka, 1999). These comparisons often set English as a superior language, but remote, cold and inappropriate for use by Japanese (cf. Dale, 1986). Tsunoda (1978) went farther, in suggesting that the Japanese process their language in a
unique manner due to a shift in brain laterisation. In his pseudobiological theory, Tsunoda also attempted to account for the notorious Japanese incompetence in mastering foreign languages, English in particular.

For those operating within the nihonjinron tradition, any semantic element in the native lexicon, as opposed to loan words from Chinese or Western languages, could be brought to bear on arguments for the uniqueness of inherently Japanese characteristics (Dale, 1986). Thus, subjected to an extraordinarily avid public interest, the national language becomes a means of collective self-examination and of soul searching but also of creating a strong distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Japanese and Westerners in particular (Kowner, 2002, 2003; Miller, 1982).

**Language Policy and Its Influence on English Loan Words**

One of the principal factors that may explain the ubiquity of English loan words in modern Japanese is Japan’s language policy. Japan does not have any national institution specifically in charge of the organisation and planning of linguistic borrowing. In fact, during the early stages of modernisation the flow of English loan words was so widespread and uncontrolled that a genuine though temporary Japanese-based pidgin developed and undoubtedly affected the mainstream language (cf. Goodman, 1967; Loveday, 1986; Miller, 1967). Consequently, certain loan words penetrated the language with only a fraction of their semantic scope, while others acquired new meanings, and still others received more than one phonological structure. Today the influx of loan words from English into Japanese remained without official control although dictionaries and almanacs provide some guidance by functioning inter alia as containers of any recent genuine linguistic acquisitions.

The successive reforms of the Japanese language in the 20th century were the joint product of pressure groups that stimulated public interest and the resultant government committees that took over and finalised the suggested reforms. The need for new vocabulary items has led, as often is the case elsewhere, to ideological debates between purists and reformers. During the Meiji era there were various levels of opposition to reform. The General Style [Futsūbun] Movement, for example, opposed the use of a colloquial style in Japanese, as well as the unification of written and colloquial styles. Instead it pressed for modifications in the existing style (Twine, 1991). As for the adoption of loan words, some critics argue even today that massive borrowing instead of creating an indigenous lexicon is a symbol of cultural backwardness and threat to the language (Burling, 1992). Others contend that enlarging a vocabulary using words which few understand reinforces the indifference or ambiguous attitude of the Japanese public to the meaning of words (Ueno, 1980). In contrast, supporters of loan word adoption argue that they enrich the language and make foreign languages more accessible (cf. Kawamoto, 1983).

Established toward the end of the 19th century, linguistic societies, such as the Society for Unification of Speech and Writing [Gembun no Ichi Kai] and the Language Association [Gengo Gakkai], prodded consistently for reforms in writing style, standardisation of the language, as well as the establishment of a national language advisory body (Twine, 1978; Yamamoto, 1969). Eventually, in 1900 the government, through the Education Ministry, established the National Language Inquiry Society [Kokugo Chōsakai], which was replaced in 1902 by the larger National Language Inquiry Board [Kokugo Chōsa linkai]. The following years were characterised by continuous linguistic reforms. In 1900 the shape of the *kana* (a general term for the two indigenous syllabaries, the *katakana* and the *hira*gana) letters was standardised; in 1901 the Education Ministry determined the practice of a standard form of Japanese, namely the variant used by the Tokyo upper-middle classes, and a year later the National Language Inquiry Board published the first official normative grammars (Maher, 1995).

The wave of linguistic reforms also affected the use of loan words. In 1902 the Ministry of Education issued the first official guidelines for the transcription of foreign names (locations as well as personal names) with *katakana* syllabary, thereby acknowledging their growing importance. However, in the reforms instituted in the primary schools’ education programme in 1910 and 1911 those guidelines were not followed. It was only in 1926 that a temporary National Language Inquiry Society [Rinji Kokugo Chōsakai] was established by the Education Ministry, and it proposed reforming the rules of loan-word transcription. Subsequently, a public report on the transcription of foreign languages was issued and accepted as a regulatory document. As attested by the written legacy of the popular culture of those days, several conventions that were added to the script to allow better approximation of the original sounds of the loan words were indeed implemented. At the same time, little attention was paid to the spoken language, and the amazing adaptation of Japanese to contemporary conceptual and technological development was achieved almost without institutional intervention (Umegaki, 1975).

After many transformations, in 1934 the Education Ministry established the National Language Council [Kokugo Shingikai], which seven
years later issued a new report on the transcription of foreign words. The main policy advocated by this report was to avoid using writing conventions that represented foreign phonemes nonexistent in Japanese. This was a substantive regression from the previous report published in 1926, which may be interpreted as part of the institutional efforts during the Pacific War to purify the Japanese language. The regression was so considerable that the new report was not very different from the first official guidelines for the writing of foreign names, issued in 1902 (Umegaki, 1975).

The Japanese defeat in 1945 opened the way to another set of reforms. The National Language Council focused mainly on script reforms of kanji (Gottlieb, 1995; Seeley, 1991; Unger, 1996), but in 1954 it issued new guidelines on the proper written rendering of loan words in a special policy report (Umegaki, 1975). Seeking a compromise between the desire to standardise the transcription of loan words while conscious that many loan words had already been nativised to the point where changing their spelling was impossible, the report was to dictate the official guidelines for loan-word transcription for the next 37 years. In 1991 an up-to-date, amended policy document on the writing of foreign loan words was published, which outlined the usage of katakana (Kokugo Shingikai, 1991). This document manifests a desire to turn Japanese into a more communicative and international language, as can be observed in an concentrated search for a pronunciation closer to the original words, including the introduction of new non-native phonemes (Carroll, 1997; Gottlieb, 1994). Having started back in the 1920s, this linguistic effort to sustain some of the original sounds of English loan words by constructing new phonemes with letter compounds based on existing letters (e.g. di, ti, fi) was implemented only for katakana. Nevertheless, it has already affected the sound system of modern Japanese as a whole, and may still enhance further transformations (for a table of contemporary spelling, see Loveday, 1997: 115).

In 1948 the National Japanese Language Research Institute [Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo] was established as an affiliate of the Education Ministry to implement the policy adopted by the National Language Council (Gottlieb, 1995). Since then it has conducted research in the area of linguistic structure, linguistic change and Japanese language teaching. Among the approximately one hundred volumes of scientific research published by the institute until the end of the century, there was one setting forth guidelines on teaching loan words (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo, 1990). For many years the activities of the institute, did not focus on lexical modernisation, and its contribution to planning or to moderating the adoption of foreign words was minimal (Grootaers, 1983). Following the previously mentioned intervention of Prime Minister Koizumi in 2002, however, a special committee composed recommended guidelines for the replacement of "difficult to understand loanwords" which are currently widely used by public channels of communication, with easier to understand Japanese words (gairaigo ikae teian: wakarintikutai gairaigo wa wakarita sukuri suru tame no goikata no kuhai). In 2006 the committee published its recommendation for the replacement of about 60 such loanwords (see: http://www.kokken.go.jp/public/gairaigo/).

Japan’s public broadcasting organisation, NHK [Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai], also has had a significant role in language planning in general, and controlling the usage of loan words in particular (Carroll, 1995). Through its two research organs, the Committee on Broadcast Research Language [Hōsō Yōgo Jinkai] and the Research Group on Broadcast Research Language [Hōsō Yōgo Kenkyūkan], NHK has served since the Pacific War as the single most important institution in defining the standard language and in disseminating it throughout Japan. Since the first radio broadcast in 1925, NHK has been instrumental in controlling and promulgating the use of loan words. It even published a book regarding, inter alia, the correct katakana spelling of loan words (NHK, 1987). This contribution, however, has been overwhelmed in recent decades by the growth of commercial TV and radio stations. Not only are they more popular than NHK, they tend to use and introduce more English-inspired words due to more liberal attitudes and various commercial needs.

In the absence of substantial official guidance, the role of tracking, cataloguing and standardising the massive penetration of foreign words in Japan was undertaken partly by compilers of dictionaries. Since Japan’s early history, dictionaries have been an integral and influential part of Japanese intellectual life, and in the last century a special genre of professional dictionaries and lexicons [senmon jiten] has developed. This type of dictionary – a strong indication of a society that cherishes knowledge and information – consists currently of several thousands of specific volumes covering almost every field. They include dictionaries of recently coined words, dictionaries of slang and dictionaries of loan words (e.g. Arakawa, 1977; Motwani, 1991; Saito, 1985). Most of them are published by non-state organisations and companies, such as the annually issued Gendai Yōgo no Kiso Chishiki [Basic Knowledge of Contemporary Terminology], which deals with new terms, most of which are loan words, classified according to subjects (e.g. Jiyūkōmin, 2004). Others are the outcome of an enterprise of the Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture. Together with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and the similar Scientific Association, it has compiled, since the 1950s, scores of dictionaries of scientific terms [gakujutsu yōgo shū] in all the major scientific disciplines (e.g. Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1986).

Evidently, language policies in Japan have focused mainly on the written language. In contrast to the spoken language, it is relatively easy, as Carroll (1997) argues, to codify, set standards for and monitor the written. Yet even here, most attention was paid to the kanji and least to katakana. The official assignment of katakana to the writing of loan words can be interpreted as official legitimisation of loan words. The small number of katakana reforms, as well as the attempt in most of them (except the one initiated during the Pacific War) to formulate a smoother, more flexible and more adequate transcription of loan words, suggests that the government has been adopting a liberal, supportive non-involvement policy in regard to loan words. This laissez-faire attitude to loan words (except for a short interlude during the Pacific War) may be an acknowledgement of the government’s inability to control the penetration of foreign vocabulary, enhanced by the implicit view that the uninhibited acquisition of loan words is an important tool in the ongoing process of modernisation. Nevertheless, this policy, or its absence, has been a crucial factor in the influx of gairaigo, English loan words in particular, into Japanese (Kowner & Rosenhouse, 2001).

**Linguistic Features and Practices of Loan Words in Japanese**

Although linguistic features and practices may be altered by institutional language policies, they are in fact the result of complex, historical, multidimensional and often even coincidental influences. In the following, we offer an analysis of certain linguistic features and practices in Japanese that reflect as well as mould cultural receptivity to loan words. As we shall show, various linguistic practices express the dialectical relationship between the cultural constructs of ‘Japaneseness’ and ‘foreign’ in Japan. Although many in Japan express their resentment towards the influx of gairaigo into Japanese, in an odd way the presence of loan words enhances the unity and integrity of the ‘Japanese language’ and consequently of an ‘original’ Japanese culture.

The domestication patterns of kango have affected the domestication patterns of gairaigo. As we pointed out above, loan words in Japanese are categorised in two groups. The first includes words that derive from Chinese and are called kango; the second includes all other loan words that are termed gairaigo. Certain scholars have argued that this sociolinguistic differentiation between kango and other loan words is not justifiable from a purely linguistic point of view, as the patterns of domestication of kango influenced the patterns of domestication of loan words from other languages centuries later (e.g. Ishiwata, 1991).

In the 7th century kango were incorporated into Japanese in great numbers, along with massive cultural importation from China that started a new era in Japanese history. The official support that it enjoyed from the Japanese court and aristocracy ceased in the 10th century. Nevertheless, with the help of merchants, pirates, artists and clergers the cultural domestication of many aspects of the Chinese culture still had a prominent effect at least until the 18th century (Pollack, 1986). The cultural legacy of those centuries leaves no doubt as to the prevailing liberal attitudes to the incorporation of new and foreign repertoires and modes of behaviour, which changed the Japanese culture dramatically. A more critical inquiry into the ways Japanese represented their culture to themselves at that time, however, results in a complex interpretation of the inner-cultural debate that took place on the influx of Chinese culture. During the early stages of the Japanese emulation of Chinese culture, things ‘Japanese’ [wan] had to be considered in relation to what was considered ‘Chinese’ [kan]. In this manner, ‘Japanese’ and ‘Chinese’ did not exist as objective identities but as antithetical cultural constructs of a uniquely Japanese dialectic known as wakan [Sino-Japanese] (Pollack, 1986). The importance some intellectuals gave to the maintenance of the boundaries of Japanese culture under such circumstances is well expressed in the 9th-century slogan ‘wakon kansai’ [Japanese spirit, Chinese technology]. This slogan is attributed to Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), who advocated the introduction of Chinese elements as long as they did not harm the integrity of Japanese cultural identity.

From a linguistic viewpoint, in addition to the influx of kango, the agglutinative and analytic elements prevalent in contemporary Japanese (but originally absent in the languages of the Altaic family, including Japanese) were created during those years in order to smooth the introduction of Chinese vocabulary items (Nishikawa, 1988; Umegaki, 1975). Furthermore, as no script existed in Japan until then, the Chinese kanji character system was also imported en bloc. At first, the political and intellectual elite of the rising kingdom of Yamato (Japan) was content to speak Japanese and write in Chinese, and all official documents and theological writings were written in Chinese. It was only in the 8th
century that the Chinese script system was domesticated and adapted to Japanese.

Originally each Chinese character was an ideograph that symbolised a single idea (logograph), but during its evolution much of the Chinese vocabulary came to comprise of words made of more than one character. When adapted to Japanese, some characters were read in Japanese according to their original meaning, others were read as Chinese loan words that had been changed phonetically in accordance with Japanese pronunciation, while yet others were used phonetically as a syllabary script regardless of their original meaning. Chinese characters were also used as building blocks for the creation of new words in Japanese. This new form of linguistic adaptation facilitated the introduction of Sino-Japanese words, that is, Chinese ‘made in Japan’, into Japanese.

During the 9th century, under the influence of Sanskrit studies of Buddhist monks and their knowledge of the alphabets of India, two original purely phonetic syllabary scripts, the hiragana and the katakana, were developed in Japan. The method was to simplify certain Chinese characters used in the first syllabary script (Seeley, 1991). During centuries of intensive linguistic importation from China, linguistic tools facilitating the smoother introduction of loan words were created. Furthermore, during those years linguistic practices that allowed great creativity with loan words and even legitimised disconnecting form and sound from content (or signifier from signified), while vigilantly maintaining a wakan dialectical discourse, were established. In the following centuries, and, as we shall see, to the present day, these sociolinguistic resources have been reapproriated in new contexts.

Written form

The modern Japanese writing system consists of three independent scripts (Chinese kanji ideographs, hiragana, katakana) that are used together, although each could theoretically represent the language’s entire phonological range (Habek, 1984; Seeley, 1991). In addition, Latin letters are frequently used, usually for acronyms, commercial names and numbers (on the increasing use of English or Latin-based text in the public space of contemporary Tokyo, see Backhaus, 2007a, 2007b). Nonetheless, the backbone of Japanese writing is the Chinese kanji character system. In modern standard Japanese, Chinese characters are used for conceptual words (mainly substantives, verbs and adjectives) and indigenous names. Alongside the Chinese script, there are two indigenous phonetic scripts known as kana. The first, Hiragana, is used for writing inflectional endings of conceptual words (written in the Chinese kanji characters), particles, as well as words previously written with rare Chinese characters, whereas the second, katakana, is used chiefly to write loan words of non-Chinese origin, non-Japanese proper names, native onomatopoeic words and the names of some plants and animals. The latter is also used to write cables, to indicate the phonetic reading of difficult Chinese characters (known as furigana) or for special poetic effects and emphasis (Rebuck, 2002). The complexity of the contemporary Japanese script transforms the characters in use from mere arbitrarily agreed conventions to being part of the communicated message. Thus, the possibility of exchanging one script for another becomes a means for sophisticated written communication (see for example, Ivy, 1988: 25).

Originally, katakana was used by men only, to punctuate and facilitate the reading of documents in Chinese. Thereafter it was used in combination with Chinese characters in the writing of official documents (Shoshashidō, 1994). It is not clear when katakana started to be used for writing loan words, but Christian priests arriving in Japan from the 16th century may have been the first to study the rules of transcribing foreign languages with kana. They began by trying to translate religious concepts into Japanese, but because of the many misunderstandings they decided to use the original words transcribed phonetically (Umeaka, 1975). Although inadequate, transcription rules formulated by Father João Rodrigues in his book Arte da Lingoa de Japam (Nagasaki, 1604–1608) were adopted by the Japanese intelligentsia throughout the Edo era (1600–1868). This does not mean that using katakana to transcribe loan words into Japanese was common practice. In fact, although some intellectuals, such as Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725), had already been doing so, most translators used kanji, and only sometimes hiragana or katakana. Institutional efforts to standardise the transcription of loan words with katakana began only in the early 20th century, suggesting that by that time it had already become customary. Today, katakana is so identified with loan words that they are sometimes referred to as katanaga [katakana words].

One of the main reasons for the current prevalence of English loan words in Japanese is arguably the existence of a separate script for writing foreign words (Honno, 1995). The option of using katakana carries immense advantages for smoothing the process of domesticating foreign words, even though it is not impossible to write loan words in Chinese characters. The word kōhii [Dutch: koffie], for example, is still often written in Chinese characters: 珈琲. Nevertheless, the phonetic use of
Chinese characters (known as \textit{hakuten}) is much less convenient than using a simple phonetic syllabary, such as the kana. Writing loan words with kana seems convenient also because it is conspicuous in the flow of a sentence written in Japanese, and immediately betrays the origin of loan words, which eases, in turn, the process of recognising and deciphering them. Compare, for example, the transcription of ‘club’ into \textit{kakarå} [karakara], and the French capital ‘Paris’ into \textit{båri}, as was the custom during Meiji period, to the modern \textit{kaibu} and \textit{båri}, respectively. But there is more to writing in \textit{kakarå} than this. Official encouragement to write non-Chinese loan words with \textit{kakarå} can justifiably be regarded as institutional approval of loan words. The government’s initiative to assign a special syllabary to loan words, and to continuously improve and elaborate on it, allowing better phonetic transcription, can be regarded as part of a language policy that accepts and actually encourages the importing of loan words. This policy is more sophisticated than it seems, as while providing linguistic devices to assimilate loan words better into Japanese, it simultaneously keeps loan words permanently in the special status of foreign words.

\textbf{Phonology}

Although phonetic adaptation of loan words in Japanese follows certain rules, it is rather complex and also has many exceptions to the rules. It is difficult to offer a fully adequate and comprehensive account here (for a more detailed description, see Ishiwata, 1991; Ohso, 1991; Umegaki, 1975). A general description of the more important rules may suffice:

1. In principle, all phonetic domestication of loan words in Japanese is based on the sound of the original words rather than on their script. Nevertheless, due to the phonological constraints of Japanese (i.e. limited number of phonemes and vowels (Miller, 1967), and almost all syllables being open phonetically), loan words sound quite different from their original pronunciation (Lovins, 1975; Vance, 1985).

2. Phonemes that do not exist in Japanese such as /L/ or /v/ as in ‘love’ are replaced by existing phonemes, in this case /r/ and /b/: ‘rabu’.

3. Nonexisting vowels, and nonexisting combinations of consonant + vowel, are approximated according to their original sound. Thus, ‘cheese’ is pronounced \textit{chisu}; ‘pair’ is pronounced \textit{pea}, ‘water’ is pronounced \textit{uwa}, and ‘silk’ is pronounced \textit{shiruku}.

4. Closed syllables are changed into open ones by addition of vowels. The vowel /a/, the shortest in Japanese, is the one most frequently used, unless another habit has formed through several years of usage. Therefore, while ‘Spain’ is pronounced \textit{supēn} and ‘bus’ is pronounced \textit{busu}, ‘brake’ is pronounced \textit{burēki}. However, after /t/ and /d/ the vowel /o/ is usually added since /t/h + /u/ in Japanese is pronounced /tsu/, and /d/h + /u/ is pronounced /dzu/. Here again, this rule is implemented only provided another habit has not become common practice. Thus, while ‘pocket’ is pronounced \textit{pocketo}, ‘shirt’ is pronounced \textit{shatsu}.

5. When the consonant /t/ is not followed by a vowel, it is usually omitted and replaced by stretching the previous vowel, as in car pronounced \textit{kai}, ‘heart’ pronounced \textit{hāto}, or ‘sport’ pronounced \textit{supōtsu}.

6. Stressing of consonants by doubling them has many exceptions to the rules. Generally in loan words, consonants that come after short vowels are doubled: ‘top’ becomes \textit{toppu}, and ‘snack’ becomes \textit{sunakku}. Interestingly, this rule not only has several variations, for example, according to the number of syllables in the word, it is also not consistent with Japanese phonetics. Unlike in loan words, in Japanese phonetics only voiceless consonants following short vowels are stressed. For this reason, pronunciation loan words in which voiced consonants are doubled is difficult for Japanese speakers, so they change them into voiceless consonants. ‘Bed’ becomes \textit{betto}, and ‘big’ becomes \textit{hikku}.

All English loan words undergo a process of phonetic ‘Japanisation’. Phonetic domestication in Japanese is so systematic that even in codeswitching to English, words that are not categorised as loan words, but as English idioms or parts of whole English phrases, are usually also pronounced after being phonetically Japanised. During an official visit to ground zero in New York, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, for instance, made a statement to the accompanying Japanese press incorporating a number of Japanised phrases such as: \textit{u masuto fanaito terrorizumu} [we must fight terrorism] (Rebuck, 2002). Though being a full independent grammatical sentence in English, the prime minister still pronounced it according to Japanese phonology. This tendency, which is ever-present in Japanese popular culture, can be interpreted from a pragmatic point of view as playing with the ‘foreign’ on familiar Japanese grounds. This suggests a dual approach, comprising almost
aggressive domestication while maintaining the communicative-markedness of the ‘foreign’ versus the ‘native’.

**Morphology**

In the process of domesticating loan words in Japanese, several patterns of morphological adaptation are noteworthy. We note two of the more common morphological transformation only:

1. English loan words are occasionally shortened by omission of their first or last parts, as in ‘blanket’, which has become *ketto*, and ‘dynamite’, which has become *maito*; or as in ‘demonstration’, which has become *demo*, and ‘department store’, which has become *depūto*. Sometimes, imported nouns formulated originally from more than one word are shortened by one or more syllables to become a new single integrated Japanese lexeme. Thus, ‘personal computer’ becomes *pasokon*, ‘mother complex’ becomes *nażākon* and ‘sexual harassment’ becomes *sekuhara*. The license to treat syllables as carriers of meaning, rather than the whole word or at least its original root, is attributable to the influence of Chinese (Ishiwata, 1991). As we briefly described earlier in this chapter, after their adaptation to Japanese, Chinese characters that represent phonetically one syllable as well as a semantic meaning became the building blocks for newly coined words in Sino-Japanese. What allows the application of this linguistic tool to English words is that unlike in Chinese, syllables in English do not have an independent meaning. Furthermore, arbitrary shortening of words does not comply with the patterns of coinedness in English. Nevertheless, though shortening loan words creates many homonyms, for example, ‘sentimental’ and ‘centimetre’ both become *senchi*, or ‘home’ and ‘platform’ both become *hōmū*, uninhibited omission of syllables is very common practice with English loan words in Japan.

2. The Japanese language is characterised by intricate politeness systems that depend on sociolinguistic factors. These systems distinguish between formal and informal styles, and numerous options of honorific language [keigo] (see Harada, 1976). Japanese speakers need to choose from several alternatives, which express the same message, while usually referring to the listener in a ‘respectful’ (‘honorific’) mode and to oneself in a ‘humble’ manner (cf. Hill *et al.*, 1986, Ogino, 1986). To create a politer register, the honorific prefix ‘o’ is attached to some nominal loan words. A bartender states to a customer that he is about to serve *ō-biru* [beer] or *ō-kōhī* [coffee]. The prefix ‘o’ is also used to produce euphemisms, ‘cleaner language’, to denote somewhat embarrassing things. The word ‘toilet’, for example, itself a euphemism used to avoid the local terminology, is first shortened and then prefixed with a formal ‘o’ resulting in the word *ō-toire* (Miller, 1967).

The morphological changes some loan words undergo reflect a carefree and liberal attitude to them. They are treated like building blocks, just as Chinese-like morphemes are used, in the innovative ongoing creation of the Japanese language. Here too, as with the phonetic adaptation of loan words, the dual approach of domesticating loan words to the point of detaching them altogether from their original context, while maintaining their culturally constructed foreignness as a communicative attribute, is prominent.

**Semantic features**

As with many other host languages, the absorption of foreign words into Japanese language leads to certain semantic phenomena that can be summarised as follows.

**Semantic deficiency**

Many of the English loan words fill semantic voids in Japanese, mainly in the modern technological domain. In certain domains the vast majority of terms are loan words (mechanical terms, computer terms, automobile parts). English terms have even replaced certain indigenous nomenclatures, and by the mid-1970s 52% of flower names, 35% of vegetable names and 24% of animal names are based on English words (Morimoto, 1978).

**Semantic redundancy**

The existence of many loan words leads to lexical redundancy. The borrowed adjectives *biggu* (big) and *kyūto* (cute), for example, sometimes replace the local adjectives *kii* and *kawii*, respectively. The noun *miruku* [milk] is at times used instead of *gyūnyū*. Often this redundancy can only be explained in terms of the functionality of loan words as stylistic devices for self-presentation or as a response to external cultural influences. A closer look suggests that in many other examples this redundancy is only apparent. The loan word and the local one denote roughly the same notion, but with a certain semantic variation or qualification. While *ikebana*, for example, denotes a Japanese style flower arrangement, *furawā areēji* (flower arrangement) denotes a Western-style one. While *daidokoro* denotes a Japanese-style kitchen, *kicchin* [kitchen]
denotes the modern Western variation; and, while maguro is the name of tuna fish served Japanese style, tsuna [tuna] always refers to canned tuna fish meat. Many ‘redundant’ loan words are used only in compounds: sukurī [school] is used in a number of compounds such as bijinesu sukurī [business school] and sukurī basu [school bus], but never independently. Likewise karucha [culture] and pēpō [paper].

Semantic extension

With the introduction of new loan words, semantic shifts are very common. Often when an indigenous word did exist, its English counterpart evolved to express only a specific part of its original meaning by narrowing its original semantic field. Thus kī [key] denotes car keys only, and rizunaburu [reasonable] is used only to describe reasonable prices. This semantic form enables speakers to achieve a particular flavour, and greater linguistic precision. Another common form of semantic shift is the extension of the original semantic fields of certain loan words. The loan word kamera man [camera man], for example, rather than denoting a professional ‘cameraman’ only, signifies any person holding a camera; and while in English the word ‘feminist’ denotes a person aspiring to achieve opportunities for women equal to those of men, in Japanese the word feminisuto refers also to a person who treats women kindly.

Semantic distortion

Sometimes the original meanings of a loan word are replaced altogether by new original local meanings. The word ‘companion’ in English, for example, denotes a friendly escort. In Japanese the word kompanion refers to a woman employed as a translator or a hostess at a social or professional gathering, or to a sale-promotion stewardess; and while the English words ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ denote the physical condition of an object, the loan word ueto [wet] describes a sentimental person, as opposed to a dorai [dry], a non-sentimental one. Many of these semantic shifts may have originally occurred due to some misunderstanding, but today public awareness of the discrepancies between the original meanings of those loan words and their Japanese meanings is growing. Contrary to what might have been expected, this awareness frequently results in a certain amused admiration for the creativity and originality of the Japanese language and its speakers. Although after undergoing phonological, morphological and semantic changes a loan word is often completely unintelligible to English speakers, it is still considered a loan word rather than a word in Japanese or even an ‘English made-in-Japan’ word.

Indigenous coinage of English-inspired vocabulary (wasei eigo)

Nowhere is more creativity and originality expressed than in the locally coined English-like words and expressions. ‘English-inspired vocabulary items’ often have meanings in Japan that are inventive, playful and uniquely Japanese (cf. Tobin, 1992). Several such expressions are so indispensable and deep-rooted in Japanese daily life that their usage has become unmarked, while other expressions are amusing enough to retain their special marking despite their long history. A few examples of such words may suffice: ‘base-up’ pronounced bēsu appu [a raise in basic salary]; ‘salaried man’ pronounced saranīman [male white-collar employee]; ‘nighter’ pronounced naitā [a night-time baseball game]; ‘skinsnhip’ pronounced sukinshippu [physical contact usually between mother and child]; ‘engine stop’ shortened and pronounced ensuto [stalling of a car engine]; ‘my car’ pronounced mai kā [one’s private car]; ‘high miss’ pronounced hai misu [an unmarried woman aged over 30]; and ‘body-conscious’ pronounced bodikon [bodikon girls formed a subculture during the late 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s. They were characterised by their figure-hugging dresses]. The combination of a loan word with a native Japanese word or with a Japanese word of Chinese origin is a popular pattern for producing loan translations or original local expressions. Haisi gaasu [exhaust gas] and ha burashi [tooth brush] are loan translations, while denki sutando [electricity + stand combined to mean an electric lamp stand] and karaoke [empty + orchestra combined, to mean the now universally popular entertainment in which amateurs sing their favourite songs with recorded orchestral accompaniment] are local original expressions.

Acronaming of English-inspired vocabulary items is also very frequent. Thus, OL, pronounced oeru, is the acronym for the Japanese original expression ‘office-lady’, referring to a female clerk. The acronym LDK, pronounced erudikei, stands for ‘living-dining-kitchen’, indicating Western-style apartments. Sometimes words in Japanese or Sino-Japanese are also made into Latinate acronyms. The noun hentai, for example, which denotes sexual perversion, is often acronamed as H, pronounced eichi. The three characteristics of the most unattractive jobs are kitanai [dirty], kiken [dangerous] andkitsui [tiring], usually referred to as 3K, pronounced sansūki.

Many of the more inventive wasei eigo expressions are coined as slang. The original obitan, for example, is a pejorative for a pushy middle-aged lady. It is actually an integration of the English nominalisation pattern: XXX+rian as in ‘vegetarian’, here it has the Japanese noun for an elderly woman, obusan. The same formation pattern produced the
amusing expression *jibetarian*, from *jibeta* (earth or ground) + ian, denoting a juvenile lazy bum squatting on the pavements. Another fun expression is *anshinjiraburu*. In this expression, the English adjective pattern un + XXX + able as in ‘unreasonable’ has been applied with the Japanese verb *shinjiru* [to believe] to form the semi-loan translation of ‘unbelievable’. The Japanese media are very quick to absorb and spread many of these newly coined expressions that evoke a youthful mood. Sometimes the media themselves are responsible for the invention of new terminology as a means of attracting a young audience or readership. This is why, for example, the publishers of a popular magazine targeting young men chose to call it *Gāmer* as a local marked variation on the English expression ‘winner’.

Similarly to the public enthusiasm for *modan-go* [modern words] in prewar Japan, nowadays too *wasei eigo* are often treated as a highly enjoyable linguistic phenomenon. While the interesting case of *wasei eigo* demonstrates the uninhibited cultural-linguistic approach to foreign lexemes, it also exhibits conspicuously the ongoing cultural construction and invention of Japanese identity through the categorisation and cultural treatment of loan words. The ambiguous identity of *wasei eigo*, which does not comply with either of these categories, is resolved by defining these words as both foreign and Japanese at the same time. This third culturally constructed categorisation complies well with yet another cultural narrative created for legitimising the incorporation of foreign elements including loan words while preserving the integrity of the Japanese culture. The hidden agenda of this narrative, as Brannen (1992) puts it, is that the Japanese, despite their numerous encounters with other cultures, remain a unique people as cultural artefacts brought to Japan from foreign lands are introduced as seeds to be planted in Japanese soil. From these seeds the original and unique Japanese culture evolves. While this narrative describes adequately and universally all intercultural encounters and exchanges, the interesting thing is that in Japan it is further developed as part of an ongoing cultural debate about Japanese identity that may, as Brannen shows, have quite unexpected public exposures.

**Grammatical adaptation**

Grammatical licence in the adaptation of loan words in Japanese is also common (cf. Tranter, 1997). The most common in regard to English is the dropping of English suffixes such as -s, -ed and -ing. ‘Sunglasses’ is *sangurasu*, condensed milk is *kondensu miruku*, and frying pan is *furai pan* (cf. Kawamoto, 1983). The Japanese language, however, provides its speakers with some grammatical possibilities that seem especially convenient for the introduction of loan words. While Japanese displays to a certain degree the characteristics of an inflecting language, it also has agglutinative and analytic characteristics. In Japanese, in most cases, a change in gender, number or case is not effected grammatically in nouns, and this facilitates the introduction of nominal loan words. Moreover, suffixes like ‘da’, ‘na’ and ‘ni’, or independent morphemes like the verb ‘suru’ [to do], are added to loan words, transforming them into nouns, adjectives, adverbs or verbs, and incorporating them into Japanese. For example, the English ‘best’, as an adverb, is transformed into a Japanese adverb through the suffix ‘ni’, resulting in ‘besuto ni’; the English noun ‘hiking’ is transformed into a Japanese verb through the Japanese verb *suru*, resulting in *haikingu suru*. In the same way, the English nominal idiom ‘hit and run’ is transformed into the Japanese verb *hitto endo ran suru*.

Certainly, as we know from other languages, inflecting characteristics do not prevent or limit the possibility of importing new vocabulary items from other languages. Japanese too offers a few examples of loan words that were originally verbs or nouns and were assimilated into Japanese as inflecting verbs or inflecting adjectives thanks to their phonetic structure in the original or after being adapted to Japanese. The verb ‘to double’, for example, became transformed into the Japanese inflecting verb *daburu* (past form *dabutta*), and the adverb ‘now’ became transformed into the Japanese inflecting adjective *naai* (past form *nauta*). The transformation of the verb ‘to neglect’ into an inflecting Japanese verb, however, was much more complex. First it was made into a Japanese verb with the addition of the verb *suru* to produce *negurekuto + suru*. Then it was shortened to *negu + suru*, and ended finally as the Japanese inflecting verb *neguru* (past form *negutta*).

Still, the scarcity of loan words that became transformed into Japanese inflectional verbs or adjectives suggests that adding suffixes or independent morphemes in order to assimilate new loan words into Japanese is much more simple. The Japanese language features an apparatus for ‘instant adaptation’ of loan words, and this has greatly facilitated the import of loan words throughout the centuries. The ease and simplicity of this process have certainly influenced the uninhibited cultural attitude to the borrowing of foreign words and to their ever-ingenious assimilation into the local language.
Conclusion

Modern Japanese is characterised by an extreme penetration of English loan words. This penetration is notable particularly because of the large linguistic distance between Japanese and English, as well as the ongoing ethnocentric discourse which focuses on the singularity of the Japanese people and their language. Despite these obstacles, English loan words have become exceptionally popular under certain favourable historical and political conditions.

The penetration of English loan words into Japanese was fostered by a long tradition of emulating the values and technology of a chosen leading civilisation. Since the end of the 19th century, Britain, and later the USA, were regarded as the bearers of civilisation. Consequently, lexical borrowing from English was not only considered indispensable for Japan’s modernisation but it was also accompanied by high prestige. At the same time, Japan has avoided almost any institutional control over this borrowing, and the attraction to English loan words in the widely available media eased the process of dissemination of new vocabulary. Finally, the use of a writing system designed in modern times specifically for Western loan words enforces their modification and thereby reduces the cultural sense of identity loss.

This chapter suggests that Japanese cultural receptiveness to English loan words does not reflect a passive cultural environment subordinated to the acknowledged superiority of the ‘West’. This receptiveness, in fact, is possible as it is constructed within an ongoing dynamic inner cultural reinvention of ‘Janesenesness’ and ‘Japanese identity’. Despite sporadic attempts to restrain the spread of loan words and to protect the purity of the Japanese language, such as that launched by Prime Minister Koizumi, the prevailing practices in Japan in regard to loan words exhibit a more sophisticated cultural strategy which protects the ‘Janesenesness’ of the Japanese language. It is a strategy in the broader sense of providing speakers with cultural-linguistic possibilities that were created over many centuries as result of multiple influences and coincidences. Even from a purist point of view, loan words are used in Japanese as an antithetical representation of the essence of ‘Japanese-ness’, and only through comparison with them, through the construction of their (foreign) image, can Japanese identity be defined and affirmed.

Paraphrasing Swidler’s (1986) notion of culture and adapting it to language, we maintain that language is a ‘tool kit’ of linguistic features, linguistic practices, symbols, values and worldviews, which people may use in various configurations. They use it to solve problems that go beyond straightforward communication, namely to metacommunication and the creation of a personal and a collective identity. Language provides its speakers with linguistic components used to construct persistent ways of ordering action, or ‘strategies of action’. In the interpretation of sociolinguistic phenomena, the significance of specific linguistic practices should be understood in relation to the strategies of action they sustain.

At the dawn of the 21st century, globalisation processes and technological progress certainly enhance and influence the speed and proportion of the phenomenon of gairaigo in Japanese. Yet in rather ingenious sociolinguistic ways, after being fully domesticated – often to the point of being totally reinvented – these words become bearers of the wayō [Japanese–Western] dialectical relations in contemporary Japan that are crucial to the contemporary construction of ‘Janesenesness’. By dramatising the difference and opposition to the Other, the sense of self is accentuated. The culturally constructed categorisation of ‘loan words’ as opposed to ‘Japanese words’ or to words in ‘English made-in-Japan’, become proof of the unity and integrity of the ever-changing Japanese language.

Note

1. All translations from Japanese sources are by the authors.