

## 17 The westernization of Japanese: Loanwords and other borrowings

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Particularly since the Meiji period (1867–1912), Japanese has taken in a large number of loanwords from European languages, especially from English. However, Japan's initial contact with European languages is reflected in borrowings from as early as the sixteenth century. The ongoing impact on the Japanese lexicon is of a magnitude equal to the impact Chinese had on the language centuries earlier (see Chapter 9), not simply providing new words for new things and technology, but making available a whole intellectual and philosophical conceptual world which was unknown in Japan before the Meiji period. The intake of loanwords may be divided into three main waves: (a) pre-Meiji, (b) from Meiji to the end of WWII, and (c) from the end of the war, of which it is the latter two phases which have exerted profound influence on the language.

### 17.1 Vocabulary layers and hybrid words

Often the existence of three or four different 'vocabulary layers' is posited in descriptions of Japanese: native Japanese words (*wago* 和語, or *yamato-kotoba*), Sino-Japanese words (*kango* 漢語), (recent) loanwords (*gairaigo* 外来語), and sometime also mimetics (*giseigo* 擬声語, *gitaigo* 擬態語). The first three, the main lexical layers, overtly refer to historical origin, but this classification is in addition thought by many scholars to represent some synchronic linguistic reality for speakers of the language, and other defining criteria than etymology are invoked, for example phonological or socio-linguistic ones. However, an etymological classification of words or morphemes is highly relevant for the history of the language, but there is no one-to-one relationship between the etymologically defined layers and layers defined by other criteria. There are certainly phonological features which are exclusive to some recent loanwords (14.6), but they are not shared by all recent loanwords. And there are socio-linguistic values (17.1.1) which are characteristic of recent and not well-integrated loanwords, but this is a short-lived quality which changes if and when the words become better integrated; more generally this applies to much new vocabulary, regardless of its origin. On the

whole it seems that the notion of vocabulary layers, other than those defined strictly etymologically, is not useful for a book such as this one.

So-called ‘hybrid’ words, i.e. words composed of elements from more than one etymological layer, abound. We already saw examples of combinations of borrowed SJ vocabulary with preexisting material in 9.2.3.2, and a simple further example is the name of Yanase Takashi’s popular cartoon character *anpanman*, lit. ‘bean-jam bun man’, which was coined by attaching the male superhero suffix *-man* borrowed from English to the compound *anpan* ‘bean-jam bun’, which was coined in the Meiji period from SJ *an* ‘bean-jam’ (餡) and *pan* ‘bread’ (from Portuguese). *Anpanman* is thus hybrid in combining three different layers of borrowed material.

### 17.1.1 Gairaigo

The Japanese word usually translated into English as ‘loanword’ is *gairaigo* (外来語), but *gairaigo* is different from *loanword* in several respects. First of all, *gairaigo* is used about recent, transparent borrowings, primarily from European languages, but does not refer to SJ vocabulary, which also is borrowed, or to old naturalized loanwords, such as those mentioned in Chapter 4. The word *gairaigo* was coined during the period of modernization of the Japanese lexicon which took place in the Meiji period (17.3) and was used first by the linguist Ueda Kazutoshi in 1895 (after returning from his studies in Germany in 1890), and it seems clear that *gairaigo* corresponds to and is intended to render the German *fremdwort* which literally means ‘alien, foreign word’. This word, and Japanese *gairaigo*, captures better than Japanese *shakuyōgo* (借用語), German *lehnwort*, or English *loanword* the various and quite diverse socio-linguistic nuances associated with the use of loanwords from European languages (such as ‘learned, trendy, exotic’ and others), at least in the initial phase of their use. Words considered *gairaigo* are usually written in *katakana* and they are sometimes referred to as *katakana-go* ‘*katakana* words’.

## 17.2 Pre-Meiji; from the end of Late Middle Japanese to the middle of the nineteenth century

During the so-called ‘Christian century’, from the arrival of the missionaries in the 1540s to the ban on Christianity and expulsion of the missionaries in the 1630s, loanwords were mainly taken in from Portuguese. Later on, during the period from the 1640s to the opening of Japan in the 1850s, when contact with Europeans was almost limited to the Dutch or took place through the Dutch settlement on Dejima off Nagasaki, loanwords were taken in from Dutch. As we saw above, the Jesuits freely used Portuguese (and Latin) words

in their publications in Japanese, either spelling them as in the source language in the alphabet texts, or adapting them into *kana* in the texts in Japanese script (10.2.2), but many of these words never became part of the Japanese language. The following is a short list of loanwords, or foreign words, used in Japanese, listed by Thunberg (1792: 268–9).<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the list comprises words which must have been and remained foreign words, used for convenience in conversation with the few interpreters and others who had contact with the Dutch in Nagasaki, but it is also striking that a fair number of words in the list have survived into and are still used in cNJ (shown in boldface). The list gives an interesting glimpse of words which a visitor at that time such as Thunberg was exposed to. For some of these words, Thunberg cites a source language, here noted as ‘h(olland)’ for Dutch’ and ‘p(ortugal)’ for Portuguese, and it is noteworthy that of the words surviving into cNJ, more than half are from Portuguese. Several of the words listed involve both borrowed and Japanese elements (the latter here written in plain type).

- (1) **tabaco** (p) ‘tobacco’ (cNJ *tabako*, mainly used about cigarettes), **bir** (h) ‘beer’ (cNJ *biiru*), *Portugal abra* ‘olive oil’ (*abura* ‘oil’), *unicorn* ‘unicorn’s horn’, *boter* (h) ‘butter’, *boter no kas* ‘cheese’ (no genitive), **karta** (p) ‘playing cards’ (cNJ *karuta*), *kapitein* (h) ‘captain’, *lancetta* ‘lancet’, *krokodil* ‘crocodile’, **pang** (p) ‘bread’ (cNJ *pan*), **pokk** (p) ‘venereal disease’, **savon** (p) ‘soap’ (cNJ *shabon*, now not used much, but generally replaced by SJ *sekken* 石鹸), *fige savon* ‘shaving soap’ (*fige* > cNJ *hige* ‘beard’), **flasco** (p) ‘flask’, **banco** (p) ‘bench’, *diamant* ‘diamond’, *faka* ‘knife’, *saffran* ‘saffron’, **biduro** (p) ‘glass’, *baso* ‘dish’, **kopp** (h) ‘cup’ (cNJ *koppu*), *ducaton* ‘Dutch coin’, *theriak* ‘theriac’, *gans* (h) ‘goose’, **vein** (h) ‘wine’ (cNJ *wain*), *kakami biduro* ‘looking glass’ (*kagami* ‘mirror’), **rassia**, **orassia** ‘cloth’ (*o-* Honorific prefix; cNJ *rasha*; Thunberg does not note it, but this word is from Portuguese *raxa*), *aderlaten* (h) ‘blood-letting’, *skerbekken* (h) ‘basin for shaving’, **fork** (h) ‘fork’ (cNJ *hooku*, *fooku*), *kananor isi* ‘hematite’ (Cannanore (Kannur) in India + *isi* ‘stone’), **tabaco ire** ‘tobacco pouch’ (*ire* ‘receptacle’), *tinta* ‘Spanish wine’.

Other Portuguese loanwords which have survived into cNJ include *bateren* ‘priest, padre’ (< *padre*), *kasutera* ‘sponge cake’ (< (*paõ de*) *Castella* ‘bread

<sup>1</sup> The list is introduced by: ‘Sunt præterea res, in Japoniam ab Exteris allatæ, quæ nominibus vel Portugallicis vel Hollandicis insigniri solent, ut:’ (‘there are various things, brought to Japan from outside, which are usually designated by Portuguese or Dutch names, such as:’).

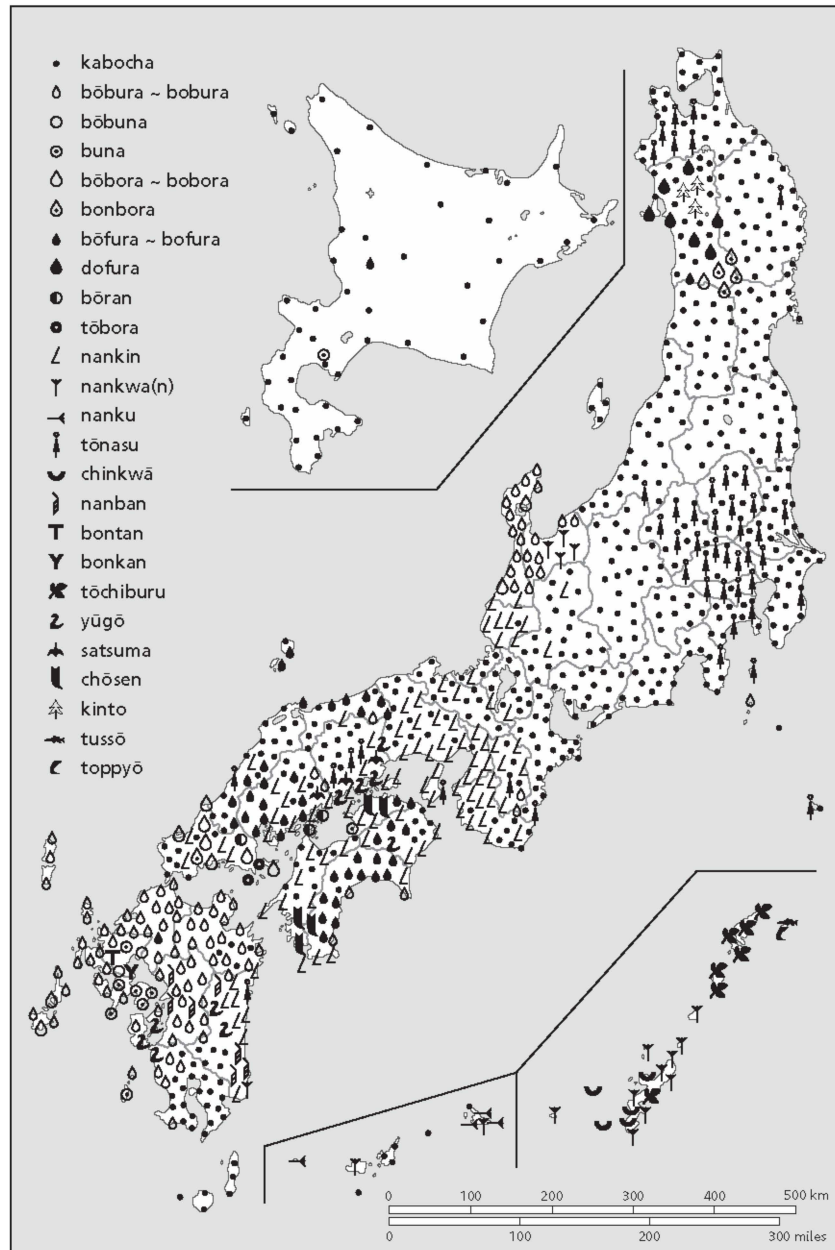
from Castilla'), and *tempura* 'tempura; deep fried fish and vegetables in batter' (< *tempero* 'cooking'). A final example is the Japanese words for 'pumpkin', which were brought to Japan by the Portuguese in the late sixteenth century. The distribution of words throughout Japan is shown in Map 17.1. The most common word, used also in standard Japanese, is *kabocha* which is used in most mainland dialects, but another widely used word is *boobora* (which has a number of variants: *bobora*, *bo(o)bura*, *boobuna*, etc.). These two word(group)s reflect adaptations of the two parts of what the Portuguese called the pumpkin when they brought it to Japan: *Cambodia abóbora* 'Cambodian pumpkin' (Port. *abóbora* 'calabash, gourd, pumpkin').<sup>2</sup> The variant shapes and distribution of the words reflecting *abóbora* also illustrate the phonological adaptations and changes which may take place in the course of borrowing into Japanese, as well as the fact that Japanese dialects may treat loanwords differently.

From the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth century the Dutch were the only Europeans allowed in Japan – and Thunberg for example had to learn Dutch in order to pass himself off as a Dutchman to be allowed to stay in Japan, and to interact with the local translators. Contact with technology and ideas from Europe, in which through that time there was a small but steadily growing interest, took place exclusively through Dutch which was studied and learnt by many intellectuals, and the study of European medicine, technology, science, etc. came to be known as 'Dutch learning' (*ran-gaku* 蘭学, 'Dutch' (< *oranda* 'Holland') + 'learning'). In the course of this, a large number of Dutch words came to be used by those engaged in 'Dutch learning'. Most such words remained foreign and never gained general currency, but some entered the language and a few are still in use today. Dutch loanwords still in use include *mesu* 'surgical scalpel' (< *mes* 'knife') and *handon* 'half day off', < *han-* 'half' + *don(taku)* (< *zontag* 'Sunday').

### 17.3 From the beginning of Meiji to the end of WWII (1945)

Although the Dutch officially until the middle of the nineteenth century were the only Europeans allowed in Japan, there was some contact with other Europeans and their languages from the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the enforced opening of Japan in the 1850s that loanwords from other European languages than Portuguese and Dutch were taken in to any noteworthy extent. From the middle of the nineteenth century Japan was inundated with technology, science, ideas and material culture from Europe

<sup>2</sup> There are also words for 'pumpkin' which have different origin, such as place names presumably reflecting putative origins (*nankin* after Nanjing in southern China, or *chōsen* 'Korea') or descriptions (*tō-nasu* 'Chinese eggplant').



Map 17.1 Distribution of words for 'pumpkin' (from Satō 2002: 169)

Table 17.1 *Loanwords in use during the Taishō period (from Shibatani 1990: 149, table 7.5)*

Origin	Number of words	%
English	84	51.9
Dutch	45	27.8
Portuguese	23	14.2
French	6	3.7
German	2	1.2
Spanish	1	0.6
Others	1	0.6

and the US, which was eagerly adopted in the course of the effort to modernize and catch up with the ‘western’ countries. This resulted in a great amount of borrowed vocabulary, which was taken in either as direct loans (17.3.1), or as loan translations into SJ (17.3.2).

### 17.3.1 *Loanwords from European languages*

English dominated as a donor language of loanwords from the very beginning of the period of modernization, but it did not attain the virtual monopoly it has today until after the end of WWII. It is often observed that loanwords from the minor donor languages exhibit some degree of semantic specialization, correlating with areas of material and cultural contribution: e.g. German (*karute* ‘medical patient record’ < *karte*, *(aru)baito* ‘part-time student job’ < *arbeit*), French (*bifuteki* ‘steak’ < *bifteck*, *konsome* < *consommé*), Italian (*opera*, *sonata*). Table 17.1 shows the origins of 162 loanwords from different European languages which were in common use around the middle of the Taishō period (1912–26). It is noteworthy that words borrowed from Dutch and Portuguese still at this time were quite prominent.

### 17.3.2 *Loan translations; Sino-Japanese coinages*

In addition to direct loans, a strategy was adopted of coining SJ words for the new notions, institutions and things to be named, that is, loan translation into (Sino-)Japanese. This coinage often consisted of finding some word, or *kanji* combination, in one of the Chinese Classics, which could be drafted in to write the new word, which was vocalized by using the SJ reading, or alternatively of reviving or adapting SJ words from earlier or specialized usage, but freer coinage from Sino-Japanese was also frequently used.

Some of the new SJ words originate in *kanji* writings intended as a logographic representation of a direct loanword, accompanied by reading glosses in *katakana*, subsequently reinvented as a SJ word. An example which illustrates some of the processes involved is cNJ *shokudō* 食堂 which is now the general word for most types of '(large, public) dining room, dining hall'. In the 1870s English *dining room* was rendered or borrowed as *dainingurūmu*, written as 会食堂 (ダイニングルーム), i.e. logographically in *kanji* with the pronunciation shown in *katakana*. Earlier 食堂 *zikedō* < *zikedai* (which is *go-on*), was a specialized word for dining rooms in Buddhist temples, but following on from the writing of *dainingurūmu* as shown above, 食堂 was drafted in as a SJ translation equivalent and was, accompanying its new use, given a different pronunciation (reading) using *kan-on* for 食, but keeping *go-on* for 堂 (whose *kan-on* is *tō*). Incidentally, *dainingurūmu* is still occasionally written <sup>ダイニングルーム</sup> 食堂.

SJ words deliberately coined, revived or adapted in this way during the Meiji period make up the great majority of SJ words in use today – and the overwhelming majority of academic, political and intellectual vocabulary used in Japanese today – and some of these words were later adopted in China and Korea, with Chinese or Sino-Korean vocalization. Many of these new words are attributable to individuals who also otherwise played prominent roles in the process of modernization in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Nishi Amane, Fukuzawa Yukichi and Inoue Tetsujirō, whose translation of William Fleming's *The vocabulary of philosophy, mental, moral and metaphysical* (1857), *Tetsugaku jii* (哲学字彙, 1881) provides more than 2,500 SJ words relevant to philosophy. Of the many new SJ words coined in this way in the late nineteenth century, a few examples are given in (2):

- (2) *shakai* 社会 'society', *minshu*(*shugi*) 民主(主義) 'democracy', *jiyū* 自由 'liberty', *shinri*(*gaku*) 心理(学) 'psyche (psychology)', *tetsugaku* 哲学 'philosophy', *kaisha* 会社 'firm, company', *kaikeigaku* 会计学 'accounting', *rōdō* 労働 'work' (which includes 働 which was made in Japan, see 9.1.5), *yūbin* 郵便 'post', *jidōsha* 自動車 'automobile', *tetsudō* 鉄道 'railway', *denwa* 電話 'telephone', *enzetsu* 演説 'speech', *tōron* 討論 'discussion', *bungaku* 文学 'literature', *shōsetsu* 小説 'novel', *kokka* 国家 'nation', *kokumin* 国民 'people'.

As the short list suggests, new words for abstract concepts and institutions were usually coined in this way, rather than by direct loans. It is highly unlikely that the lexical, terminological modernization of the Meiji period would have been as successful as it was, if it had had to rely on direct loans, rather than

SJ coinages, which are short and in some cases provide educated readers with semantic clues. In addition, SJ coinages have the important function of giving the impression that these words were part of and belonged in an intellectual tradition.

### 17.3.3 *Influence from European languages in grammar and usage*

European languages, and especially translation practices from European languages not unlike the *kanbun-kundoku* practices described in 9.1 – i.e. ‘reading’ a Dutch or English text ‘in Japanese’ – have exerted some influence on Japanese, though not to the extent Chinese did earlier. For example, the use of the 3rd person pronouns *kare* ‘he’ and *kanojo* ‘she’ (< *ka-no-jo* ‘DISTAL-GEN-woman’), which became widely used from the late nineteenth century in literary writing and eventually passed over into general language, originates in translation-inspired imitations of European literature; the imitation went so far as to use *kanojo* to refer to ships. In general, under this influence from Dutch and English, pronouns came to be used far more, especially in writing from the early twentieth century onwards, than they had been before the Meiji period.

Another example which is often mentioned is changes in the use of the passive. Because of the relatively free word order, a semantic patient can in Japanese be topicalized or fronted without the need for passivization, and the passive is traditionally said not to have been used much solely for this purpose, but usually to express some kind of affectedness on a human, or animate, patient, by a sentient or personified agent. However, since the Meiji period, more direct uses of the passive have become current, with both inanimate agents and patients, and this is usually ascribed to influence from or imitation of translation from Dutch and English languages. Kinsui (1997) has shown that marking of the agent in direct passives by *ni-yotte* originates in translation practices from Dutch, in which *door* ‘through’, which can be used both about path, means and way, and about agents in passive constructions, was conventionally translated by *ni-yorite* or *ni-yotte*, which originally meant ‘because’, also when used about passive agents. This usage was eventually generalized and made its way into general language. It is interesting that the title of Yamada Yoshio’s ground-breaking study of the influence of *kanbun-kundoku* on Japanese (*Kanbun no kundoku ni yorite tsutaeraretaru gohō* from 1935), uses the direct passive with an inanimate agent and *ni-yorite* to mark the agent, both of which originate in similar influences from similar practices centuries after *kanbun-kundoku* made its mark on Japanese.

Finally, the obligatory marking of all core arguments (subjects and objects) by case particles in written Japanese today is a written language feature which was introduced in the establishment of the new normative standard written



Table 17.2 *Loanwords used in magazines (from Shibatani 1990: 148, table 7.4)*

Origin	Number of words	%
English	2,395	80.8
French	166	5.6
German	99	3.3
Italian	44	1.5
Dutch	40	1.3
Russian	25	0.8
Chinese	22	0.7
Portuguese	21	0.7
Spanish	21	0.7
Others	131	5.3

language. It was not a feature of written Japanese before the *genbun'itchi* reforms, nor was it ever, or is today, a feature of spoken Japanese, where omission of case particles (case drop) has always been frequent.<sup>3</sup> Its introduction into standard written Japanese is usually ascribed to a desire to have a normative, regular grammar for written language, as the European languages did, but it should also be noted that *kuntengo* (9.1.6), which is one formal genre of written Japanese, generally did not have case drop.

#### 17.4 Post-WWII

The period after the end of WWII has seen an intake of loanwords from English on a much larger scale than in the period before the war and English now has a near monopoly as a donor of loanwords to Japanese, as shown in Table 17.2 which shows a clear growth in the proportion of loanwords from English in the post-war period compared to before the war, cf. Table 17.1. This has accompanied improvements in English education and widespread command of English (i.e., more (limited) bilingualism) and far greater contact with and access to English, in particular American English.

It is today difficult to distinguish between integrated loanwords from English and occasional use of phonologically more or less adapted English words (which may later be more widely adopted to become well-integrated loanwords). Conventions exist for spelling English words in *katakana*, and it is therefore easy to insert English words in written Japanese for stylistic effect.

<sup>3</sup> That is the reason a trick question like *pantsukutta koto aru?* (courtesy of Miss Saitō Sachiko) works. It can either be parsed as (i) *pan (o) tsukutta koto aru?* 'Have you ever made bread?' or as (ii) *pantsu (o) kutta koto aru?* 'Have you ever eaten pants?'

Needless to say, different speakers have different repertoires of integrated loanwords. In this respect the socio-linguistic situation in Japan is much the same as in most other developed countries, with quite different levels of command of English between different segments of the population and widespread use of English words by some speakers, especially educated and young urban people. Buzzwords often derive from English, for example *sekuhara* 'sexual harassment', abbreviated from *sekushuaru harasumento*, the phonologically adapted rendition of the English word; and inventive metaphorical usages can be surprising and amusing, as in *bākodo* 'comb-over' which is from *bar code*. English words and morphemes are in Japan often used creatively in combinations that are not usual in first language English speech communities, giving rise to 'loanwords' which are not used in English, for example *ōeru* 'female office worker' < *OL* (short for *office + lady*), *batontatchi* 'baton pass' or as a verb *batontatchi-se-* 'pass the baton to one's successor' < *baton + touch*, *sukinshippu* 'physical contact (especially between baby and mother)' < *skin + -ship*, or *makaroni-wesutan* 'spaghetti western'. *Camcorder* (Japanese *kamukōdā*) is an example of an English word coined in Japan and now used worldwide. These examples are all from the post-war period, but many examples are found also before the war, for example *ōrudomisu* 'old maid' < *old + miss*, or *afureko* 'dubbing' < *after + recording*.

## REFERENCES

- Westernization, general: Miller 1967: 235ff., Shibatani 1990: 142ff. Loanwords: *Kadokawa gairaigo jiten* (Arawaka 1977). Grammatical borrowing: Kinsui 1997.