The Use of Loanwords in the Japanese EFL classroom

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L1 orthography in an L2 Class?

This paper was inspired by my observation of my students' use of katakana in the classroom over the years. While I am pleased to have the benefit of the doubt when it comes to using L1 in the classroom for educational support at my present university, I have wondered to what extent the use of katakana actually serves in aiding the learner in the classroom. For example, I noticed in my reading class recently that a student wrote the *katakana* りんく (*rinku*) over the word "link" in a reading passage. Several questions came to mind when I observed the student write this after she consulted a dictionary: Did she write the katakana because she already knew it as a 外来語 (Gairaigo: "loanword") in Japanese? What point is there to acquiring *gairaigo* if the connection cannot be easily made to its L2 counterpart without the aid of a dictionary? Why are the learners in Japan not acquiring loanwords in their original form using the Roman alphabet in their early years of schooling? Since a single word can have many meanings, was the meaning, as the student understood it, really applicable to the way the word was used in the text the she was reading at the time? What really is the whole point of using Katakana in the first place? Who decides what an official borrowed word becomes and what are that words "shelf-life" once they have been assimilated into the Japanese language?

Japanese Orthography and *gairaigo*

According to the study of writing systems or orthography used by languages around the world, there are three major types: logographic, syllabic and alphabetic. English is understood as a language that uses the alphabetic script. Japanese, on

the other hand, is a unique language that predominantly uses the logographic and two different syllabic scripts which were created from the logographic (Chinese characters). Though the Roman alphabetic script is not considered a part of the Japanese writing system per se, it is taught in elementary schools as *rooma-ji* two years before English education starts (Daulton, 2008). It is also not uncommon to see words borrowed from English as is (i.e. in the Roman alphabet) and blended into a vertically written text that has the logographic and syllabary scripts. However, the *katakana* script is used to transcribe words borrowed from other languages. It is a syllabic sound based orthography where virtually all of the 71 individual units form a short syllable in the form of a consonant and vowel cluster.[1] The other syllabary, *hiragana*, is used more exclusively for words of Japanese origin and is used also to reflect particles and other grammatical functions such as inflections of the logographic system known as *kanji*. Each syllabary unit or "letter", be it *katakana* or *hiragana* generally has no meaning by itself, rather each *kanji* (or Chinese character) has a meaning (better understood linguistically as a morpheme – the smallest unit of meaning in a language[2]). *Kanji* were first imported into Japan during the 8th century from China at a time when the Japanese did not have their own writing system[3]. They are no longer considered "borrowed". Eventually, *hiragana* and *katakana* would be derived from the *kanji* script to serve certain orthographic puposes.

　　With its more angular features, *katakana* really stands as a text. It is for this reason that it is used as a script reserved for not only singling out a word but has historically marked words with some amount of prestige in the same way that italicization is used to single out words of Latin origin in the English language. On a slightly more socio-political note, Kay observes that segregating the two languages with the aid of a natively produced script allows the borrower to retain a kind of linguistic integrity (Kay, 1995). The rapid increase of *katakana* loanwords happened after the Second World War when the American Occupation forces sought to limit the use of *kanji*. Prior to that decision, loanwords were often "calqued" into the *kanji* script (Daulton, 2008) For example, the word <u>baseball</u> was changed into <u>*yakyuu*</u> which was a logographic representation of two Chinese characters: one for <u>field</u> and the other for <u>ball</u>. With the new restrictions in place by the occupying forces,

this encouraged the use of *katakana* to represent borrowed words. While the Americans had hoped for the democraticization of language use and perhaps the proliferation of English, what the policy effectively created was as Honna describes, "a language within a language" (see Maher, 2008). Having studied the use of loanwords extensively, Honna further observes, "the most remarkable influence which the English language has exerted in Japan is its influence on Japanese [the language itself]" (Ibid, 2008).

Post-War use of *gairaigo* in newsprint media

In order to determine the extent to which *gairaigo* is used in Japanese society, studies have focused on their use in the news media particularly in certain sections of newspapers. In one study of the Asahi Newspaper, Oshima asserts that this kind of approach to understanding the use of *gairaigo* in Japan is a "conservative" estimate because newspapers try to use *gairaigo* that are accessible to as wide a readership as possible (i.e. anybody above 15 years old to senior citizens) (Oshima, 2004). Oshima observed that "new technology, advertisements and young people" are at the forefront of infusing the Japanese language with new *gairaigo*, but the conversational use of *gairaigo* among young people was not considered appropriate for the study because the "shelf-life" of new words is always at the mercy of social trends. Old words are often replaced with new ones among young speakers. Nevertheless, Oshima's study did reveal that the increase of *gairaigo* into the Japanese language was less at the societal or daily conversational level than it was in other fields of specific use such as culture and sports (Ibid, 2004).

In an attempt to further understand the editorial decision making processes by which some loanwords get chosen into the conservative press, Kimie Oshima interviewed a writer and a former editor of the conservative newspaper Asahi Shimbum. According to a 1997 guideline, writers had to "beware of the abuse of *gairaigo* and foreign words" (Ibid, 2004) Only in the case where new words or concepts did not already exist in Japanese, *katakana* could be used with some explanatory note in parenthesis especially in articles in the field of economics.

Moreover, in such cases, nouns were always preferred over verbs. With sports related articles, however, terms would often not be translated as it was assumed that anyone who had an interest with the sport in question would be able to understand the borrowed term in its original form. The consensus from the interviews was that they did not like to use *gairaigo* yet they believed the influx of loanwords into the Japanese predominantly from the English would increase. (Ibid, 2004). The strongest reason for this conviction lies in the fact that the creation (calquing) of new words using Chinese characters requires official sanction, whereas rendering new words in *Katakana* does not have the same restriction (Kay, 1995).

Characteristics of gairaigo using the *katakana* syllabary

As mentioned earlier, the use of *katakana* to borrow new words from any language not only circumvented the need to obtain government sanction for such words (i.e. words calqued into Kanji need state approval) but it also allowed a "free hand", as it were, to bring in new words while retaining the integrity of the whole language. Since *katakana* is already unique to the Japanese language, this process did not require anything more than a little imagination in applying the rules that help assimilate the borrowed word into the Japanese sound system. Since the Japanese language is one largely based on a consonant/vowel cluster, ergo syllabary, words that are borrowed go through a transformation wherein consonant clusters are broken up to make it more "intelligible" to the Japanese ear. Essentially, each consonant cluster would be broken up with the insertion of a muted vowel sound with the purpose of highlighting the consonant's sound. In linguistics, this process is known as vowel epenthesis. Without this process the close combination of one consonant to another becomes unintelligible to the average Japanese speaker. Conversely, final ending consonants also become extended to include a vowel sound. Hence, a two syllable word like English would become *ingurishu*, finally transforming into a four syllable word. What is interesting to note is that words that are *katakana*-ized from the original English spoken pronunciation often sound closer to the original than those that are derived from an orthographical representation.

Unfortunately, most gairaigo are acquired through the latter process.

The Japanese language is a remarkably easy language to pronounce for second language speakers whose own language system has a larger count of phonemes. This reality, however, further complicates the process for transforming words into the Japanese syllabary system. Quite often this process requires finding more approximations for phonemes (as well as vowel sounds) that just do not exist in the Japanese sound system in the first place. A case in point is the word that my student chose to transcribe into the *katakana* script as she found it in her dicitionary: the word link. Since the Japanese language system does not have the /l/ sound, the syllabary approximation is used which sounds a lot closer to an /r/ sound. In effect, transcribed into romaji the *katakana* version of link inevitably becomes *rinku*. Following the rules of the final consonant mentioned earlier, a one syllable word becomes a two syllable word. Moreover, the vowel sound also deviates from the original becoming longer.

For many years, the Japanese language has been able to survive the incredible influx of homonyms the poured into their linguistic system when it adopted the Chinese language over several stages in its history due to the morphemic properties of the Chinese character. While the misappropriation of homonyms is often the butt of most of their humour in daily conversation or on prime time variety shows on television, the inability of *katakana* to adequately replace the phonemes of borrowed words is no laughing matter in educational circles. So much so that most Japanese teachers of English (and native speakers alike) see little to no educational value in using *gairaigo* at all. This is especially evident when one considers the problems of using one substitute to represent two completely different phonemes at the same time. Imagine trying to transcribe the English word rink (as in an ice "rink") into *katakana* and the exact rendering for link would be the end result: *rinku*!

In addition to the phonological transformations, there are some specific categories that further characterize *gairaigo* borrowed from the English language. For the purpose of this paper , it is important to readdress the question that originally inspired my research into the question of using *katakana* as an aid to understanding whether or not such a strategy has any positive effect in acquiring the target word

in L2 – more particularly, did my student's notation of り ん く (rinku) over the word link serve any educational value? Many studies have been done on the inhibitory effects of lexical transfer. Conversely, studies reflecting the benefits of L1 *katakana* transfer are comparably few in number. In order to further discussion on this matter it is important to understand the role of cognates. Cognates are defined as words that have a related structure which can be found in at least two languages. It is often the misunderstanding of the stricter definition of the term that has led many teachers from seeing any benefits of using cognates in the classroom. This is usually attributable to the case of false cognates. For example, the French word for "understand" is *comprendre*, however, when Portuguese speakers employ the strategy of searching for similar cognates in their own mental lexicon, they may mistakenly look to *comprar* (to buy) as a potential for understanding the new French target word. It is easy to see the similarities orthographically and even phonologically.

One reason which explains why teachers refrain from using cognates to aid learning may have less to do with their own personal experiences of misapplying false cognates then it has to do with a learning approach influenced by a learning methodology couched in the behaviourist learning theory of the sixties. Essentially, the theory encouraged any behaviour that resulted in positive transfer and any other behaviour that resulted in negative transfer was to be discouraged. This oversimplification of the theory underestimated the possible benefits that making errors had to offer in the learning process. (See Ringbom, 1987). By only focusing on false cognates, instructors risk whitewashing any benefits that true cognates may have to offer. More importantly, it fails to properly address a strategy that students are already using in their language learning; namely, searching their already learned knowledge (previously known words of foreign origin i.e. *gairaigo*) with perceived similarities with a new target word. Swan recognizes this process:

Mother-tongue influence is responsible not only for errors, but also for much of what is correct in an interlanguage [approach]. If we did not keep making cross-linguistic correspondences, we might never manage to learn new languages at all. (Swan, 1997).

The research on the effect of loanwords

The research documenting the negative effects of loanwords in the EFL classroom far outweigh research on the positive effects. The reasons for this are because it is a lot easier to study for negative transfer of false cognates. Moreover, being able to assess positive transfer is harder to measure. In addition to the pitfalls that false cognates pose, the most common argument against using loanwords deals with the level of verbal production. Admittedly, the shortcomings of the *katakana* pronunciation by a Japanese second language learner often render even a true cognate incomprehensible to L1 English speakers who have had little exposure to Japan. Yet, this failure to do deal with correct pronunciation has more to do with teachers' reluctance to address the issue than the value that can actually be derived from recognizing how the positive transfer of true cognates can reduce the learning burden. In a study conducted by Daulton (1996), only one third of middle school Japanese teachers admitted to using the phonemic alphabet.

On the level of written production, Hashimoto (1993) documents how Japanese students ESL were able to correctly spell borrowed words better than they were able to spell non-borrowed words. Daulton (1998) similarly notes that the rate of accuracy in spelling increases the higher the frequency of the borrowed word. Brown and Williams (1985) conducted a receptive English listening study and discovered that Japanese learners were able to identify and understand the meanings of borrowed words that were in the 2000 frequency range better than non-borrowed words. When Japanese learners were presented with a cloze activity where all four choices were correct, the Brown study (1995) found that 49.6 % of the respondents chose the borrowed word even when a simpler, non-borrowed item was available.

Although there are studies that show the benefits that loanwords can have for the Japanese learner, more work needs to be done to explore the full positive potential that true cognates can provide. Unfortunately, the studies against the use of loanwords in the classroom are far more abundant as is the bias, both anecdotal and empirical.

Factors that can contribute to a lack of confidence in cognates include the fear of making errors and the perception that English is more distant than it actually is. False friends often produce ludicrous or otherwise memorable errors, which can easily assume an importance in learners' and teachers' minds that is out of proportion. The dangers of false friends should not be exaggerated, as good cognates usually outnumber deceptive ones. (Daulton, 2008)

The more important argument that studies against the use of loanwords fails to address is the fact making errors is part of the process of acquiring a language. Approaching language instruction on the basis of error avoidance not only encourages students to adopt the same philosophy of learning but it also fails to address the proper approach to helping students who do use loanwords in class to facilitate learning such as my student did.

Constructive use of *gairaigo* in the classroom

In Paul Nation's *Teaching Vocabulary: Strategies and Techniques*, he points out that vocabulary instruction in the classroom is often neglected; hence a systematized approach to its instruction should be incorporated into any syllabus (Nation, 2008). This approach can be broken down into four strands: Meaning-focused input, Meaning-focused output, Language-focused Learning, and Fluency development. Of the four strands, the language-focused learning strand deals with the direct learning of vocabulary (for example, making word cards) whereas the other strands extend the learning into a well-balanced approach where the other four skills can be applied, namely reading, writing, listening and speaking.

In order to properly search out the educational value of using *gairaigo* with the learners and incorporating that learning into the language-focused learning strand, the instructor would need to help the learners single out the true cognates from the other cognates that do not serve any educational purpose. Daulton further subdivides the *false* cognates into the following categories: convergent/divergent

cognates, close/distant false friends and Japanized English (Daulton, 2008). Convergent cognates occur when more than one Japanese word can be applied to a single L1 word. The opposite is the case with divergent cognates. Distant false friends are words that do not share any semantic connection with the original English word and close false friends, the most troublesome of all cognates, have what seems to be a semantic connection but end up being a complete aberration of the original word. Japanized false friends are words that are a complete fabrication and may be partly derived by an original word in the L2 but would end up being completely unintelligible to a native speaker of that language.

Taking the time to explain these categories during class time will go a long way to demystifying the properties of *gairaigo* and subsequently help the learners make more informed choices about which loanwords could be used for educational purposes. This process will also raise a learner consciousness about the nature of borrowing and how seldom a one-to-one relationship can be derived between the L2 word in question and the L1 borrowed word. The Daulton text referred to in this paper has conveniently provided two appendixes that list the true cognates according to the BNC 3000 and the Academic Word List (See Daulton, 2008, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

134	*Japan's Built-in Lexicon of English-based Loanwords*
FIRST 1000	ATTENTION アテンション *atenshon*
•ABLE	•BABY ベイビー *beibii*
ABILITY アビリティー *abiritii*	•BACK バック *bakku*
•ABOUT アバウト *abauto*	BACKGROUND
•ACCESS アクセス *akusesu*	バックグラウンド *bakuguraundo*
•ACT アクト *akuto*	•BALL ボール *booru*
ACTION アクション *akushon*	•BANK バンク *banku*
•ACTIVE アクティブ / アクティヴ *akutibu*	BANKER バンカー *bankaa*
ACTIVITY アクティビティ *akutibiti*	BANKING バンキング *banking*
•ADVANTAGE アドバンテージ *adobanteeji*	•BAR バー *baa*
•ADVICE アドバイス *adobaisu*	•BASE ベース *beesu*
ADVISOR アドバイザー *adobaizaa*	BASIC ベーシック *beeshikku*
ADVISER アドバイザー *adobaizaa*	•BEAR ベア *bea*
•AFTER アフター *afutaa*	•BED ベッド *beddo*
•AFTERNOON アフターヌーン *afutaanuun*	BEDROOM ベッドルーム *beddoruumu*
•AGAIN アゲイン *agein*	•BEGIN
•AGAINST アゲインスト *ageinsuto*	BEGINNER ビギナー *beginaa*
•AGENT エージェント *eejento*	BEGINNING ビギニング *beginingu*
•AGE エイジ *eiji*	•BEHIND ビハインド *bihaindo*
•AIR エア *ea*	•BELIEVE ビリーブ *biriibu*
•ALL オール *ooru*	•BENEFIT ベネフィット *benifitto*
•AMERICA アメリカ *amerika*	•BEST ベスト *besuto*
AMERICAN アメリカン *amerikan*	•BIG ビッグ *biggu*
AMERICANS アメリカンズ *amerikanzu*	•BIRD バード *baado*

Figure 1. (Daulton, 2008)

Figure 1 above is an example of the true cognates matching the BNC lists made available in the appendixes. The value of this list is that the English form of the loanword is paired with both the *katakana* rendering and the *romaji*. These lists can be made available to the students alongside with the BNC 3000 list at the beginning of the term. In addition to explaining the research behind the creation of the lists, the nature of word families and an understanding of high and low frequencies of words, it should be stressed when presenting these lists is that the words contained within represent the true cognates and should therefore be distinguished from the other cognates.

Appendix 3	157
Sublist-1	IDENTITY
APPROACH	アイデンティティー *aidentitii*
アプローチ *apuroochi*	INCOME
AREA	インカム *inkamu*
エリア *eria*	LEGAL
BENEFIT	リーガル *riigaru*
ベネフィット *benefitto*	MAJOR
CONCEPT	メジャー *mejaa*
コンセプト *konseputo*	MAJORITY
CONTRACT	マジョリティー *majoritii*
コントラクト *kontorakuto*	METHOD
CREATE	メソッド *mesoddo*
クリエート *kurieeto*	PERCENT

Figure 2 (Daulton, 2008)

Figure 2 above is an example of the true cognates that correspond to Coxhead's *Academic Word List*. Extra care should be given to help the students understand the arrangement of the list into sublists. The fact that the sublists are arranged according to their frequency (sublist 1 being the most frequent on through sublist 10 being the least frequent) should help the students make an informed decision about which *gairaigo* to prioritize in the process of the direct learning of vocabulary.
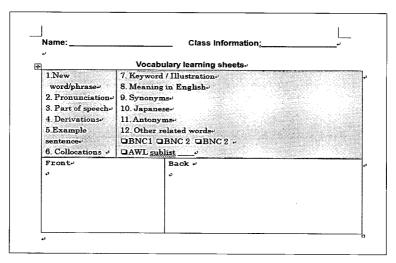
Figure 3

Figure 3 above is an example of a Vocabulary Learning Sheet that students can keep in a vocabullary file. It is designed to mimic a flashcard format where the students can put the target *gairaigo* in the "Front" portion of the sheet and the "Back" portion can have extra information pertaining to the word. The students can choose from the numbered categories when researching their loanwords. For example, in the "Front" portion, the students can also include a sentence in English which shows an example of the way the word is used alongside other words. Using an online compendium or a corpus based dictionary can be of an invaluable assistance. On the "Back", the student can write the original *katakana* and/or other information such as the meaning in English or a synonym that they already know for the word. While this may appear to be a lot of work, it is in the process of exploring connections between the student's own mental lexicon of a known cognate to that of the target word it really represents which ends up being of the most importance.

The direct exploration of words is labor intensive but as Nation observes, "Direct learning of vocabulary is efficient in terms of return for time *and effort*"[italics mine] (Nation, 2006). Moreover, the by-product of studying this way can also be applied to the study of other L2 words and learners make new discoveries as they work on this approach. According to Ringbom, "As their proficiency *develops*,

learners realise that many words do not have a consistent one-to-one relation to words in another language" – (Ringbom, 2007) Exploring *gairaigo* for true cognates involves students in understanding that not all words, even in borrowed ones transcribed into *katakana*, have a direct relationship with their counterpart in L2.

Conclusion

Borrowing from other languages is not a unique phenomenon to the development of the Japanese language today. What makes Japanese unique is the use of specific scripts both for the purposes of preserving a socio-political integrity and to facilitate pronunciation into its own sound system. The potential for using these borrowed words to learn the language from which it was borrowed has been subject for debate because of the transformations that loanwords which are true cognates go through both in pronunciation and, at times, in meaning. As a learner progresses in their studies of English, they recognize the cognates of the borrowed words and employ the strategy of using them to lessen the learning burden of acquiring new words. Unfortunately, the pitfall of using false cognates has discouraged the exploration and the learning potential that true cognates have to offer. If we, as teachers, discourage our students from experimenting with the existence of loanwords already available to them through various forms of media, are we not reinforcing the idea that making mistakes in learning a language is wrong? I believe a paradigm shift is required. Our role as instructors should be to encourage our students to find the positive connections and similarities that already exist between Japanese and English. How successful our students will be in that endeavour will depend largely on how well we equip them with the right tools. Moreover, we should encourage a curiosity in their learning and promote flexibility in their learning approach which can help them adapt to the constant changes that occur in language.

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Notes

1 Each of the syllabaries (i.e. *katakana* and *hiragana*) is generally understood as each having 46 basic units or "letters". However with the use of diacritics for voicing each syllabary can be extended to represent 71 "letters".

2 According to Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, a morpheme is the "smallest" meaning unit in a language that cannot be divided any further without loosing its meaning. For example, "book" can be considered one morpheme and "books" is considered two morphemes. The "s" representing functional meaning of plurality.

3 50% of the Japanese language consists of *kango*, words of Chinese origin and written with Chinese characters. Given their very long history in the Japanese language they are no longer considered to be "borrowed".