

English Loanwords in Japanese and English Proficiency in Japan

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Abstract

In recent years, the quantity of English loanwords that have been appropriated and naturalized into Japanese has drastically increased. Daulton (2008) found that approximately 45 percent of the word families from the *British National Corpus* (BNC) 3000 (Nation, 2004), a list of the most frequent word families in English, corresponded to common loanwords used in Japanese. Regardless of the significant amount of English loanwords used in Japanese, Japan ranks 44th out of 49 countries on the TOEIC Listening and Reading Test (Educational Testing Service, 2019), a test that measures English proficiency. This paper explores possible reasons why the English loanwords used in Japanese are not helping to increase the English proficiency of language learners in Japan.

Introduction

Language contact has a major impact on how languages form, transform, progress, and in some cases, regress. For example, from the early 1800s to early 1900s, approximately 35 million people immigrated to the United States of America from numerous countries, including Germany, Italy, and Russia, all of them bringing with them their languages (Bryson, 1994). As a result, all of these languages affected and continue to affect each other. The more interaction and language contact between people from different linguistic backgrounds, the more a language is likely to undergo significant changes, often at a higher rate of speed than languages in which interaction and language contact are minimal. In Japan, however, the main factor affecting the Japanese language is not constant interaction with people from different linguistic backgrounds. Rather, it is the use of mostly English-derived loanwords by native speakers of Japanese.

According to statistics released by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2018), there were 2,637,251 non-Japanese citizens living in Japan in 2018, with the majority of them coming from countries in which English is not the official language. However, in recent years the majority of the loanwords that are used in Japanese have come from English. The languages that people bring with them when they move to a country often have an effect on the

language of the country in which they reside. But in Japan, a lot of the contact that native Japanese speakers have with English comes in the form of movies, music, books, and other mediums that do not involve direct contact with native speakers of English.

The Japan Management Association (2015) conducted a survey on 1,000 business people regarding English usage in the workplace and found that approximately 90% of the people surveyed do not use English at work. So, if only a fraction of people engaged in business use English at work, what percentage of non-business people use it? It is estimated that only a fraction of a percentage of native Japanese speakers not engaged in business are exposed to English on a daily basis, other than studying it at school, or hearing it in songs or movies. How, then, did so many English loanwords enter the Japanese language? I first begin by giving a brief overview of the history of loanwords in Japan in order to demonstrate how Japanese has become so permeated with English loanwords. Subsequently, I explain the current state of loanword usage in Japan, after which I explore reasons why the English loanwords used in Japanese are not helping to increase the proficiency of English language learners in Japan. This is followed by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of loanwords for production and the conclusion, in which I summarize the main points of this study.

The History of Loanwords in Japanese

In the realm of Japanese linguistics, words of Chinese origin, frequently referred to as Sino-Japanese vocabulary, are often not considered to be loanwords. Even though many words used in Japanese have originated from Chinese, loanwords in Japanese are often regarded as words of Western etymology. Words of foreign derivation that were adopted after approximately the mid-16th century, which is when Japanese began to encounter European languages, are classified as loanwords (Irwin, 2011).

Loanwords are often categorized based on the period in which they entered the Japanese language. The first is the Iberian period, which lasted for approximately a hundred years from around the middle of the 16th century. The majority of the loanwords that entered the Japanese language during this period originated from Portuguese, which was spoken by merchants, explorers, and Jesuits (Irwin, 2011). After the enactment of the National Isolation Edict, Japan's trade with other countries was restricted and merchants from countries that Japan deemed hostile were expelled.

The Dutch, who were not viewed as a threat, were permitted to stay in the Nagasaki area. The next phase of loanword history began in the mid-17th century and lasted for approximately 200 years, ending in 1859 when a select number of ports were opened to foreign trade. During this

period, Japanese contact with Europeans was limited to the Dutch, leading to a significant amount of Dutch words infiltrating the Japanese language. The next period of borrowing, which consisted of words borrowed from Western languages, such as French, German, and English, began in the 19th century and continues to the present day. Towards the end of the 19th century, some Western concepts were being calqued into Japanese using Sino-Japanese loan translations (Irwin, 2011). However, in recent years, many loanwords and concepts from other languages are often represented using katakana to pronounce words as close as possible to the source words in the donor languages.

The Current State of Loanword Usage in Japanese

The generally accepted definition of a loanword is a word borrowed from another language. Because the number of loanwords and foreign words being used in Japanese society is so extensive, with new foreign words being used every day, it is difficult to accurately determine how many loanwords are used in Japanese. In addition, the difference between a loanword and a foreign word is quite vague. At what point does a foreign word become a loanword and when does a loanword become a word “owned” by a particular language? It is for this reason that it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of loanwords in use in Japanese.

According to Daulton (2009), approximately 10 percent of the Japanese lexicon consists of words of Western origin. The increase in loanwords can be seen by examining the number of loanwords contained in dictionaries. A dictionary dedicated to loanwords published by Sanseido called *Concise Katakana Word Dictionary* (2010) contains 56,300 entries, 8,200 of which are acronyms. From the 20th century, the majority of the words that have been borrowed into Japanese have come from English. During and since the occupation of Japan by the United States, staggering amounts of loanwords were and have been adopted into the Japanese language. Due to the lack of restrictions regarding the use of loanwords and foreign words, words not intelligible to many Japanese citizens are ubiquitous throughout Japanese society.

There are a variety of reasons that loanwords are used in Japanese. According to Jinnouchi (2012), loanwords are appealing because they are easy to use, using them eliminates the need to deal with how to position their meanings within the existing vocabulary and they enrich the Japanese language. However, there are certain products, situations, signs and so on in which only English is used and Japanese is nonexistent. It is not uncommon to go to a shopping mall and not be able to find a shop with a Japanese name or to go a restaurant or cafe with menus only in English. In many cases, English is given priority over Japanese, regardless of the fact that non-Japanese citizens are still a fraction of the population in Japan. In addition, in recent years Japanese words or

Japanese characters are rarely found on t-shirts, car names, school uniforms and bags, and a variety of other items. It is typical to come across a high-rise business building in which the majority of the companies have English names, regardless of the fact that they are Japanese companies. Countries like France and China have been more resistant than Japan to the use of English loanwords. In China, although both transliteration and literal translations are used for foreign names, ideas, and concepts, literal translations are still more widely used. There has also been a movement in Korea that aims to keep the language pure (Jinnouchi, 2012). There are groups in Japan that aim to protect the Japanese language from the excessive use of loanwords, but judging from the abundant number of loanwords in use, their efforts seem to be in vain.

English Proficiency in Japan

In this section, I consider possible reasons why the English loanwords used in Japanese are not helping to increase the proficiency of English language learners in Japan. I first discuss cognates and explain the different types, as well as how phenomena such as semantic narrowing and semantic expansion can affect learners' comprehension and recognition of loanwords. This is followed by an exploration of other factors related to loanwords that may affect the listening and reading scores of language learners.

There are generally two commonly held views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of loanwords for English language learners in Japan. One view is that loanwords are a hazard for learners because they often create confusion and they do not necessarily lead to pragmatic fluency. The other is that loanword cognates significantly aid acquisition and comprehension. There are many words whose meanings are completely different from English from the time they are borrowed, possibly because of a misuse that is unquestioned and perpetuated. Because the media has the ability to reach millions of viewers, its role is paramount in the spread of loanwords. TV personalities, journalists, magazine editors, and other people in the media industry frequently use loanwords. However, just because they are using them, does not necessarily mean that they properly understand their meanings or connotations. If the usage of a foreign word is incorrect from its initial adoption, it is highly unlikely that it will fall into the category of words that aid English acquisition and proficiency.

Nevertheless, it is possible that a borrowed word starts off with a different meaning to that of the source word and eventually shares similar meanings. Other words that may have possessed similar meanings to English when they were first used can transform over time and no longer share meanings similar to the source word. Because the meanings and connotations of words are constantly

morphing and adapting, they are on a continuum of meaning, often shifting back and forth, sometimes causing the continuum itself to shrink or expand.

English words made in Japan, also known as *waseieigo*, are often completely different from their meanings in English, which frequently leads to misuse and causes misunderstandings. These words are made using a combination of English words. Words such as “スキシップ” (*skinship*) [physical contact, physical affection, and so on] often cause misunderstandings when learners, especially low-level learners, assume that words such as these are English. It is often pointed out that the creation and usage of these words are detrimental for English language learners. While using foreign words can be appealing because they feel novel, their usage can inhibit the proper understanding of English words. It is possible to use Japanese kanji and words to express a new idea or concept. If using foreign words or loanwords is appealing and is therefore given priority over Japanese words, in terms of English acquisition, proper usage would be advantageous for learners.

There are a significant amount of loanwords that share one meaning, several meanings, or in some cases, all of the same meanings as the original English words, thereby becoming an invaluable resource for native Japanese speakers when learning or producing English. Many commonly used loanwords belong to the most frequently used word families in English. Although all of the meanings might not be exactly the same, or in some cases, similar at all to the source word, there are many loanwords that do share at least one or more meanings. Even if the word only shares one meaning with the source word, it may still help learners predict other meanings.

A study performed by Daulton (2005) revealed that approximately 25 percent of words compiled in the *Academic Word List* by Coxhead (1998) are commonly used loanwords in Japanese. Daulton (1998) compared loanwords in Japanese to West's (1953) list of most frequently used English words and found that 38 percent of the word families from the list correlated to English loanwords in Japanese. A more recent study done by Daulton (2008) discovered that approximately 45 percent (1,356) of the word families from the *British National Corpus* (BNC) 3000 (Nation, 2004), a list of the most frequent word families in English, corresponded to common loanwords used in Japanese. Whether a loanword is common or not was determined by giving 24 tests, each containing approximately 100 words, to Japanese university students, and if at least 7 out of 10 students recognized a word, it was deemed to be a common loanword. However, just because a word is common does not mean that it is well understood.

It is often said that English language learners in Japan are able to read English better than they can hear it. Therefore, assuming that learners have enough proficiency in English to take a standardized test such as TOEIC, reading scores should be higher than listening scores. But, according to data published by Educational Testing Service (ETS) (2019), Japan's mean TOEIC

score for reading was 229, while for listening it was 290. Out of the 48 other countries besides Japan listed in the ETS report, the only countries that performed more poorly on the reading section were Macao, Mongolia, Thailand, Albania, and Indonesia. On the listening section, Benin, Vietnam, Macao, Mongolia, Thailand, Albania, and Indonesia had lower scores than Japan. It is often said that English loanwords are used more in Japan than in other countries in East Asia, such as China and Korea. However, Japan ranks 44th out of 49 countries on the TOEIC Listening and Reading Test, whereas China ranks 36th, and Korea ranks 18th, scoring 673, 95 points higher than China, and 153 points higher than Japan. Regardless of the fact that a significant amount of loanwords and foreign words are in use in Japan and can be seen and heard all throughout society, it does not seem to be beneficial in helping students on standardized tests that measure learners' English skills, such as the TOEIC Test. It may come as a shock to many language teachers in Japan that such a surprising number of English loanwords are used in Japanese and yet the mean TOEIC score is still extremely low.

When learning a second language, a learner's first language is an extremely invaluable resource. In Japanese, there are an extensive amount of English cognates that learners have at their disposal (Daulton, 2008). Loanwords can be an invaluable resource for English language learners and knowledge of them can assist in the comprehension of English words. One advantage of cognates is that when they are very similar, learners do not have to study as hard to learn them (Nation, 1990). There are a variety of definitions of what a cognate is, one stating that in order to be cognates, words have to have the same linguistic derivation and share a resemblance in form and meaning. Another definition asserts, for example, that because words evolve in form and meaning, even if they do not share the same form or meaning at the present time, they can still be cognates. In this study, I am using the word cognate to mean a borrowed word that is not necessarily similar in form, but shares at least one similar meaning with the word in the language it was borrowed from. In Japan, most of the words borrowed in recent years come from English, and are usually expressed in katakana, and they do not appear similar in form like *night* in English and *nuit* in French.

There are numerous languages that are connected by groups of words that learners recognize to be closely related. These are known as cognate pairs. When studying a second language, a learner's first language can both assist and inhibit learning (Daulton, 2008). Kay (1995) asserts that most loanwords in Japanese are not exact contextual and semantic equivalents to the words that they derive from. Some words, such as “ボランティア”(borantia) [volunteer], “スケジュール”(sukejuuru) [schedule], and “インストラクター”(insutorakutaa) [instructor] are good examples of cognates that share several similar meanings and usages to source words. However, words such as “サラリー

マン” (sarariiman) [businessman] can create difficulties for learners, especially low-level learners, who perceive the Japan-made English words to be English.

Because of the extensive amount of loanwords in use in Japanese society, there are a large number of cognates that are a great asset to language learners as they can facilitate positive transfer. However, as words flow through society, they frequently morph, leading to semantic change. This in turn can result in negative transfer. In addition to undergoing semantic change, foreign words, usually of English origin, are used to create waseieigo, often making them immediately different from their English meanings at their inception. Low-level language learners often mistake waseieigo for English, resulting in negative transfer. One example of a waseieigo is the word, “ベビーカー” (bebi- ka-), which is comprised of the English words, “baby” and “car” and means stroller in English. To some native Japanese native speakers, on the surface words like these may appear to be English words and may lead to negative transfer.

There are also word pairs that are referred to as close false friends and distant false friends. Close false friends are words in which meanings are close, but not the same, whereas distant false friends are words that have extremely different meanings (Daulton, 2008). Close false friends are words that are more likely to cause accuracy problems for language learners, but even if their usage of a close false friend is not correct, the recipient of their talk may be able to guess the meaning depending on the distance of the meanings. Also, if a learner sees a close false friend written or hears it spoken, they may be able to infer the meaning as they are close in meaning to the source word.

The word “カンニング” (kanningu) in Japanese means to cheat on a test and comes from the English word “cunning,” meaning crafty, sly, and so on. Although in English “cunning” does not mean to cheat, when cheating, students need to be sly in order to avoid being caught by their teacher. The Japanese word “カンニング” (kanningu) and the English word “cunning” are different in meaning, but their connotations are similar. The Japanese word “カンニング” (kanningu) is often used in conjunction with the verb “する” (suru), meaning to do. In English, cunning is usually used as an adjective or noun. Even though the parts of speech often used in each language may make it difficult for learners use correctly and comprehend, because “カンニング” (kanningu) in Japanese and “cunning” in English share similar connotations, learners may be able to infer the meaning if they encounter it.

Many waseieigo would be classified as distance false friends because their meanings are often considerably different from the English source words. Sometimes it is blatantly obvious that distant false friends have different meanings from their English equivalents, so people will most likely refrain from using them, especially if it was a combination of words that are shortened and therefore makes

it apparent that it is not English. An example of a distant false friend would be the word “バイキング” (baikingu) [Viking], which means all you can eat.

Some studies (e.g. Shepherd, 1996) focus on the negative facets of loanwords for English language learners in Japan. For example, in addition to stressing the fact that many loanwords have extremely different meanings and pronunciations from the original English words, he points out that when loanwords are shortened or used in combination with other words, they are extremely different from the source words. Daulton (2008), on the other hand, argues that loanwords do facilitate learning, they are easier to learn, and there is a usage preference over non-loanwords.

The meanings of loanwords are often very limited compared to those of the original English words. When foreign words are first adopted, they are frequently used with very narrow meanings in specific contexts. Over time, semantic expansion can occur, eventually encompassing many or all of the meanings of the source word, or it can take on new meanings that are completely different. In many cases, the borrowing of words results in semantic narrowing. When semantic narrowing occurs, it can make it difficult for learners to comprehend the meaning of a loanword, regardless if they are able to hear or recognize it as they loanword that they know. If the word is used in a different context or in a different meaning that they are not familiar with, it may act as an impediment to understanding. If a loanword has several meanings, especially if one of those meanings is not the same as the English meanings, it may confuse learners and not help to improve their proficiency.

Some of the more obvious factors that can affect listening ability are phonological differences and linguistic factors, such as knowledge of syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. Syntax, grammar, and vocabulary are all elements that can affect not only language learners' listening proficiency, but their reading proficiency as well. Phonological differences between English loanwords and source words can create difficulties for language learners. It is conceivable that although language learners understand loanwords, they are unable to hear them and recognize them as the loanwords that they know. Some loanwords sound very similar to the original English word and others sounds considerably different. For example, the English word “bike,” meaning motorcycle, is extremely close in pronunciation to the Japanese word “バイク” (baiku). The English word “hierarchy” and the Japanese word “ヒエラルキー” (hierarukii) share a similar meaning, but they sound considerably different and would most likely be very difficult for a language learner to recognize as a cognate. However, as discussed above, even if students recognize them as loanwords, if the words are not true cognates and language learners perceive them to be, this could have a profound effect on their ability to comprehend a sentence correctly.

In English, as in many other languages, when some sounds are produced in combination with

other sounds, they can disappear and blend together to create new sounds, thereby making it difficult for learners to hear words that they know. So, even if a word such as “バイク” (baiku) sounds similar to the source word, language learners may not be able to hear it when it is produced with other words. When words are produced in combination, it makes it difficult for language learners to identify word boundaries, which is where a word starts and finishes. Even assuming that loanwords have exactly or almost exactly the same pronunciation as the English word, if they are said at a speed that is too fast for language learners to hear them, comprehension of many loanwords will not translate into high test scores. It would be much easier for language learners to identify loanwords if they were produced in isolation, reducing the possibility that sounds disappear or morph as they do when produced in combination with other sounds.

It is possible that many of the loanwords used in Japanese society and that appear on the TOEIC Test have low levels of comprehension. There have been plethora of studies performed regarding the comprehension of loanwords. Daulton (2001), for example, surveyed what were assumed to be well understood loanwords and found that comprehension levels were surprisingly low. In order to hear and understand a sentence, learners need to understand vocabulary and other linguistic elements. The low scores on the both the listening section and reading section suggest that as a whole language learners lack not only the ability to hear words, but also the syntactical, lexical, and grammatical knowledge needed to comprehend the content. It is also conceivable that test takers are able to hear more loanwords than non-loanwords because they do not encounter non-loanwords as frequently. Unfortunately, because there are a number of factors that affect comprehension, it is difficult to identify and isolate specific reasons why loanwords used in Japanese are not helping language learners to get high scores on the TOEIC Test. One obvious conclusion that can be drawn is that based on the TOEIC scores, familiarity with loanwords alone is not advantageous in helping language learners to improve their overall listening ability.

The scores on the TOIEC reading section also indicate that language learners in Japan lack the syntactical, lexical, and grammatical knowledge needed and that the lexicon of loanwords that language learners have at their disposal is not sufficient enough to enable them to acquire high scores on the TOEIC Test. Even if language learners can comprehend or recognize a significant amount of loanwords, understanding a complex sentence in a particular context requires a much higher level of knowledge and skills. It goes without saying that knowledge of grammar structures and other linguistic elements is necessary to improve scores on standardized tests. Low scores on the listening section of the TOEIC Test may result from students not being able to hear a word, even though it is a word they know because it has a slightly or significantly different pronunciation from that in Japanese. This can be relatively straightforward. Determining why people do not

comprehend a sentence, paragraph, and so on is much more complex.

At Japanese junior high and high schools the focus is often more on learning grammar in isolation and less on learning grammar in context and developing reading skills. This teaching style may help students to understand grammar, but not necessarily how sentences are connected to each other, and how to infer meaning from groups of sentences. It also does not teach students how and when particular grammar structures, words, expressions, and so on are used. This may affect language learners' ability to comprehend how sentences are connected and draw meaning from them. There is not an emphasis on written production at Japanese junior high and high schools either, so many university students often do not know the elements of paragraphs or essays and how they are constructed. Placing more of an emphasis on reading and writing would allow students to see grammar in context, enable them to practice finding information, and make them think about how to put groups of sentences together, which should lead to an improvement in reading fluency.

Because language is much more complicated than just understanding a large amount of vocabulary, even if all of the loanwords used in Japan were true cognates, this most likely would not result in a significant improvement in scores on standardized tests. Teaching students reading skills would also enable them to develop their ability to predict things about the content based on context clues. Developing these skills would enable learners to improve beyond just understanding individual words and sentences. Reading more will increase students' exposure to not only loanwords, but also a variety of other words, phrases, and so on, which should improve their overall comprehension, and may eventually lead to an improvement in pragmatic fluency because learners will come into contact with more natural language.

Language Production

Even though learners of English in Japan have an extensive lexicon of cognates at their disposal, it has not translated into high scores on the TOEIC Listening and Reading Test. It is for this reason that many language teachers are extremely skeptical about the ability to legitimize loanwords as an effective tool for language learners. If loanwords are not helping learners to achieve high scores on tests, which are one way that proficiency can be measured, that brings into question their usefulness. Knowledge of cognates will undeniably help learners to perform better on vocabulary tests, but if they are not effective in helping students to comprehend reading passages at a higher level than students who do not have as many cognates as their disposal, how useful are they? Judging from the mean TOEIC score of Japan, loanwords do not appear to be improving English language learners' listening and reading proficiency. Loanwords can, however, be an

extremely invaluable tool for language learners when speaking or writing English. Speaking and writing ability are not measured on the TOEIC Test mentioned above. It is often possible to communicate or convey information with vocabulary alone, even if the sentence is not grammatically or pragmatically correct.

While the comprehension of a large number of English loanwords enables language learners in Japan to communicate in English on a basic level, it does not guarantee that their usage will be pragmatically correct. Even if loanwords are cognates, that does not mean that they are used the same in English and Japanese. During production, when learners assume that words are similar when they are not, it can cause errors (Ringbom, 2007). This could occur when learners assume that words share a similar meaning or usage. In addition, the usage and meaning of words are constantly in flux and sometimes loanwords and source words can converge or diverge.

It is irrefutable that a learner's first language assists in the acquisition of their second language. It helps the learning process if a learner is able to recognize some similarities between their first language and the language they are learning (Ringbom, 2007). Daulton (2008) claims that "English loanwords in Japanese do not impede the mastery of spoken English and may be an aid in some cases, especially for word recognition" (p. 65). Loanwords can, however, have both negative and positive effects on a language learner's production. Loanwords can have negative effects on learner's production if the meaning, usage, or pronunciation of the loanword is different in Japanese and English and learners are not aware of those differences. If the meaning, usage, and pronunciation of a loanword are similar in Japanese and English, then it is likely that there will be positive transfer. If the loanword is a close false friend or a distance false friend, there is a high probability that negative transfer will occur.

In addition to many loanwords having different meanings from source words and many language learners not understanding that all loanwords do not derive from English, there are other downsides. Although in recent years the majority of loanwords that enter the Japanese language derive from English, there are still a significant amount of words that come from other languages. With regards to English acquisition, one significant problem is that many learners, especially low-level learners, are often unable to differentiate between English-derived loanwords and loanwords from other languages. When speaking English, some language learners use words such as " アルバイト " (arubaito), which means part-time job and derives from the German word "arbeit." It would be beneficial for language learners if loanwords were taught or discussed in Japanese or English classes at junior high or high schools in Japan. Teaching students the similarities and differences of loanwords, both semantic and phonological, would help learners to deepen their understanding of loanwords.

If students are unable to hear loanwords, merely knowing them is insufficient for reciprocal communication. If knowing them will only help students produce basic sentences, and not necessarily contribute to grammatical and pragmatic accuracy, both of which are signs of a high degree of proficiency, how useful are they? The report published by ETS (2019) revealed that out of all of the test takers from Japan, 46% reported that English usage consisted of 1-10% of their daily life. According to a survey by the Japan Management Association (2015), out of the 1,000 business people surveyed, 7.1% stated that they use English sometimes and 3.4% answered that they use English almost every day. If only approximately 1 in 10 business people use English in Japan, which does business with many other countries, then it is highly likely that only a fraction of a percentage of people not engaged in business use English on a regular basis.

This means that if English learners in Japan use English, it will probably be at work. Therefore, the people who do use English will most likely be required to use it in a business setting. Business English is undoubtedly more difficult than daily conversation and an extremely high level of English proficiency is required. If knowledge of loanwords is not sufficient enough to help learners achieve the high level of proficiency needed in business, then how beneficial are loanwords to language learners?

While cognates may not be sufficient in aiding the comprehension of complex sentences, they undeniably assist in the comprehension and production of simple sentences. Cognates may create accuracy problems (e.g., tenses, parts of speech, and so on) during production, but they can serve as an important foundation for language learners. How often a cognate is used in society determines how often the average person will encounter that word, and theoretically, the more one encounters a word, the higher the level of comprehension of that word should be. Exposure to a frequently used loanword may lead to certain biases regarding the usage and meaning and this may affect how and when that word is used when learners are using it in English. Simply knowing the meaning of word does not help learners understand how or in what situation it is used. Pragmatic fluency develops as a result of a significant amount of exposure to natural language, whether it be spoken or written.

Conclusion

As Nation (1990) points out, learners do not have to study as hard to learn cognates that are relatively similar. This would allow language learners to spend less time on words that they already know and spend more time on grammar, idioms, and other linguistic elements that will help them to increase their knowledge and improve their overall proficiency. Why then does Japan, a country with a language that contains an abundant number of English loanwords known for its high level of

education, rank so low on the TOEIC Test? Often in language classrooms, the focus is on continually learning something new and not solidifying, clarifying, or better understanding things learners already know. Loanwords are undeniably an amazing resource for learners of English in Japan. However, the topic of loanwords is rarely mentioned, let alone focused on in language classrooms. Helping learners to understand the similarities and differences of loanwords and their English equivalents, both phonological and semantic, will help solidify the lexical foundation that learners already have. Making loanwords a topic of discussion and or teaching them systematically would help dispel any misunderstandings about them and then teachers could focus on other things like grammar, idioms, usage, and so on that would help strengthen language learners' linguistic foundations.

Ignoring the topic of loanwords can lead to several problems. For example, many learners, especially low-level learners, assume that most loanwords originate from English and are true cognates. Also, there are a significant amount of loanwords that do not share any or all of the meanings of the original English words. Teaching students how they are similar and different will not only deepen their comprehension of loanwords, it will enhance their understanding of their own language. It is undeniable that loanwords in Japanese are an invaluable resource for English language learners. Knowledge of them can aid in the comprehension and recognition of English vocabulary. One fourth of the words in Coxhead's (1998) *Academic Word List* and roughly 45 percent of the word families from the *British National Corpus* BNC) 3000 (Nation, 2004) corresponded to frequently used loanwords in Japanese, but this unfortunately is not translating into a high level of English proficiency, as measured by the TOEIC Test. Judging from the mean TOEIC score of Japan, it is obvious that merely comprehending or recognizing a significant amount of English loanwords is insufficient when those loanwords are combined with elements of grammar.

Since English language learners in Japan have an extensive amount of loanwords at their disposal, one might assume that this would help improve their proficiency, or at the very least allow them to spend less time studying vocabulary and more time studying other components of the language, which would then lead to an increase in proficiency. It is often said that there are more loanwords used in Japanese than in other languages such as Korean and Chinese. If this is true, it is extremely peculiar why the mean TOEIC score Japan is so low compared to those countries. There are a significant amount of English loanwords used in Japanese and even if a large portion of them were not true cognates or were false friends, that still leaves a substantial number of loanwords that do share similar meanings to their source words at their disposal.

Although knowledge or recognition of loanwords may not necessarily help English language learners in Japan to achieve high scores on standardized tests which measure proficiency, that does

not mean that loanwords are completely insignificant. Loanwords are an undoubtedly helpful resource for language learners when they are producing language. Although many loanwords may not be true cognates, if they share one similar meaning, the recipient of the talk will be more likely to understand what they are trying to convey. Also, even if a loanword is a close or distant false friend, the use of the word may help the recipient to guess the meaning.

Japan's low TOEIC scores in comparison to many other countries could be attributed to a variety of reasons. For example, language learners in some countries may tend to take the TOEIC Test after they have achieved a high degree of proficiency. Schools in some countries may require students to take the TOEIC Test regardless of their proficiency and if many low-level language learners take the test, that would cause the mean score to decrease. Factors such as these could have a major impact on the mean TOEIC score. However, these factors do not change the fact that loanwords are not helping language learners in Japan to perform better on the TOEIC Test than countries in which English loanwords are not used as frequently. How Japan's mean TOEIC score compares to the mean scores of other countries is actually not relevant. Japan's mean TOEIC Test score is extremely low, not just in comparison to other countries.

This study explored the possible reasons why the English loanwords in use in Japan are not contributing to a high level of English ability, as measured the TOEIC Test. The meanings of words are continuously changing as semantic narrowing and expansion occurs, sometimes resulting in close false friends or distant false friends, which are not as useful as true cognates and may create confusion for learners. However, even if a loanword is a true cognate, if students are unable to hear it because the pronunciation is different to that of the pronunciation in Japanese, or because it is pronounced differently when said in combination with other sounds, it is unlikely to assist students in achieving high scores on the listening section of the TOEIC Test. Loanwords are not helping learners get to high scores on the TOEIC Test and this could be attributed to something more than an abundance of close or false friends or a lack of understanding of other linguistic elements like grammar. It could possibly be indicative of a deeper rooted problem in the English education in Japan.

English grammar is often taught in isolation at Japanese junior high and high schools and there is rarely an emphasis placed on improving reading ability. The low mean score on the listening section of the TOEIC Test may be simply due to test takers not being able to hear the words. On the other hand, the low mean score on the reading section could be a result of a lack of reading skills and not necessarily just a lack of knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, or syntax. Teaching students how to understand grammar in context and improve reading skills, such as inferring or predicting, should help to increase reading scores.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Mitsuhiro Nakamura, Professor Takanobu Akiyama, Professor Hisashi Sugito, and Professor Robert Stroud for their insightful ideas and suggestions.