The Influence of Foreign Words from English in Japanese (Composed of Katakana) on Nonnative Speakers' Learning of Japanese

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Abstract: With the increasing number of Japanese learners, the problems they encounter during the learning process are gradually becoming apparent, among which the diverse writing system of Japanese and many foreign vocabularies are repeatedly mentioned. Especially the complex writing system and extensive use of foreign words in Japanese. As a part of the Japanese writing system, Katakana is particularly used to represent English loanwords. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact of English loanwords composed of Katakana on non-native Japanese language learners. This article collects and compares relevant data through literature review and concludes that due to the different syllable structures of katakana compared to English, semantic changes in vocabulary with social development, and methods of introducing foreign words, non-native Japanese language learners have problems in pronunciation recognition, semantic memory, and reading usage of English foreign words. Therefore, katakana teaching needs to be given attention. This study can provide ideas for the learning and education of Japanese, showcasing the cross referencing of the language in different cultures.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Lead-In and Background

Loanwords are words adopted from one language and incorporated into another language without translation. These words can serve a variety of functions in the borrowing language, such as filling a lexical gap, conveying specific cultural meanings, or enriching the language with new concepts and expressions (Poplack & Meechan, 1998). Loanwords not only add new vocabulary but also reflect the changing socio-cultural landscape of the language.

The writing system of Japanese consists of three parts: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Among them, hiragana is more rounded and blunt in writing, while katakana is sharper and more angular. Katakana is primarily used for foreign words, technical terms, the names of plants, animals and minerals. The use of katakana is an important and efficient way to introduce English loanwords. Examples include:

コンピュータ (konpyu-ta) - computer

テレビ (terebi) - television

アイスクリーム (aisukuri-mu) - ice cream

Since World War II, English-derived words (EDWs) have rapidly entered the Japanese language.

As the driving force of post-war nationalism weakened and external influences gradually increased, EDWs aligned with Japan's modernization process (Þórðísarson, 2016). This was a significant shift in the linguistic landscape. The rise of radio, film, and television in the 20th century further solidified the presence of English in Japan. As Western media needed new terminology to express modern concepts, English words became crucial for communication. At the same time, the Japanese government implemented educational reforms that required English to become a compulsory course in schools, accelerating people's acquisition of English vocabulary. These reforms were essential in broadening the public's familiarity with English words. After World War II, Japan also restricted the use of Chinese characters, which promoted the rapid spread of English loanwords. Katakana being simpler and more flexible, became an ideal choice for spelling loanwords in everyday use.

English loanwords play a significant role in modern Japanese, enriching the language's vocabulary and making it more adaptable to the globalized world. The introduction of English vocabulary is not only a linguistic necessity but also serves as a powerful social tool. In Japan, English loanwords are often associated with prestige,

sophistication, and modernity. As a result, loanwords are widely used in advertising, branding and marketing, where they create a sense of appeal and trendiness. These words often evoke a sense of cosmopolitanism, attracting attention and giving products a more international feel. However, despite the positive impacts of English loanwords, there is criticism from conservatives who focus on preserving Japanese cultural and linguistic traditions. Some of them argue that the excessive use of foreign words makes the language seem artificial and inauthentic, or even disrespectful of its native heritage. They worry that the influx of English terms might lead to the erosion of traditional Japanese expressions and concepts (Daulton, 1999).

Based on existing research, it can be clearly seen that English loanwords written in katakana have become an indispensable and important part of modern Japanese, reflecting the language's adaptability to changing cultural and global trends.

1.2 Objective and Significance

English loanwords have a significant presence in Japanese and are recorded using the katakana system. In the process of learning Japanese, these katakana English loanwords will largely affect people's progress in learning Japanese. Many learners believe that katakana has a significant impact on their learning of Japanese, such as pronunciation, memory and reading. This article aims to explore the partial influence of English loanwords (written in katakana) on non-native speakers when learning Japanese, mainly adopts the literature research method to propose feasible conclusions by comparing data, analyzing and summarizing existing achievements, exploring the impact of English loanwords on learners in different language environments. By studying the difficulties encountered by non-native speakers in learning Japanese, Katakana, and English loanwords, it can help educators and textbook writers better design teaching methods and materials to improve learning outcomes. In addition, this study also contributes to promoting cross-cultural communication, as accurate understanding and use of these loanwords are crucial for non-native speakers working or living in Japan, this research can also help understand how language absorbs and integrates foreign elements in cross-cultural communication.

2 AFFECTS ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

2.1 Pronunciation Changes Caused by the Introduction Method

It is not possible to fully reproduce one language from another because there may be syllables that do not exist between them, so borrowing foreign words that contain such pronunciations often requires adjusting their pronunciation. When Japanese learners are exposed to katakana-based representations of English loanwords, they often face a challenge in perceiving the original English pronunciation correctly. The katakana system, which adheres to the mora-timed structure of the Japanese language, requires adjustments to foreign sounds that do not exist within the phonetic inventory of Japanese. As such, English loanwords are often adapted by simplifying consonant clusters, changing vowels, or inserting additional syllables to match Japanese phonetic patterns (Daulton, 2008). These alterations significantly influence how learners process and reproduce these words. For example, learners may have difficulty distinguishing between English vowels and consonants that are not easily represented in katakana, such as the subtle vowel distinctions in words like "beat" and "bit." Over time, repeated exposure to these modified versions of English words can distort their mental representations of the original words.

Japanese phonetic patterns often conflict with English pronunciation, especially when katakana-based pronunciation aids are used. English words with stress-timed syllables, which rely heavily on pitch and stress for meaning, often do not align with the syllable-timed nature of Japanese, which has a more even rhythmic flow. This discrepancy can lead to mispronunciations that affect comprehensibility, especially for learners who rely on katakana pronunciation to map English sounds. For instance, words like "computer" or "television" are often pronounced in a way that de-emphasizes the natural stress patterns of English, making them sound unnatural and harder to understand for native English speakers (Wydell, 2019). Katakana pronunciation, by overemphasizing syllable structure and underrepresenting stress, leads to further difficulties in acquiring the rhythm and stress patterns necessary for fluent English speaking (Hoshino & Kroll, 2008). Overreliance on katakana also creates challenges in understanding the role of intonation in English, which is essential for conveying meaning in conversational

speech. Therefore, learners who depend too much on katakana may struggle to produce English speech that accurately reflects the natural patterns of stress and rhythm found in native English communication (Wydell, 2019).

A psycholinguistic model suggests that many loanwords' adaptations originate in perceptual assimilation, a cognitive process where foreign sounds are mapped onto the closest native equivalents during perception (Peperkamp & Dupoux, 2003). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the adaptation of English words into the Japanese phonetic system. The model proposes that perceptual assimilation helps learners deal with foreign sounds that are outside their native phonological inventory by assigning them similar sounds that exist in their language. In the case of Japanese, the dominant phonological system influences how English loanwords are represented in katakana. Conservative assimilation and innovation lead to orthographic practices that often modify the stress and length of some English words, reflecting a preference for a more manageable mora-timed structure (Kubozono, 2002). Consequently, many English loanwords undergo a process of "de-Anglicization," where their pronunciation is modified to fit the phonological norms of Japanese (Honna, 1995). This process ensures that the adapted words conform to the syllabic and rhythmic patterns of Japanese, which is more consistent with the mora-timed structure than the stress-timed nature of English.

2.2 Katakana Pronunciation Reacts with English Pronunciation

As learners of Japanese are exposed to katakana representations of English loanwords, their mental representation of these words may become distorted in ways that affect their pronunciation and understanding of the original English sounds (Stokes, 2023). Katakana pronunciation, which follows a mora-based system, encourages learners to perceive English loanwords as having a more regular, syllabic structure. However, this is not true of original English pronunciation, which often features more complex consonant clusters and variable vowel lengths. For example, when learners encounter the word "glass," they may perceive it as closer to グラス (gurasu), a form that simplifies the consonant cluster "gl" and alters the vowel sounds in ways that are not present in the original English pronunciation. This shift in perception may lead learners to adopt an inaccurate phonological representation of the word, causing

confusion and reinforcing errors in their pronunciation.

Katakana pronunciation can impede the development of authentic English pronunciation because it distorts critical features such as intonation and vowel length. English is a stress-timed language, in contrast, Japanese has a syllable-timed rhythm, where each syllable tends to be given roughly equal duration. Learners who rely heavily on katakana representations may not internalize the rhythm and intonation patterns of English, leading to a more uniform rhythm that sounds unnatural to native English speakers. Studies have shown that learners who depend on katakana for their understanding of English pronunciation may struggle to master English intonation and rhythm and could develop inaccurate phonological representations of English words (Hoshino & Kroll, 2008). This discrepancy between the English and Japanese pronunciation systems often results in mispronunciations that not only affect the learners' ability to produce English words correctly but also interfere with their comprehension, making it harder for them to understand spoken English. As learners' exposure to katakana-based representations increases, these mispronunciations may become more entrenched, further distancing them from authentic English pronunciation.

3 AFFECTS THE MEMORY OF JAPANESE WORD MEANINGS

3.1 Quickly Memorize and Expand Japanese Vocabulary Through Katakana Loanwords

The idea of using borrowed words as a tool for language learning has been a subject of debate, mainly due to the transformations that these borrowed words undergo in both pronunciation and sometimes meaning. Loanwords often go through a process of adaptation to fit the phonological and grammatical rules of the borrowing language, which can result in variations in pronunciation, meaning, or usage across different languages (Daniel & Ferreira, 2011). For Japanese language learners with prior knowledge of English, recognizing the similarities between English loanwords and their Japanese counterparts can provide valuable insights that inform teaching strategies for Japanese language acquisition (Gakkula & Tengse, 2021). As learners progress in their English studies, they begin to recognize cognates among borrowed words, which not only makes it

easier for them to understand and memorize new vocabulary, but also helps them grasp the connection between the source language and the target language. This strategy plays a positive role in reducing the learning burden and improving vocabulary acquisition efficiency.

Katakana plays a crucial role in helping Japanese learners become acquainted with English vocabulary. By converting English words into katakana, learners can engage with new terms through a script they are already familiar with, which aids in their comprehension (Sava, 2022). Research shows that katakana-based learning has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it offers a familiar and accessible script for Japanese learners, making their first exposure to English less daunting and reducing potential feelings of apprehension (Kahramonovna, 2023). This familiarity with katakana allows learners to feel more comfortable with English loanwords, providing an easier transition to English language acquisition.

Using katakana to represent English words allows students familiar with katakana from their native language to identify patterns and similarities between the two languages more easily (Yoko, 2019). This recognition can help learners initially grasp English vocabulary and make it easier to identify English loanwords in Japanese texts. However, excessive dependence on katakana for vocabulary may hinder students' understanding of the true meanings and contexts of English words. As a result, learners may develop a shallow understanding of words, focusing on their superficial form rather than their deeper conceptual meanings (Allen, 2022). In the long term, this approach might limit learners' ability to use English words effectively in different contexts. While katakana serves as an accessible entry point for new vocabulary, it is essential for learners to move beyond the surface-level recognition and delve into the nuances of the words' meanings, pronunciation, and usage. This deeper engagement is crucial for achieving fluency and avoiding the pitfalls of over-reliance on a simplified, katakana-based understanding.

3.2 The Difficulty of Distinguishing the Meaning of English Loanwords Writing in Katakana and Original Words

The varying social and cultural contexts over time give rise to new interpretations, and as language evolves, some of these meanings become standardized. Consequently, the meanings of katakana words often diverge significantly from their original English counterparts. The process of borrowing and adapting words is essential for language growth and cultural exchange. However, it also introduces challenges, especially in language learning. As meanings shift and evolve, learners may struggle with understanding the original and current meanings of borrowed words, and this could cause confusion or hinder their ability to communicate fluently.

The meanings of loanwords often evolve over time as they are reinterpreted within the context of the borrowing culture. This process of semantic shift is not arbitrary but is influenced by a range of factors including social norms, cultural values, and historical contexts surrounding the word's adoption. For instance, the Japanese term "カラオケ" (karaoke), originally derived from the English term "karaoke," has undergone significant cultural reinterpretation in Japan. While "karaoke" in English refers to a "empty orchestra," in Japan, it has come to represent a popular social activity where people gather to sing and enjoy music together. This shift reflects how the meaning of the term has adapted to suit local cultural practices and preferences, transforming it into a communal form of entertainment rather than a simple reference to the music industry (Honna, 1995).

As language evolves, so do the meanings of loanwords. Initially, borrowed words may retain close connections to their original meanings, but with time and usage, they may undergo changes based on the needs and attitudes of the borrowing society. This shift can be especially noticeable in everyday terms that are frequently used in conversation or media. In some cases, the original meaning may become obscure or entirely irrelevant to the speakers of the borrowing language, and the term may take on new connotations. For example, the term "computer" in Japanese (コンピュータ) is not just a technical term, but also reflects the rapid integration of technology into Japanese society, symbolizing an entire cultural movement towards digitalization and modernization (Kubozono, 2002). The evolution of meaning in loanwords can also be influenced by external factors such as globalization and technological innovation. As new technologies and trends emerge, the language adapts to incorporate these innovations, and borrowed words often acquire new meanings that reflect these shifts. Words like "smartphone" (スマートフォン) have evolved not just as technological terms, but as part of a cultural shift in communication and social interaction.

3.3 Japanese Style English and English Loanwords

Languages are fluid and evolve over time, transcending the boundaries of a single culture, adapting across different contexts (Blommaert, 2010). Such adaptations initially require alignment with the phonological and orthographic rules of the target language. The changes that English loanwords undergo when integrated into Japanese involve both phonological and morphological adjustments, ensuring their smooth incorporation into the Japanese language system (Tengse & Gakkula, 2021). A prominent feature of loanwords in Japanese is that their meanings often diverge from their original counterparts. In fact, loanwords in any language often undergo shifts in meaning, but (Kay, 1995) suggests that Japanese shows a marked tendency to alter the meanings of borrowed terms. This semantic transformation occurs as the loanwords are absorbed into the cultural context of Japan, where they are reinterpreted based on local customs, practices, and societal needs. In Japan, there is little cultural drive to preserve the original meanings of loanwords.

Additionally, the large-scale influx and rapid integration of English loanwords into Japanese has resulted in a phenomenon of semantic alteration. There are many Japanese expressions are created by incorporating English loanwords alongside native Japanese terms, a process known as wasei-eigo. In Japanese, eigo refers to the English language, while wasei-eigo denotes English words that have been adapted or localized into Japanese (Irwin, 2011). What distinguishes wasei-eigo is that these terms are not just direct borrowings from English, but rather a fusion of English and Japanese vocabulary. This phenomenon illustrates how languages can creatively coexist and evolve, often resulting in unique hybrid expressions that are not easily traceable to their origins.

Some English loanwords in Japan have gradually adopted special Japanese abbreviations, for example:

コンビニ (konbini) - Convenience store
パソコン (pasokon) - Personal computer
エアコン (eakon) - Air conditioner

Japanese words like these may seem to originate from English, but they do not exist in English .These English loanwords, which have been processed by Japanese abbreviations, are now difficult to directly determine their source words through literal pronunciation, which is the process of localizing English loanwords. Sometimes loanwords are used because their native equivalents are direct, or when a word's implicit meaning may have negative

evaluations, especially in the fields of sexuality and personal hygiene (Rebuck, 2002). But for Japanese language learners, quickly identifying these words sometimes means a challenge. Such challenges underscore the importance of cultural context in language acquisition, as learners must not only memorize vocabulary but also understand the shifts in meaning that have occurred through localization.

4 AFFECTS READING RECOGNITION

4.1 Psychological Factor

A free-recall experiment shows the probability of recalling a specific item from a list is influenced by its position within the sequence. Items placed at the beginning or end of the list are generally recalled more accurately than those in the middle (Reber, 1995). This is referred to as the primacy effect in cognitive psychology.

In Japanese language courses, Hiragana is typically introduced first, followed by Katakana. Due to the primacy effect, Hiragana, which is taught at the start of the learning process, is often better retained compared to Katakana, which is taught later. This leads to a disparity in retention between the two syllabaries, with Hiragana being more familiar and easier to recall. As a result, Katakana, being introduced after Hiragana, often becomes more challenging for learners to master, resulting in lower recognition and recall abilities (Hossain & Uddin, 2008). Furthermore, in many Japanese language programs, Katakana instruction tends to receive significantly less focus than Kanji, with fewer class hours dedicated to learning and practicing this syllabary (Tashiro, 2015). This disparity in instructional time contributes to the difficulty learners face when encountering Katakana, especially when reading katakana loanwords. Even advanced learners often struggle with Katakana, which may limit their fluency when it comes to reading katakana-based words in texts and understanding loanwords in Japanese. Also, there are very few Japanese educators who learn the knowledge of Katakana and receive regular Katakana training (Gao, 2024).

Another strong theoretical basis can be found in the feature theory of perception. When identifying letters from any alphabet, it is crucial to differentiate one letter from another. The unique characteristics of each letter help learners distinguish one from others (Reber, 1995). The challenges associated with

learning Katakana can be explained through the feature model in cognitive psychology. Each letter in Hiragana and Katakana consists of a series of strokes, which are marks made by a pen, brush, or similar tool, moving across a surface. These strokes can be seen as distinct characteristics that set one letter apart from another. Therefore, it can be argued that an alphabet with more strokes has more distinct features, making it easier to learn.

So, an alphabet with fewer strokes has fewer distinctive characteristics, making it harder to learn. To support this theory, a detailed analysis of the strokes in Hiragana and Katakana was conducted. It was found that Hiragana contains 58 strokes, while Katakana has 32 strokes. The number of strokes in Hiragana is nearly twice that in Katakana. This suggests that Katakana, with fewer strokes, is less distinctive and therefore more challenging to learn (Hossain & Uddin, 2008).

4.2 Katakana Loanwords Reduction in Reading Speed and Fluency

A research result shows that learners find four skills difficult in the process of learning foreign languages. The respondents showed a lack of proficiency in four aspects: reading and writing foreign language, writing foreign language, pronouncing foreign language, and listening to foreign language. The awareness of learners' unfamiliarity with foreign languages can also be divided into four categories: resistance to use, resistance to meaning, learning difficulties, and anxiety felt when learning or using foreign languages (Horikiri, 2008). Unlike hiragana, which can be easily recognized, katakana often necessitates pronunciation first before one can connect it to its original vocabulary to understand its meaning.

One common criticism of English loanwords is their potential difficulty in comprehension, particularly when they are uncommon. A previous study pointed out that loanwords are usually nouns, but their word classes can be changed by adding particles or other pseudonyms. However, for Japanese language learners, especially beginners, it is difficult to associate and judge the word classes of foreign words based on grammatical features (Zhuang & Wu, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the semantic changes and expansion of foreign words are also important factors that affect beginners' reading of katakana sentences.

When learners encounter the same word in both scripts, they may need to pause and reframe their understanding of the word, which disrupts the reading flow and slows down comprehension. Moreover,

such transitions can lead to more time spent processing, as learners need to constantly adapt to the different visual forms of the same word in katakana and kanji. This adjustment process can create a cognitive load, especially for those still mastering the scripts. The phenomenon of loanword avoidance is closely tied to the duration of Japanese language study. As learners accumulate more learning hours, their proficiency improves, and the tendency to avoid loanwords gradually decreases (Luo, 2015).

5 CONCLUSION

Through research, this article delves into the impact of English loanwords (composed of katakana) in Japanese on language learning for non-native Japanese learners. Research has found that loanwords in katakana form have a significant impact on language learning for learners, especially in areas such as English pronunciation, vocabulary memory, and reading recognition. Although English loanwords can to some extent promote the expansion of learners' vocabulary, due to the extensive localization processing in Japanese when absorbing English loanwords, including sound and morphological changes, there are significant differences in the pronunciation of these loanwords from their original English form. This differentiated vocabulary structure often makes it difficult for non-native learners to quickly and intuitively recognize these foreign words and may even develop a certain language avoidance mentality.

Specifically, learners often feel confused and uneasy when faced with English loanwords composed of katakana, especially when there are deviations in pronunciation and meaning matching. This confusion often leads learners to develop avoidance psychology towards hiragana loanwords, unwilling to use or recognize these words, thereby affecting their language learning process. This phenomenon not only hinders learners' memory and mastery of Japanese vocabulary but may also affect their fluency and confidence in actual language communication. Many learners often encounter comprehension barriers when encountering sentences containing katakana loanwords due to unfamiliarity with the pronunciation of the vocabulary or difficulty memorizing it, which in turn affects their fluent oral and listening expression.

Based on this discovery, recommendations can be made for Japanese language learners and educators. Japanese language educators can emphasize the teaching of hiragana English loanwords in the

teaching process. Through training on hiragana loanwords, teachers can help students improve their speech recognition and practical application abilities of these words, reduce students' troubles caused by loanwords, and help learners better master Japanese.

This study also has certain limitations. This study mainly focuses on the language learning process of non-native Japanese learners and fails to investigate in depth the differences in response of learners with different native language backgrounds to foreign words in Katakana English. For example, native English speakers may be easier to adapt to hiragana loanwords than native English speakers because they have a relatively complete English vocabulary. Future research can examine the performance and difficulties of learners with different native language backgrounds in learning katakana English loanwords from a cross-cultural perspective, further revealing the universal rules and individual differences of language learning.

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