

# Loanwords in Japanese: Helpful, Harmful, or Neither?

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## Abstract

People borrow words from other languages for several reasons, one of the main being to communicate a thing or an idea that does not exist in their own language or culture. These borrowed words are referred to as loanwords and they can help to enrich and develop the language into which they are borrowed. However, in recent years in Japan, an extensive number of loanwords are used even when suitable equivalents in Japanese already exist. This sudden influx of loanwords has been the root of communication problems all throughout Japanese society. In this paper, I explore the historical and sociolinguistic factors that have led to the significant use of English loanwords in Japanese and consider the effects of English loanword usage on the Japanese language, Japanese society, and on the English competency of language learners in Japan.

## I . Introduction

Throughout time languages have developed and changed when speakers of different languages interacted through trade, migration, and conquest, among other things. Languages expand when vocabulary for various things and concepts that did not exist in a language or culture are introduced into a language. When a word for an idea, thing, or concept that did not previously exist in a language is borrowed and begins to be used by speakers of that language, it can take many years to spread among the speakers of that language and finally be understood, especially in the past before the advent of print media, radio, television, and the internet. As words flow through society from speaker to speaker, their meanings and nuances can increase, decrease, and change. When a word takes on a completely new meaning, it is referred to as semantic expansion. People can create new meanings for words sometimes intentionally or unintentionally. New meanings can be created unintentionally when people use a word in a semantically incorrect way, which can then spread throughout society and become standard. When a word loses a particular meaning, it is called

semantic narrowing, which occurs when people stop using a particular meaning of a word.

Languages can also change when people who speak different languages interact, exposing each other to words for different things and ideas that may not exist in their respective languages or cultures. When people use words from a different language it is often called borrowing and the word borrowed is often referred to as a loanword. There are many definitions of what a loanword is and scholars generally fail to come to an agreement regarding the exact meaning.

Put simply, a loanword is a word adopted from another language. This definition, however, can be problematic for several reasons and leaves many questions to be answered. For example, what does it mean to adopt a word? According to Cambridge Dictionary (2023), adopt means “to choose someone or something or take something as your own.” Based on this definition, when a word is adopted it becomes part of the language into which the word is used.

However, several questions still remain. For example, what is the difference between a foreign word and a loanword? There is no universally accepted explanation of what the actual difference is between a foreign word and a loanword. A foreign word is a word from another language and a loanword is a word adopted from another language, but at what point does a foreign word become a loanword, a word adopted into a language, a word that now belongs to that language? Because there is no clear distinction between what foreign words and loanwords are, it is difficult to classify them. It is easy for most people to understand that a foreign word is a word from a different language. However, it is difficult to comprehend what a loanword is because it is not clearly defined and loanwords start out as foreign words. A loanword should be defined as a word adopted from another language that is intelligible to the majority of the speakers of the language into which the word is adopted. How a loanword is defined becomes extremely important because if a foreign word is only understood by a small amount of people but is used throughout society, whether it be in the news media, at city offices, or at schools, it can lead to significant communication problems.

Irwin (2011) defines a loanword in Japanese as “a foreign word which has undergone adaptation to Japanese phonology, has been borrowed into Japanese after the mid-16th century and whose meaning is, or has been, intelligible to the general speech community” (p. 10). In Japanese there are three types of words: *wago*, words of Japanese origin, *kango*, words of Chinese origin, and *gairaigo*, words of Western origin. Although words of Chinese origin are technically of foreign origin, they are not categorized as such (Loveday, 1996).

## II. Reasons for Loanword Usage

In the past people borrowed words for ideas, things, and concepts, that did not exist in their

language or culture, whereas in more recent years people borrow words for different reasons. With the exception of technology and science related words, a significant amount of loanwords are borrowed because of their allure. In Japan, the main reason people use loanwords even when a perfectly suitable equivalent in their own language exists is to show that they have a certain level of knowledge of a foreign language and may know words that other people do not know, therefore causing them to appear ostentatious.

There are, however, a variety of other reasons that words are borrowed from other languages. For example, they are borrowed to make distinctions in meaning, and emphasize or call attention to something (Loveday, 1996). Loanwords are sometimes used in advertisements as emphasis or for aesthetics. Having too many kanji or Japanese characters can make something difficult to read or create a very rigid image. Loanwords are sometimes used to blur a meaning when the meaning is something negative or sensitive.

According to Jinnai (2007), Japanese people tend to speak vaguely and leave the interpretation to the person they are speaking to. He also explains that because words formed from kanji are extremely vivid and leave little room for interpretation, there has been an increase in new katakana words that are not well understood. Another reason that people use loanwords is to avoid using taboo Japanese words. For example, there are several loanwords used regarding the elderly and people with disabilities, (Jinnai, 2007). The number of places and situations in which loanwords are used is endless. They are used in company meetings and presentations, university lectures, school lessons, speeches, and TV shows, just to name a few.

Loveday (1996) points out that “the borrowing of items for referents already encoded in Japanese demonstrates that cultural contact is not the sole motivation for contact with English” (p. 83). Cultural contact is less a factor for borrowing than the reasons mentioned above. The number of foreigners living in Japan is extremely low so the amount of cultural contact with people who speak other languages is minimal.

### III. Loanwords and their Effects on the Japanese Language

There are various theories as to when Japanese became a fully-fledged language. It is often hypothesized that it was sometime during the Yayoi Period. Japanese as the national language of Japan is an ideological construct that did not exist prior to Japan’s modernization (Heinrich, 2012), which coincided with Japan’s westernization and took place in many forms. According to Ueno (2001), the increase in the usage of western loanwords in Japanese could be seen as a sign of Japan’s westernization. Because Japan did not have its own writing system, it borrowed character scripts

known as kanji from the Chinese language. Kanji on mainland Japan date back to the fifth century and the first Japanese writings can be traced back to the eighth century (Loveday, 1996). Academic words of western origin were translated into Japanese using kango from the Meiji Restoration. Kango began to increase from the Nara Period, but apart from the period during World War II, loanwords of Western origin have continued to be adopted into the Japanese language since the Meiji Period (Ueno, 2001).

Even though Japanese and English are not geographically adjacent languages, English has had a significant effect on the Japanese lexicon, especially since World War II and the American occupation. During World War II, English was viewed as the language of enemy in Japan and several measures were taken in order to prohibit its usage. Because of the government's policies regarding English, company names, baseball words, school names, stage names, and other names of English origin were replaced with Japanese words. Some sport names and words related to various sports were also changed. “ラグビー” (ragubii) [rugby] and “スキー” (sukii) [skiing], for example, were changed to “闘球” (toukyuu), and “雪滑” (yukisuberi) (Oishi, 2007). The characters “闘” (tou) and “球” (kyuu) literally mean fight ball, or fight for the ball. “雪” (yuki) and “滑” (suberi) mean snow and slide, or to slide on the snow. Some of the words that were changed during the war were the baseball words “ストライク” (sutoraiku) [strike] and “ファウル” (fauru) [foul]; they were replaced by the words “よし一本” (yoshi ippon), literally meaning “good one” and “だめ” (dame), meaning bad (Oishi, 2007). The word “ニュース” (nyuusu) [news] is a commonly used word in Japan and has been in use since before World War II. However, similar to the other words of English origin that were replaced by Japanese words, the word “ニュース” (nyuusu) [news] was replaced by the Japanese equivalent “報道” (houdou) (Oishi, 2007).

Following the end of World War II there was a significant increase in foreign words, which would later become loanwords, words adopted into the Japanese language. Because there were no clear restrictions in place regarding the use of foreign words in Japanese society, people were free to use them as they pleased. This led to a tidal wave of foreign words used in stores, advertisements, team names, and product names, among other things, and this situation has continued virtually unhindered until the present.

The number of loanwords entering the Japanese language increased significantly after World War II, but there has also been a dramatic increase in recent years, not only because of science and technology related words that have entered the Japanese language. The use of technology, such as the internet, has given people access a wide range of information in a variety of languages. The Japanese government and various schools have increased their emphasis on the importance of English education. The weight placed on the importance of English can be evinced by the fact that

English is taught in elementary, junior high, and high schools and is a subject on university entrance exams. Also, there has been an increasing amount of universities that provide programs with most or all of their courses taught in English. This increased exposure to English has increased people's knowledge of English and therefore their ability to use it, at least at the vocabulary level, with relative ease when speaking with other native Japanese speakers. People are able to make use of their knowledge of English vocabulary words in a variety of ways and settings. For example, at company meetings, when speaking with friends, and when writing newspaper articles, news scripts, or blogs. This usage has caused waves of loanwords to flow through Japanese society and significantly impact the Japanese language.

The majority of the words that have entered the Japanese language in recent years have come from English and when new words are created they are often made by combining loanwords (Ueno, 2001). Most loanwords in Japanese begin as nouns, but they can function as adverbs or adjectives, and they are sometimes changed to function as verbs or the verb "suru" [to do] is added to verbalize them. There are two types of loanwords: new words used to describe new things and new words to describe old things (Jinnai, 2007). In most cases problems occur when new words are used to describe old things, especially when suitable Japanese translations already exist. There has been a significant increase in loanwords to describe things even though there are preexisting Japanese words that are sufficient. For example, "公民館" (kouminkan) has been replaced by "コミュニティーセンター" (komyunitii sentaa) [community center], and "さじ" (saji) has been replaced by "スプーン" (supuun) [spoon] (Jinnai, 2007).

According to Aitchison (2013) "language might be slowly evolving to a more efficient state. We might be witnessing the survival of the fittest, with existing languages adapting to the needs of the times" (p. 7). Some Japanese words are shortened by using one loanword or by combining more than one loanword or parts of those words, so in some sense Japanese is becoming more efficient. New words are often made using shortened versions of foreign words or loanwords. However, even if the part of the word is the exact same in Japanese, it is often quite different in English, so it does not necessarily lead to a higher level of understanding of the meaning of the word. For example, the words "パソコン" (pasokon) [personal computer], "エアコン" (eakon) [air conditioner], and "リモコン" (rimokon) [remote control]" all contain "コン" (kon), but each of the meanings is significantly different in English (Ueno, 2001). At first glance, although the "kon" part of each word may look the same, the meaning is not always the same and may not necessarily lead to a greater understanding of English.

Even if loanwords are longer and more characters are required to write them, there is a trend to use them because they are different, more attractive, and make the speaker or writer of the

loanword appear intelligent or to have an elevated status. It would be assumed that when a writer is writing they would choose the shortest, easiest option that they are most familiar with and that a speaker would choose the shorter Japanese word instead of the longer loanword. However, in recent years loanwords tend to be used even if they are longer and contain more characters.

The use of English loanwords has affected the Japanese language in a variety of ways. For example, it has affected Japanese grammar and Japanese pronunciation (Ueno, 2001). However, the most significant impact that English loanwords have had on the Japanese language is by far the replacement of Japanese words. Even within Japan, Japanese is being used less and less and it is losing its status and power to English (Ueno, 2001). There are even some Japanese companies, such as Rakuten, who have declared that the common language at their company would be English.

Heinrich (2012) states that “As powerful symbols of nationhood, national languages take their particular shape as a result of discursive solutions to the historical, social and political contexts from which they emerge” (p. 6). Because of the extensive use of foreign words and loanwords in Japan, Japanese, the national language of Japan, has continued to weaken and lose significance because it is being overtaken by English.

Sanseido (2020) published a dictionary called *コンサイスカタカナ語辞典* [Concise Dictionary of Katakana Words], which consists of 58,500 entries, 49,300 of which are katakana words, and the remaining 9,200 are abbreviations based on the Roman alphabet and symbols. The number of entries in this dictionary provides an indication of the scale of loanword usage in Japanese. Brysbaert et al. (2016) conducted an experiment to find out how many words the average adult knows. They provided participants with a list of 61,800 lemmas, which are the uninflected basal forms of a word. Based on the data that they collected they concluded that the average 20-year-old adult knows approximately 42,000 lemmas. Based on the estimates published by Brysbaert et al. (2016), if the average Japanese person is expected to understand common Japanese words plus all of the foreign words and loanwords that are used in society, it is highly unlikely that the majority of the foreign words and loanwords will be well understood or understood at all.

Language, similar to other things, changes over time, but “large numbers of intelligent people condemn and resent language change, regarding alterations as due to unnecessary sloppiness, laziness, or ignorance” (Aitchison, 2013, p. 4-5). There are many different opinions about whether loanwords are improving Japanese or destroying it (Jinnai, 2007). Some people despise the use of loanwords and how it is changing the Japanese language, whereas other people welcome it with open arms. As a result of loanword usage, the Japanese language is slowly changing, morphing into something that is only a shell of its former self. Unless government action is taken in order to prevent the use and further spread of loanwords, the Japanese language will continue to be in peril.

In addition to the number of Japanese words being replaced by loanwords and therefore disappearing from the Japanese language, the population of Japan is decreasing at a staggering rate. This means that the number of Japanese speakers is declining, further putting the Japanese language at risk of becoming extinct. Judging from the fact that many loanwords are replacing Japanese words and are the source of communication problems throughout society, it appears that loanwords are more harmful than helpful to the Japanese language.

#### IV. Loanwords and their Effects on Japanese Society

In 1991, the government talked about how loanwords would be written, but they did not consider whether they should be used or not (Jinnai, 2007) or whether their use should be prohibited. In 1995, the government discussed the increase in the use of loanwords and foreign words in Japanese. The Agency of Cultural Affairs (1995) posted a report of the meeting and in the report they mentioned the results of a public opinion poll taken the same year regarding the use of loanwords and foreign words in Japanese. Approximately 45% of the respondents answered that it would be alright if loanwords and foreign words increased slightly and 30.4% said that they felt that loanwords should not increase more than now. 13.1% responded that they do not mind how much loanword and foreign word usage increases, 6.6% stated that loanword and foreign word usage should be decreased, and 5.0% responded that they are not sure. Overall, the attitudes toward loanword and foreign word usage in Japanese seemed to be quite positive, with very few of the respondents holding negative feelings towards loanwords and foreign words. The report goes on to mention that some people feel that the overuse of loanwords and foreign words needs to be prevented when a suitable Japanese word exists, when their usage creates communication breakdowns with other generations, and when the meaning is different from the source word, which will not only create problems for people learning that language, but also lead to the destruction of the Japanese language.

The report points out that there are times when it is necessary to use loanwords and foreign words in order to communicate certain nuances and concepts. It states that sometimes the Japanese translation is more difficult to understand than loanwords or foreign words, but that people should decide which words to choose based on who they are communicating to and what their objective is. Finally, the report concludes that broadcasting agencies, newspapers, and government agencies and so on should not use loanwords and foreign words when it can be communicated in Japanese. However, despite the fact that government made this suggestion, there are no laws in place, such as the Toubon Law in France, to prevent the use or overuse of foreign words and loanwords. The government's suggestion was extremely vague so it did not seem to lead to any improvement to

speak of.

In 2002, the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics formed a committee in order to come up with a solution for how to deal with loanwords commonly used in the public sphere that were not well understood. The committee created a list that consisted of 176 words (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, 2006), but it was criticized by some as being not useful because of the minimal amount of words (Aizawa, 2012). The committee came up with translations and explanations for each of the words on the list in order to make it easier for people to understand them. However, it is highly likely that the majority of people in Japan have not seen the list or even know of its existence. If the average person does not see the list, it will not create a deeper understanding of each of the words and all of the committee's efforts will have been in vain.

The number of entries in the *Concise Dictionary of Katakana Words* is suggestive of the number of foreign or loanwords in use in Japanese. Even if only a small portion of the 49,300 words in the dictionary are words that are commonly used in society, that is still a significant amount of words for Japanese people to remember. Furthermore, the committee formed by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics only had 176 words on their list, which is a far cry from the amount of foreign words and loanwords used in Japan and the number of words in the *Concise Dictionary of Katakana Words*.

Loanwords are sometimes the cause of communication breakdowns (Jinnai, 2007). Due to the prevalent use of loanwords in various media, including television, magazines, and newspapers, some people have to use a dictionary in an attempt to understand what is being said or written. Some might find it preposterous that an adult living in a country that has a language that they are a native speaker of would have to use a dictionary in order to comprehend a TV program. According to Jinnai (2007), the elderly are the least familiar with loanwords so they are the people who are having the most difficult time with them.

In 2013, a 71-year-old man named Hoji Takahashi sued Japan's national broadcast organization, NHK, for their overuse of English words, which he claims caused him mental distress. Takahashi's lawyer, Mutsuo Miyata, said that "With Japanese society increasingly Americanised, Takahashi believes that NHK, as Japan's national broadcaster, shouldn't go with the trend, but remain determined to prioritise the use of Japanese, which he thinks would go a long way toward protecting Japanese culture" (BBC, 2013). NHK acknowledged using commonly used words of non-Japanese origin, but rejected the claim that they overused them (Japan Times, 2013). Kiyofumi Saito, the presiding judge in the case, ruled that it is not possible to prove that emotional distress can be caused as a result of the use of foreign words (Japan Today, 2014). Judge Saito stated that NHK did not infringe on Takahashi's rights (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2014).



Although Takahashi's rights may not have been infringed upon, most would agree that not being able to understand a TV program in your own country whose national language you speak because of the overuse of foreign words or loanwords would cause emotional distress. This lawsuit demonstrates the problematic nature of foreign words and loanwords and reveals that if checks and balances are not in place to prevent things like this from occurring, this will continue to happen and Japan will slowly descend into linguistic chaos.

Takahashi remarked that “Young people can probably understand a lot of this stuff, but for older people like myself, when I hear “asurito” (athlete) and “konpuraiansu” (compliance), I don't know what it means” (Japan Today, 2014). Several public surveys have been conducted regarding people's intelligibility of and thoughts towards loanwords and results revealed that there is difference in intelligibility based on people's ages. If a significant amount of foreign words or loanwords are used in succession in, say, for example, a news program or speech, the overall intelligibility would significantly decrease. There are a variety of opinions regarding loanword usage, with some people outright criticizing any use of loanwords, and other people being quite receptive to their usage. Some people think that loanword usage is destroying the Japanese language because loanwords continue to replace Japanese words, and others think that loanwords are enriching the Japanese language.

Some people refrain from using foreign words and loanwords, but others, such as Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, well known for overusing loanwords and foreign words in the media, prefer to use them. At a news conference held on March 23, 2020 (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2020), she used many foreign words, such as “ロックダウン (rokkudaun) [lockdown]” and “オーバーシュート (oobaashuuto) [overshoot],” to discuss the current state of the coronavirus. When she was giving her speech, she would use a foreign word and include the Japanese translation. For example, before she said “lockdown” she stated the meaning in Japanese, “都市が封鎖されている (toshi ga fuusa sareteiru) [the city is on lockdown]. Because she is saying the meaning in Japanese, there is no need for her to use foreign words. It is equivalent to saying the exact same thing twice.

In response to the use of foreign words related to the coronavirus, Defense Minister Taro Kono tweeted, “クラスター 集団感染” (kurasutaa shuudankansen) [cluster] “オーバーシュート 感染爆発” (oobaashuuto kansenbakuhatu) [overshoot] “ロックダウン 都市封鎖” (rokkudaun toshifuusa) [lockdown] “ではダメなのか。なんでカタカナ?” (de wa dame na no ka. nande katakana?) [Are these not okay? Why katakana?] (Kono, 2020). Here he is questioning why the foreign words “cluster,” “overshoot,” and “lockdown” are being used when there are sufficient Japanese terms that can communicate those concepts.

In the past it took a considerable amount of time for foreign words to spread throughout a country. Often times particular words may be popular in circles or professions but would rarely

make their way to the general population. With the proliferation of the internet, social media, and news media, new words can spread in an instant. What may have taken tens of years for a word to spread among the speakers of a language in the past may now take a matter of days, hours, minutes, or even seconds. Nowadays, through the internet and various social media platforms, and foreign language education at elementary, junior high, high schools, and universities, people have exposure and access to various languages and words on a daily basis.

Sometimes it only takes one event for a foreign word used only in certain groups to become well known throughout the general population and eventually replace the original Japanese word. For example, during World War II, the word “生命線” (seimeisen) [lifeline] was used, but the English word “lifeline” became widely used following the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (Ueno, 2001). When one media outlet uses a particular word in order to sound intelligent or to make their newscasts sound more interesting, other media outlets will pick up on that and mimic them. The same can be said about the word “pandemic.” Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the word “pandemic” was rarely used in Japan. However, even though the word pandemic can be expressed in Japanese, it became a keyword to describe the spread of the coronavirus.

The main people disseminating foreign words and loanwords are people in media and government offices who can reach a large number of people very easily, such as newscasters, journalists, magazine editors, government officials, people involved in the creation of TV shows, anime creators, and so on. Even children are constantly bombarded with loanwords all throughout their daily lives. Japanese animation is littered with loanwords and foreign words that children do not understand. Sometimes they are used for design purposes and other times they are used because of the appeal of using something different. It is not strange, for example to see “敵：ヴァイラン” (teki: viran) [villain: villain] on a sign in a Japanese animation. Here, too, even though the Japanese word “teki” is sufficient to say “villain,” they still included the English word “villain.”

## V. Loanwords and their Effects on English Competency

According to Daulton (2008), “Because of the vast number of English words that have been borrowed, Japanese have access to countless potential cognates, which include high-frequency and academic words. English loanwords are a built-in lexicon of English words have yet to encounter” (p. 4). It would be assumed that because the majority of new words introduced into the Japanese language are of English origin that it would lead to an increase in English competency. However, in actuality, this is not the case. Even though a significant number of loanwords are used in Japanese, it has not led to a high level of English proficiency, high scores on standardized tests, such as TOEIC (Butterfield, 2019), or

a high degree of pragmatic competence (Butterfield, 2020).

A report published by Educational Testing Service (2022) on TOEIC test takers worldwide revealed that 33% of the test takers from Japan were scientific/technical professions and their average test score was 561, not significantly better than speakers of languages in which loanwords are not used as extensively as Japanese. This could be due to a variety of factors. For, example, English is not used by many of the test takers from Japan. 43% of the test takers from Japan reported only using English between 1 to 10% in their daily lives. Also, 39% of the test takers from Japan reported that the skill that they used most frequently was reading, which would not result in an increase in listening ability, and therefore a high score on the listening section of the TOEIC Test.

Despite the fact that so many loanwords are used in Japanese and that English words can be seen and heard all throughout Japan, it is not leading to a substantial level of intelligibility among the people being exposed to them. Just because loanwords exist in various forms and mediums all throughout Japanese society does not necessarily mean that they are well understood. Even if they were well understood by English language learners in Japan, it does not mean that they loanwords share all of the same meanings as the original English word, which may not result in improved English ability, and instead may lead to confusion.

In addition to the meanings that loanwords share with the source words, they can sometimes take on new meanings for several reasons. One could be that the first person who used it did not have a thorough understanding of the meaning and used it incorrectly, therefore setting up the word for failure from the start. When loanwords of English origin and their source words have different meanings, it can be extremely problematic for language learners.

Assuming that a particular English word used as a loanword in Japanese shared all of the exact meanings in Japanese, it may not share all of the same pragmatic usages, which is another factor that may impede English language learners in Japan from fully utilizing the loanwords in Japanese and not reflect a score increase on standardized tests that measure English proficiency. Many words are only used in very specific contexts and it is possible for a loanword to be used in less or more contexts than the source word. When a loanword is used in less ways that the source word, it is called contextual narrowing, and conversely, when it is used in more contexts, it is called contextual expansion. Contextual narrowing and expansion only become problematic when, for example, English language learners use a particular meaning of a word in a particular context that is not appropriate or natural. Another problem that exists in Japan is the creation of Japanese words using English words or parts of English words. These are called Wasei-Eigo, which are pseudo loanwords, and literally means Japanese-made English.

Another problem that may be preventing language learners in Japan from getting higher scores

is pronunciation. Assuming that a loanword of English origin shares the same meanings and pragmatic usages in English and Japanese, it still may not be heard and recognized on the listening section of the TOEIC Test if the English and Japanese pronunciations are not similar. A common factor that is often cited for the fact that the number of loanwords in use in Japan is not leading to a higher proficiency among English language learners is the sheer amount of loanwords being used. The number of loanwords in use in Japan seems to be increasing year by year, but English proficiency does not appear to be improving. The 49,300 entries in Sanseido's (2020) *Concise Dictionary of Katakana Words* indicate the enormous scale of foreign words and loanwords in use in Japan. The newest version of the dictionary includes terms that have appeared in society more recently as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, such as "pandemic," "social distancing," and "telework." Because of the astonishing number of and speed with which foreign words and loanwords are introduced into and flow through Japanese society, it is extremely difficult for the average person to understand all of them, even superficially.

Although the number of business people who use or are exposed to English on a daily basis is quite low, scores on standardized tests such as the TOEIC Test are extremely important. According to a questionnaire conducted by the Institute for International Business Communication (2013), 41.7% of the companies surveyed answered that they sometimes use applicants' TOEIC scores as a reference when making a hiring decision and 27.6% responded that they do use it as a reference. The average score that companies wanted for new graduates was 565. Having a thorough understanding of loanwords as well as their semantic and pragmatic similarities and differences is important not just for the sake of getting a high score on a test, but also because it could affect whether language learners receive a job or not.

If the TOEIC scores of test takers in Japan were significantly higher or lower than other speakers of languages in which loanwords are not used in large numbers, it would indicate a positive or negative correlation between loanword usage in Japanese and overall English ability. However, because the TOEIC scores of Japanese test takers are not notably different from test takers from countries in which loanwords are not used nearly as much as in Japan, it suggests that loanwords are neither noticeably helpful, nor harmful to English language learners.

## VI . Conclusion

It is often said that a language dies when the last speaker of that language dies, but just like living humans are slowly dying, languages can also be in the process of dying. This can be said about the Japanese language. There is an abundance of loanwords that are used in the Japanese language that

are replacing their Japanese counterparts even when perfectly suitable equivalents exist. Languages, just like humans, are alive, and they are constantly changing, developing, and deteriorating. When the change is subtle, happening over an extended period of time, it becomes difficult for the current speakers of a language to realize how drastically their language has changed. However, when the changes occur radically over a short period of time, they are easier to recognize. Due to the sudden influx of foreign words and loanwords, Japanese is changing at a significant rate so the changes are axiomatic. The large amount of foreign words and loanwords in use in Japan makes it difficult for people to develop a deep understanding of all of the words being used.

In the past there had been proposals of changing the national language of Japan from Japanese to English. This, obviously, did not gain traction and was not accepted by the Japanese government, but currently because of the lack of legislation to prevent the use of foreign words and loanwords in the media, at schools, public places, and so on, it appears that there is a tacit acceptance by the government that it is acceptable if English replaces Japanese. Without some type of legislation to prohibit the use of foreign words and loanwords, Japanese words will continue to be replaced by English words and the Japanese language will no longer be recognizable.

One of the premises of successful communication is that both interlocutors understand the words being uttered by the other person. If for some reason the words are not understood, it will often result in a communication breakdown, which can lead to a variety of issues. The overuse of loanwords in Japanese society is causing communication problems in various situations across a broad range of age groups. Because of the significant number of loanwords in use in Japanese, the problems created by the inability for people to understand each other cannot be easily solved. It is important for people who disseminate information, such as journalists, newscasters, and government officials who use foreign words and loanwords to consider who their audience is, the problems that may arise as well as the consequences. Their actions can either contribute to the destruction of the Japanese language or help to save it.

There have been different groups that have been created in hopes of saving the Japanese language, but their efforts have had little success. Because of their lack of reach and overall positive public attitudes towards foreign word and loanword usage in society, they seem to be fighting a losing battle. Without some type of top-down government legislation, there is little hope that the Japanese language will survive in the future. It does not appear that the majority of the general public find the changes to the Japanese language undesirable, which is why the situation has escalated to where it has.

An extensive public survey comparing the intelligibility of a Japanese word and a foreign word or loanword should be conducted and then used to create a comprehensive list of words that are

permissible and not permissible to use. These words would then have to be referenced before making a speech or creating a TV program and so on in order to avoid using words that are not well understood by the general public. Without the creation of such a list, it is highly unlikely that the number of people complaining about their inability to comprehend a TV show will decrease. If such a list is not created, the use of foreign words and loanwords will be left to the discretion of the person, organization, news outlet, and so on that is releasing the information. It is often the news outlets that constantly overuse foreign words and loanwords and that echo the words used by various government officials.

In order for successful communication to occur, both interlocutors need to understand the words being used. As Bybee (2015) states, “Language is conventional. What this means is that it has to be used in pretty much the same way by speakers and listeners in order for it to be effective as communication” (p. 5). However, as shown by several public surveys, even loanwords that are frequently used in Japanese society are not well understood. If both speakers do not understand the words being used, it will result in a communication breakdown. Words are used to communicate and when those words are not understood, they do not serve a purpose. Because there are so many foreign words and loanwords in use in Japan, many are not well understood, and they are constantly competing for survival with Japanese words.

The government needs to conduct a public survey in order to determine which foreign words and loanwords are well understood by the majority of the population and which are not. After determining this they should prohibit the use of the foreign words in order to avoid communication problems and to further prevent the destruction of the Japanese language. However, because of the extensive amount of loanwords in use in Japanese society, such a large-scale, thorough survey is virtually impossible. Had the government acted faster, the situation would not have progressed as much as it has.

If the government fails to put a law in place that prohibits the use of foreign words in the news media, schools, and city and government offices that are not well understood, the current situation will continue to worsen until the Japanese language is flooded with even more unintelligible foreign words. The lack of legislation by the government demonstrates that it is underestimating the problem and until the problem is taken seriously and addressed, foreign words and loanwords will continue to replace Japanese words, resulting in the demise of the Japanese language.

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