

## Students' Attitudes towards English Loan Words in Japanese

### ทัศนคติของนักศึกษาต่อคำยืมภาษาอังกฤษในภาษาญี่ปุ่น

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#### Abstract

Numerous English loan words have been adopted into Japanese, and many of them are used in the textbooks for Japanese Foreign Language students. This study aimed to identify Thai university students' attitudes towards English loan words (Katakana words) in Japanese. A total of 106 university students of Japanese major were involved in this survey research. A questionnaire was used to collect data, and descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. The study found the neutral tendencies of learner's attitudes towards the loan words in Japanese. Although students were ambivalent, they seemed to be not suffering in learning loan word in Japanese. Pronunciation of loan words was some burden in their learning Japanese. Regarding the origins of students' attitudes towards English loan word, students claimed particularly that social media, textbooks and university teachers were the causes of their attitudes.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, English Loan Words, Japanese

#### บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาญี่ปุ่นรับคำยืมภาษาอังกฤษเข้ามาใช้เป็นจำนวนมากและคำยืมส่วนใหญ่จะปรากฏในตำราภาษาญี่ปุ่นสำหรับผู้เรียนต่างชาติ วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษาชิ้นนี้คือศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาญี่ปุ่นเป็นวิชาเอกจำนวน 106 คน รวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถาม วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนา ผลการศึกษาพบว่านักศึกษามีทัศนคติต่อคำยืมคำภาษาอังกฤษระดับปานกลาง แสดงให้เห็นว่าคำยืมในภาษาอังกฤษไม่ได้สร้างความลำบากในการเรียนให้นักศึกษามากนักแม้การแสดงทัศนคติจะยังไม่ชี้ชัดลงไป การออกเสียงของคำยืมเป็นเรื่องที่ยากต่อการเรียน นักศึกษาระบุว่าทัศนคติต่อคำยืมภาษาอังกฤษของตนเองได้รับอิทธิพลมาจากสังคมออนไลน์ ตำรา และอาจารย์มหาวิทยาลัย

**คำสำคัญ:** ทัศนคติ, คำยืมภาษาอังกฤษ, ภาษาญี่ปุ่น

## Introduction

Japanese language has developed through the borrowing and use of words from different languages through centuries. Before European languages were introduced, Chinese language and culture was the most prominent power to affect Japanese language and culture. Japan was influenced by Chinese civilization on a massive scale in the fifth and sixth centuries, motivated by the great prestige of Chinese culture and lack of a native writing system for Japanese. Therefore, Chinese had gained high status and was used in various circles in Japanese society. Later, Japanese developed their own scripts and inventing a system to read and write Chinese Characters based on Japanese grammar and vocabulary. The imported Chinese words were not perceived by Japanese as loan words but they have been completely accepted as Japanese vocabulary.

With the coming of missionaries and merchants from European countries in the 1540s, the European loan words-Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch were introduced into Japanese. Though after only 80 years, the Europeans were been expelled from Japan, many European loan words having survived up to today, and are among those most naturalized in the Japanese language.

Loan words with English origin paved their ways to Japanese in the period of Meiji Restoration, and were the prominent Western language in the Taisho period from 1912 to 1926 (Scherling, 2012). The bulk of English loan word in Japanese today are motivated from American cultural influence on Japan since the end of World War II (Olah, 2007). It revealed that the loan words in general dictionaries, increased from 3.5% in 1956 to around 10% by 1990. The katakana dictionary published by Sanseido in 2000 contains 52,500 foreign word entries. Ishiwata (2001) noted that katakana dictionaries (loan words dictionaries) at present have gradually come close to being ordinary Japanese-English dictionaries, and they served as with how to say a word in English. Irwin (2011) gave a remark on the power of English loan words that they were not the same as other donor languages, overwhelmingly borrowed from nouns and verbs, but also from adjectives and adverbs, interjections, prepositions, numbers, pronouns, prefixes, articles, and conjunction. The loan words have become an unavoidable part of Japanese for both writing and speaking. This phenomenon seems to be so much greater due to the globalization posing a problem to foreigners of Japanese whose first language is English (Igarashi, 2007). Igarashi further addressed that the increase of katakana words in Japanese writing means that the learners need to know more katakana words than ever before to read Japanese writing. This indicates that the new loan words are continuously introduced in such writing, some of which are not deeply rooted in Japanese loan words inventory. As a result, many students do not know the meaning of such words, and this causes some difficulty in learning Japanese. Thus, this study examined the attitudes of Thai students who were learning Japanese as their degree in four universities

in Bangkok. From students’ perspective, it could offer some suggestions as to how to make loan words more comprehensible for JFL learners.

## Literature Review

### Language Attitudes

Attitudes have been defined in various ways according to different scholars. Attitude is not directly observe but can be inferred from observable responses (Eagly and Chaiken,1993). Bohner and Wanke (2002) defined attitudes as “a summary evaluation of an object or thought”. Individual attitude to something is the way of thinking or feeling about something. Carranza (1982) pointed out that language attitudes influence language behavior in a number of ways, and maintained that language attitudes could contribute to sound changes and help determine teachers’ perceptions of students’ abilities.

### Katakana script in Japanese Writing System

Japanese writing system uses a combination of four scripts-hiragana, katakana, kanji and romaji. Hiragana and katakana are phonetic syllabaries while kanji is Chinese logograms adapted for Japanese, and romaji is a roman alphabet. Hiragana and katakana, each of which independently represents all the sounds of Japanese language while kanji which each character represents units of meaning. In other words, kana (hiragana and katakana) is a phonographic system but kanji is a logographic system. Though two writing systems are used to write a Japanese sentence, each script in each system has its own function and usage. In a sentence, kanji is used to write the major content words while hiragana, the main phonetic writing system, is used for particles, other grammatical elements and ending. Katakana is generally used for loanwords from foreign languages other than Chinese. Due to the relative ease with which katakana can phonetic transcribe loan words (Tamaoka and Miyaoka, 2003), more and more English words were received into Japanese.

It is not only the pronunciation of loan words is different from the original words, but also most meanings are different. Loan words written with katakana have no keys to interpret the meaning like kanji, thus causing difficulty to understand their meaning for the first time one comes across the word.

Anyone can easily coin make any words into Japanese by using katakana but most words in katakana already have particular spelling. It is not only that the pronunciations are different from the original words, but also most meanings are different.

### Related Studies

Daulton (2011), in his study “On the origins of gairaigo bias: English learners’ attitudes towards English-based loanwords in Japan” used a questionnaire to examine 113 Japanese freshmen’s attitudes towards gairaigo (loanwords). The participants were students in the

three faculties: Business, Economics and Law at a large, medium-level Japanese university. A five-point Likert scale was used for the first 9 of 11 questions, and questions 10 and 11 were multiple-choice. The research concluded that though students were ambivalent, they generally did not suffer from gairaigo bias. Pronunciation differences are the major weakness of gairaigo as cognates in students' perspective.

In Daulton's another study (2003), he suggested that English-Japanese loan words which appear in the 1001-2000 most common words in English, were not difficult for students to predict the meaning of a loan word.

The related study conducted by Tamaoka and Miyaoka (2003) to investigate students' cognitive processing of Japanese loanwords in Katakana. The researchers used a decision task and a questionnaire to ask two groups of students. The results of questionnaires examining 20 Japanese undergraduate and graduate students in a prestigious Japanese university revealed that native Japanese students were likely to use decision-making strategies for determining lexicality of loan words in Japanese based on their daily experience of exposure to katakana words in print.

Hatanaka and Pannell (2016) conducted a research on English Loanwords and Made-in-Japan English in Japanese with six native speakers of English (NSEs) and six native speakers of Japanese (NSJs) of Hawaii Pacific University and the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, Hawaii. One of the research purposes was to investigate students' attitudes toward wasei-eigo (made-in-Japan English). It found that students' attitudes toward wasei-eigo were mixed. NSJs' responses were ranging from enthusiastic reflection to shock and embarrassment when they were informed that the terms are not used outside of Japan. NSEs generally agreed that the EDWs were in some way creative or interesting, although they found some of the terms confusing.

The study concerned loan words (gairaigo) with Thai students participants was conducted by Supansa Pinsri (2011). She surveyed the beliefs about Japanese loanwords (gairaigo) among students, lecturers and Japanese-speaking employees. Three groups of participants were 264 Thai students of Japanese major, 23 Thai teachers of Japanese, and 102 Japanese-speaking employees. The results indicated that the three groups agreed that gairaigo was important in learning Japanese but they had different opinions about the level of gairaigo knowledge which JFL students should attain. All groups stated that English loan words help them understand the word better when they make the English association on their own.

In reviewing previous studies, it has suggested the possible benefits of English loan words for Japanese students of English language learning, and they may benefits to JFL students as well. However, loan words are often a source of confusion for both students due to their pronunciation differences from the original words.

## Research Method and Model

This study focuses on investigating students' attitudes towards English loan words in Japanese in order to find teaching strategies regarding loan words usage.

A survey questionnaire was used to investigate 106 Thai third-year students of Japanese major in 4 universities in Bangkok. These 4 universities were chosen since their Japanese major programs were parallel and served the purpose of the study. Three parts of the questionnaire used to investigate students' data – general demography, understanding the differences between English and Japanese, attitudes towards English loan words in Japanese. A five -point Likert scale was used for the first 9 of 11 questions, and questions 10 and 11 were multiple-choice. The researcher used the adapted questionnaire developed by Daulton (2011) in order to compare the result of students' attitudes towards English loan words between the students, and to check that the results are consistent. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

## Participants

All participants were between 20-21 years old, 88 were female and 18 were male. They were studying Japanese as their major in four universities in Bangkok, Thailand: Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Rajamangala University of Technology, Rattanakosin Bopitpimuk Chakrawad campus, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Srinakharinwirot University. The Students enrolled in the third year and took Japanese in their degree, voluntarily participated in the research. Their educational background- learning Japanese for 5-6 years was 54.7%, and English for more than 10 years was 66%. Most of them (24.5 %) had basic Japanese language skill of JLPT, and 46.2% had basic English vocabulary knowledge less than 1000 words from self-report.

## The Findings

The results revealed that 84% of students do not think Japanese and English are closely related. In term of the similarity between Japanese and English, 63.2% of students pointed out that vocabulary system was the most similar. They thought that grammar systems of both languages were the most similar (20.8%) whereas only 16.0% said that phonology systems of the languages were the most similar.

Regarding “systems of Japanese” which were the easiest to master for persons who learned English as a second language, 69.8% gave vocabulary systems as a dominant one, followed by grammar systems (18.9%). For the question “When is it easier to understand a written text?”, 71.7% stated that when knowing vocabulary well, but 21.7% answered that when knowing grammar well.

### **Learner's attitude towards English loan words**

For the first eight questions, students' responses were quite reflecting the respondents' neutral emotional attitudes towards English loan words. These questions were *I think there are too many loan words in Japanese, I like to use loanwords when I speak Japanese, I like to use loan words when I do not know the words in Japanese, I think loan words are hard to understand, In learning Japanese, loan words are obstacles, in learning Japanese, loan words are helpful, My Japanese teachers said Katakana words helped us in learning Japanese, and I'd like to hear more about Katakana words.*

Students indicated *the biggest weakness of loan words are pronunciation* ( $\bar{x}=3.54$ ), followed by *grammar* ( $\bar{x}=3.30$ ). Concerning the last statement *the origins of your attitudes towards loan words*, participants indicated that social media, textbook, and university teachers were chosen in decreasing order respectively ( $\bar{x}=3.77, 3.65, 3.56$ ). This pointed out that students had neutral attitudes towards English loan words in the Japanese language. Being influenced by factors of social media as well as textbooks shaped the learners' attitudes. They thought loan words were rather too many and difficult to understand; this was due to loan word's pronunciation (3.68). Nevertheless, they insisted that loan words were useful in learning Japanese, when they were confronted with difficult situations to communicate using Japanese words, they struggled to overcome the problem by changing to use English loan words instead. This implied that having knowledge of English sometimes helped in recalling the English loan words.

As students pointed out that pronunciation of loan words was the most difficult, this shed light on characteristics of the two languages: Japanese and English, cause pronunciation problems.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, vocabulary was perceived as the most similar systems between Japanese and English by most participants. They pointed that with strong foundation of vocabulary knowledge, they could understand the written text easier. In addition, they noted that in learning Japanese, vocabulary is the easiest to understand and master for learners of English as a second language. More half of participants (51.9% : N=55; including the results of self-evaluation at ratio of 1001- 2000 words and 2001-3000 words) reported their self-assessment of English vocabulary knowledge was 1001-3000 words. It implied that they could understand the English-Japanese loan words which appear in the 1001-2000 most common words in English which Daulton (2001) suggested in his study.

The analysis above revealed the tendencies of learner's attitudes towards loan words in Japanese. First, although students, who had been studying Japanese, were ambivalent, they seemed to be not suffering from English loan words. Second, pronunciation of loan words caused some burden in their learning Japanese. These results

supported the study by Daulton (2011) although the present research studied Thai learners of Japanese, Daulton conducted his study using Japanese English students. Third, regarding the origins of students’ attitudes towards English loan word in Japanese, the participants claimed particularly that social media (people around you), textbooks, university teachers, and social media (TV and magazine) were the causes of their attitudes. In Daulton’s study, the mass media, each participant’s own conclusions, and people around them were the most responses. For Thai students, their own conclusion was not common responses. The most interesting finding to emerge from this study was that social media was the important source of students’ attitudes towards loan words in Japanese.

### **Recommendation**

There should be additional study about the attitudes towards English loan words of Thai teachers of Japanese. The results can be compared to those of the present study, in order to offer some suggestions as to how to make loan words more comprehensible for JFL learners.

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