

The English loan word *Pantsu* (pants) in Japanese:

A preliminary study of the influence of Americanization on Japanese loan words

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to show how loan words and loan-word-like words called *katakana-go* or *wasei-go* (Japanese words coined by modifying western words) has been influenced by Americanization in the Japanese language by focusing on an English loan word *pantsu* (pants). In this paper, the term “loan word” is mostly used as a cover term for western words and *katakana-go*. For the past several years, I have noticed that American English has been influencing not only Japanese culture but also the language. *Pantsu* is an example of this tendency. *Pantsu* used to mean only underpants in Japanese but nowadays it also means trousers.

Do people make a distinction between the new meaning and the old one? Does the traditional meaning refer to the identical entity as the new meaning? To answer these questions, I studied Japanese native speakers' use of the loan word, *pantsu*.

Semantic change is closely related to change in social structures. Therefore, before I focus on the specific word *pantsu*, I will first discuss the Japanese historical background of borrowing words and the linguistic tendencies in borrowing words.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BORROWING WORDS IN JAPAN

Language contact in Japan started at least a thousand years ago, when Buddhists and Chinese scholars came to the country in the ninth century. However, most of these words have become part of the native Japanese lexicon and may only be recognized as loan words by those with knowledge of Buddhism. Actually, in Japanese, “loan words” mainly stand for words borrowed from western countries (Yoshizawa & Ishiwata, 1979: iv).

From 1640 to 1853, Japan had a period of isolation called “*sakoku*” (national isolation) during which only Dutch traders were allowed to land on the island of Dejima in Nagasaki. Despite the enforced isolation, Dutch words were borrowed: *koppu* (glass) was one of them.

According to Stanlaw (1982: 169), English words started to replace Dutch and other European loan words after Commodore Perry's arrival. *Gurasu* (glass) started to be used around this period. Even today, *koppu* and *gurasu* are both used to refer to a glass: the former usually refers to a plain glass and the latter to a fancy glass such as a wine glass. But this clear

SAKIKO YONEDA

distinction is getting fuzzy in recent times, which indicates the language trend being discussed in this paper.

Curiosity about the newcomers and their culture instigated a Japanese interest in learning English. However, in the next period, the Taisho period (1912–1926), Dutch and Portuguese loan words were noticeably borrowed, using words from everyday topics like *rajio* (radio) and *takushii* (taxi) (Stanlaw 1982: 170).

After World War II, enormous numbers of English words were imported. Ten percent of the modern Japanese vocabulary is composed of loan words. 80.8% of the total western loan words were already English in 1964 according to Takashi (1990: 327) and Soga (1982: 10).

One of the main reasons that Japanese borrowed English words was because English had the value of modernity, sophistication, and internationalization. It is obvious in advertisements which have a more than necessary number of borrowed words. Let us look at the following example which is taken from Toyota's advertisement of children's car seats in a magazine, Car and Driver, Nov. 26, 1994 :

<u>Mama</u>	to	kodomo	no	<u>seehutiidoraiibu</u>	wo	<u>teema</u>
mother and children	of	safe driving	CASE MARKER	theme		
<u>ni</u>	<u>shita</u>	<u>tookushoo</u>	wo	<u>kaisai</u>	<u>shimasu</u>	
POSTPOSITION	made	talk show	CASE MARKER	hold	will	

gloss : We will hold a talk show on the theme of safe driving for mother and child.

We, instead, could say “haha (mama) to kodomo no anzen unten (safe driving) wo shudai (theme) ni shita kooshuu (talk show or lecture) wo kaisai shimasu.” However, this latter phrase sounds more rigid and makes it sound like a phrase on a brochure published by the government. So we can say that loan words make the utterances less direct in Japanese. At the same time, it is an important point that imported words tend to sound old-fashioned within a few years compared to Japanese native words. This fact indicates that loan words tend to be fads and change frequently.

The more Japanese people had contact with various countries, the more people started to think of English, especially American English, as an international language. Since America is the most powerful and influential country in the world, American English is more dominant than British English in Japan. Actually, when I started studying English in 1970's, I was told that British English was more prestigious. I soon realized, however, American English was the English I was more exposed to on TV, on the radio, and in magazines, etc.

This trend explains why some loan words from other languages are starting to be replaced or

even “corrected” by American English. Many current Japanese TV programs seem to be good evidence to support this view. Some programs like “*Kyosen-no Tsukaenai Eigo* (Kyosen’s program of useless English words),” “*Nyuusu Eigo Lesson* (News English from ABC)” on TV and “*Kaigai Ryoko-no tame-no One-point Lesson* (Mini Lesson on a Single Point for Overseas Tourists)” on the radio, point out the “incorrect” use of English loan words like *jumper* (a zip-up jacket), *gyangu* (gangster/s) and *hambaagu* (hamburger/s), etc. Those programs show how they cannot be used in the U.S., and how a person who incorrectly used a loan words was laughed at by Americans.

3. LINGUISTIC FEATURES SEEN IN LOAN WORDS IN JAPANESE

The number of loan words is still increasing in Japanese. Loan words used to be translated into Japanese by avoiding *katakana* (Japanese characters used to indicate mainly western loan words), but now the tendency is toward using *katakana* rather than translation. Why is this so? What important role do loan words play? What does this tendency tell us about today’s language use?

Yoshizawa and Ishiwata (1979, vii-viii) list five roles of loan words in Japanese (most of the examples below were taken from their research):

1. to take in new/foreign things, ideas, expressions like *body language* and *recycling*.
2. to indicate “newness” of things like *butikku* for *yoohinten* (boutique).
3. to express technical things like *mesu* for a surgical knife.
4. to avoid directness: *mataniti doresu* (maternity dresses) for *nimpufuku*.
5. to help foreign language study for people who use English for their work. (These days, more and more people must use English. And, for those people, borrowing foreign words just as they are is an extension of their everyday life.)

What is clear here is that English is prevailing in Japanese people’s lives more than ever. In the history of language use, such a phenomenon has never occurred, where people throughout Japan have been exposed to a foreign language to this extent.

Some linguistic features regarding loan words will be discussed here. When foreign words are borrowed into Japanese, there are always certain differences in the phones, morphs and meanings (Yoshizawa and Ishiwata 1979: v-vi). In terms of the phones, certain sounds which Japanese does not have are changed to the closest Japanese sounds: [r] and [l] become [ɾ]. Also, vowels are inserted between consonant clusters or added to a word-final consonant as in *miruku* (milk). At the same time, voiced consonants never occur after consonant geminates, so voiced consonants such as *d* as in *bed* and *g* in *bag* get devoiced and pronounced like *betto* and *bakku*.

In terms of the morphs, bound morphemes are likely to be cut off: *corned beef* becomes *koon biifu*, *sunglasses* becomes *sangurasu*. Some words are abbreviated by cutting some parts of a word like *infure* for *inflation*.

As for the meaning of words, Japanese tend to take in only one definition out of many that a word might have. For example, *smart* in English means *being sharp, impertinent, energetic, shrewd, fashionable* as an adjective; *to cause a sharp, superficial stinging pain, to suffer acutely*, or *to suffer or pay a heavy penalty* as an intransitive verb; and *sharp mental or physical pain or intelligence* as a noun (Costello, et al., 1993 : 1285), while Japanese *sumaato* indicates only the meaning of *slender and/or stylish*.

We must not ignore the fact that there are loan-word-like words that are written in *katakana*: Each element of the word is western, but the word as a whole does not make any sense in the original language. These types of words are called *wasei-go* (Japanese words coined by modifying/combining western words). Some examples are *ofisu redi* or *office lady* (female office workers), *poteto furai* or *potato fry* (fried potatoes), and *toreening pants* or *training pants* (sweat pants). It is obviously difficult for naive Japanese people to tell if they are “legitimate” English words or not, and whether those words will prove to be obstacles in foreign language learning. Instances of struggling to be clearly understood when using *katakana-go* can be a strong drive for Japanese people to use “correct” English words.

The social tendency of living a more westernized life, and the recent demand to use English in the work place has made Japanese people have to learn more English. According to Yoshizawa and Ishiwata (1979: xii), the words *piano* and *hammock* are not even translated into Japanese in dictionaries any more but are just defined using *katakana*. This indicates a trend of western goods and ideas becoming more and more well-known among the average population compared to past years when only specialists knew foreign words. In light of this growing trend, more and more loan/loan-word-like words are being used in Japanese today.

4. FRAMEWORKS OF “PANTSU (PANTS)” IN BRITISH ENGLISH, AMERICAN ENGLISH, AND JAPANESE

In borrowing words from other languages, Japanese incorporates only one meaning of a borrowed word which has various meanings in the original language, or uses the word only in specific situations, as mentioned in the previous section.

Pantsu is one of these examples. According to Miura (1979: 117), *pantsu* in Japanese usually means *underpants*. It replaced its non-loan equivalent, *sarumata*, which was only for men and sounds outdated. In the U.S., it primarily means *trousers*, but in Japanese *pants* alone usually means *underpants* for either sex and any age. *Trousers* is *zubon*, a misapplied loan

word from French *jupon*. (*Jupon* means an underskirt in French.)

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989: 153) describes the history of *pants* as follows:

a. orig. = Pantaloon; subsequently used for trousers, worn by either men or women.

Chiefly U.S. b. orig. colloquial and 'shoppy' for 'drawers'; now used for underpants, panties, or shorts worn as an outer garment : cf. hot pants.

(note : "pantaloon" originally meant "a. The Venetian character in Italian comedy, represented as a lean and foolish old man, wearing spectacles, pantaloons and slippers."

(OED 1989: 147))

Onion (1970: 1425), Coulson et al. (1962: 591), and Flexner et al. (1987: 1403) say *pants* means *men's underpants* in British English, and *trousers* in American English. So, from these assertions, it is assumed that *pantsu* came into Japanese through British English and now conflicts with the American English usage. However, Shinmura (1955, 1969, 1983, 1991) and Arakawa (1986) say that it was originally taken from the U.S. According to Shinmura (ibid.), *pantsu* means (1) *zubon* (trousers), (2) *rikujou kyoogi yoo no mijikai zubon* (shorts used for track and fields), and (3) *zuroosu* (drawers, underpants, panties). This indicates that *pants* meaning *trousers* has actually prevailed among Japanese from or even before 1950's. However, historically, the actual use of *pantsu* does not coincide with Shinmura's definition. Unfortunately, there is not space and time to do further investigation for this discrepancy.

Traditionally Japanese people did not use to wear underpants, which came in vogue with their term by westernization. It is assumed that Japanese people started to use *pantsu* to refer to *underpants* for any age and sex, whereas *pants* in British English meant *underpants* only for males. *Pantsu* has been used in compound words like *toreeningu pants* (sweat pants), *shooto pant* (shorts) and *pantsurukku* (the pants look). *Pantsu* alone has been a term for underwear, and it was not polite to use it alone to indicate underwear in public in Japan. However, some young people have started to say, for example, "*Anata sono pantsu ga niau janaino* (You look nice in those pants)." The young people's usage above is misleading for the people who never use *pantsu* alone to indicate *trousers*.

It appears that American culture is so attractive that even its language is influencing Japanese people's speech. Or, perhaps, because of the greater exposure to American English, people have started to use the American definition regardless of the confusion. It might cause the conflict with traditional use. Also, *pants* in American English is not a taboo, so from an international language point of view, people would not necessarily need to feel intimidated to use it in public.

This tendency to use *pantsu* to indicate *trousers* occurred only one or two decades ago, so it is considered that only a small portion of the population actually uses it. But at the same time, since those people might be the ones who will influence the future of the language, it seems worthy to investigate it.

The next chapter will discuss the preliminary research done to see what the actual use of the word *pantsu* is in Japan today.

5. SURVEY

Based on the discussion from the previous sections, the following can be surmised. (1) Because of the prestige of American English loan words and the tendency to correct wrong usage of any western loan word, *pantsu* will probably occur in people's speech, and be referred to as *trousers* by people of any age and either sex, as a sign of this trend. (2) There may be age differences in this use as people over sixty and under ten have not been exposed to many loan words, and thus they are not so susceptible to loan words. Japanese in their twenties and thirties, however, especially women, may use words with new meanings more often than people of other ages.

5.1 Materials

Three kinds of pictures were used for this research: (1) a man in trousers, (2) a woman in trousers, and (3) a child in trousers. The following is the direction given to the subjects (the original was written in Japanese):

This is to study how people are using loan words every day. It is not used to evaluate anything personal, so please feel free to write your actual use.

Please look at the pictures and choose either of the following words you use.

- (1) A man in the picture *pantsu* *zubon* other (give details)
- (2) A woman in the picture *pantsu* *zubon* other (give details)
- (3) A child in the picture *pantsu* *zubon* other (give details)

This research focused on the use of *pantsu* meaning *trousers*, which is expected to be the new trend. However, how is this new trend prevailed among people? Do old people use *pantsu* as well as young people? Are trousers called *pantsu* only in reference to adult fashion? To investigate these points, the three kinds of pictures (a man, a woman, and a child) were used.

5.2 Sample Subjects

The subjects for gathering the data are as follows: five fourth grade students in Tokyo (two nine- and ten-year-old boys and three nine- and ten-year-old girls); five female junior college students ages eighteen and nineteen; five senior citizens ages sixty-two to sixty-five (four males and one female).

5.3 Results and Discussion

The results were as follows shown in Table 1:

Table 1 shows that (1) no age group called children's trousers *pantsu*, (2) some young women used *pantsu* for men's trousers but not for any other age group, and (3) for women's

The English loan word *Pantsu* (pants) in Japanese

Table 1. Number of Answers of *Pantsu*

	children's trousers	male trousers	female trousers
elementary schoolchildren	0	0	0 (1)* ¹
junior college students	0	2	5
senior citizens	0	0	0 (3)* ²

note: *1 : *pantsurukku* (style of wearing pants) ; *2 : *pantaron* (pantaloon)

trousers, one subject (10-year-old female) answered *pantsu-rukku* (the pants look), and three senior citizens in their sixties answered *pantaron* (pantaloon), which used to be in fashion around the 1970's to refer to women's bell-bottom trousers. These are more traditional uses of the terms than *pantsu* but their answers indicate that women's fashion is considered to be more sophisticated. In other words, young women tend to use *pantsu* for either underwear or trousers for the adult gender, but not for children. This fact indicates that *pantsu*, meaning trousers, may be restricted to adult fashion in Japanese.

From the discussions in the previous sections and the above results, I made a table comparing the features of *pants* in three languages: British English, American English and

Table 2. Table of Comparing *Pants* in Three Languages

	British E.	American E.	Traditional JPN	Current JPN
male trousers	-	+	-	+
female trousers	-	+	-	+
children's trousers	-	+	-	-
male underwear	+	-	+	+
female underwear	-	-	+	+
children's underwear	-	-	+	+

note: "+" indicates that the items on the list are called *pants* / *pantsu*, and "-" indicates that they are not.

Japanese.

This table shows that traditional Japanese has been more like British English, and the current Japanese leans more towards American English.

There are two possibilities for use of *pantsu* in the future. (1) It will be lost like a fad word because it is too confusing for people to use the same word for underwear and trousers. (2) It will survive because it is the correct way of using it in American English. Another crucial problem with (2) is that not all Japanese are familiar enough with American English to keep using the "correct" meaning of the word. So, those who really do not know the original framework of this loan word may misanalyze it and misuse it, then in turn the incorrect usage may become popular. This has already happened frequently in the Japanese language when borrowing words from other languages.

SAKIKO YONEDA

This survey indicates that language may not change in all the generations at the same time, but in certain groups of ages with people who are more involved in a new culture. I chose the arbitrary word *pantsu* for this survey since such a word grasped a language phenomenon that shows the semantic shift of *pantsu*. It also clearly shows social change of "Americanization." It may be necessary to investigate further in the future using a wider range of words and a larger population of subjects for my survey.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at the shift of Japanese use of loan words in terms of history, social changes and linguistics. It pointed out the conflict between the traditional and current usage of *pantsu* in Japanese by comparing the meanings of British English and American English. The research using fifteen people ages nine to sixty-five showed an anticipated tendency of shift.

At this point, it is difficult to say whether the trend of using *pantsu* for *trousers* will survive as a "legitimate" loan word in Japanese. However, this kind of problem which already seems to exist with some loan word candidates like *baiku* /*bike* (bicycle and motorcycle) and *napukin* (table napkin/s and sanitary napkin/s), will probably occur more frequently in Japanese from now on because of the language and cultural contact, the change in Japanese people's life style, and most of all, because of internalization, namely "Americanization".

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