

# Expected Bilingualism in Monolingual Japanese Communicative Practices

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## Introduction

The history of linguistic borrowing from English into Japanese stretches back to at least the early seventeenth century, with the arrival of the British sailor William Adams into a port in the southern area of Japan (Daulton, 2008a; Kay, 1995; Stanlaw, 2004). Over the following four hundred years, the stock of English words borrowed into the Japanese lexicon has grown so large that they now account for around seven to ten percent of the everyday Japanese vocabulary (Irwin, 2011; Stanlaw, 2004). Even just a brief glance at the Japanese linguistic landscape reveals not only the quantity but also the variety of English words and phrases that have been etched into Japanese society; on the signs hanging in shop windows, on the t-shirts of people passing by, on the information boards in train stations, on the road markings along the streets (Backhaus, 2010).

The presence of tens of thousands of English words embedded into the Japanese language, with many occurring in the everyday workings of Japanese society, suggests that at the very least a rudimentary knowledge of English-derived vocabulary is a necessary part of successful Japanese communication. This is particularly so considering the fact that the borrowing from English is an ongoing process, with new English-derived words regularly entering Japanese society and many of them becoming encoded in the latest editions of dictionaries. This persistent borrowing from English happens on such an extensive scale that it is considered to be the largest factor involved in the present-day expansion of the Japanese lexicon (Daulton, 2008b). Against this backdrop, however, is the stark reality that the vast majority of Japanese citizens are monolinguals. Indeed, it has been stated that “the over-whelming majority of the inhabitants of Japan today, whatever their ethnicity and whatever their culture, have, to use Bloomfield’s (1933:56) definition of bilingualism, ‘native-like control’ over only one language: Japanese” (Irwin, 2011, p. 2).

This article discusses how the quantity, frequency, and integratedness of English-derived vocabulary in the Japanese language suggests that Japanese-speaking monolinguals are actually expected to have a certain degree of Japanese-English bilingual competence in order to achieve success in their Japanese communicative practices. It begins with an overview of the three main types of English witnessed throughout Japanese society, which are termed here (a) *copied* English, (b) *adapted* English, and (c) *constructed* English. It will be discussed how these three terms relate to the existing nomenclature in Japanese of (a) 英語外国語/eigogaikokugo, (b) 英語外来語/eigogairaigo, and (c) 和製英語/waseieigo. The positioning of these three varieties of English within the Japanese linguistic framework will be examined, with reference to an example taken from the Japanese linguistic landscape of the dynamic interaction of these forms of English. This will then be used to give claim to the idea that regular, everyday monolingual communicative practices within Japanese society are underpinned by a linguistic framework built upon the bilingual interaction of Japanese and English vocabulary.

### **The Types of English in Japan**

Without a specific linguistic analysis, it can appear that the borrowing of English vocabulary into Japanese has resulted in one large homogenous group of loanwords which can be easily traced back to their English language origins. The reality, however, is that centuries of primarily distant contact have resulted in words being borrowed through both the oral and written medium, with complex and often irregular types and amounts of modifications made to the words. This had led to the creation of three main types of English borrowings in Japanese. The first type I will call *copied* words. These are the English words and phrases that appear in Japan with no readily-identifiable adaptations having been made to them: they appear in their new Japanese home in the same form as in their original English one. One form of this copied English is the language inside English language learning textbooks used throughout the Japanese education system. This English is most commonly lifted directly from varieties such as American and British English, and is both studied and used in Japan primarily as a foreign language. Another form of copied English is seen in the linguistic landscape of Japan, where words seem to have been copied directly from English and pasted onto things such as signs, t-shirts, and advertising brochures. It is highly probable that these words are being used more as

design elements for visual effect than as words with well-defined semantic references; evidenced by the frequent appearance of offensive words, sexual terms, incorrect spellings, and incomprehensible messages in places like shops signs and the clothing worn by all generations. Figure 1 is an example of the naming of a clothing shop using copied English, where the semantic reference of the word ‘sperm’ was likely not intentionally selected to refer to the contents of the shop. This category of copied words is known in Japanese as 英語外国語 *eigogaikokugo*, which translates as English foreign words, and also relates to the German term *fremdwort* which is used in loanword studies to refer to words which have undergone minimal modifications from their original form (Onysko & Winter-Froemel, 2011, p. 1552).



**Figure 1. An example of copied English used on a clothing shop sign board in Japan**

Another major type of English vocabulary in Japanese is what I will call *adapted* English. This is the English words and phrases which have been borrowed into the internal workings of the Japanese language; in the form of English-derived words which have undergone any number of phonological, orthographical, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic adaptations to mold them into shape for their new home. In Japanese this adapted English is known by the term 英語外来語/*eigogairaigo* which translates as English words coming in from outside. Adapted English has become an

integral part of the syntactic make up of Japanese. Virtually any newspaper article, magazine feature, movie script, and everyday conversation in Japan will contain adapted English, whose foreign origins are often still very much transparent when written because of the use of the katakana script marking the words as belonging to the *gairaigo* lexical stratum.

The third major category of English in Japan is known in Japanese as 和製英語/*waseieigo*, translating as Japanese-constructed English. I will abbreviate this translation to *reconstructed* English. The meaning of this term is to imply that the word or phrase has been re-constructed when borrowed into Japanese. In this way, the word or phrase is strongly associated with its English origins, but will have been changed in a way that means it is not realized in that particular form back in the English language.

Whilst the above description of three major types of English in Japan appears to be straightforward, and it is indeed easy to find examples of each type throughout Japanese society, the reality is that they are better thought of as points along a continuum rather than as clear, well-defined categories. In many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether an English word appearing in the Latin alphabet is a copied word or adapted word. It may simply have been lifted from English, pasted into Japanese and actually be incomprehensible to most people in Japan. Or instead it may be a very common word even in Japanese and has just been written in the Latin alphabet for effect. The situation is also very fluid in that what in one context or for one person might be a copied word, may in another context or for another person be an adapted word. Whilst reconstructed English may appear easier to classify, it is difficult to decide on the criteria by which the classification is made. Sometimes form is considered the primary criteria whereby the word or phrase can be considered reconstructed English if the word is not seen to exist in that form in English. But even this raises questions of what varieties of English are used to check for the existence of the form, and what language resources and tools are used for the checking.

### **An Analysis of Types of English used in the Japanese Linguistic Landscape**

From this overview of the major types of English found throughout Japanese society, the following discussion uses a menu board outside a coffee shop as an example of the

way in which the various types of English interact with each other in the process of Japanese communicative practices. It is thereby an example of the type of Japanese-English bilingual expectations that are made of Japanese-speaking monolinguals.

Figure 2 shows a menu sign board from outside a coffee shop on the island of Miyajima in Hiroshima prefecture. In order for it to be of use in discussing the idea of the bilingual expectations made of monolingual speakers of Japanese, it first needs to be decided whether the sign is intended for Japanese speakers or English-speaking foreign visitors. The latter function of the sign board is probable because of the fact that Miyajima is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan for both domestic and international visitors. Furthermore, there appears to be a significant amount of English on the board written in the Latin alphabet which suggests that the board may be for the purpose of helping English speakers understand the food and drink available in the shop. But on closer inspection it becomes clear that for English speakers with no knowledge of Japanese scripts, the only information available to them is that it is a coffee shop, open from 9am till 6pm (7pm on Saturdays), with drinks that can be taken out, some things which are frozen, and some cake sets. A general idea could also be gained of some prices and sizes, and the assumption could be made that some drinks are available as either hot or cold options. But the English speaking visitor is left with little idea of what the actual specific options are, which would be one of the primary purposes of the menu.

Having established that the menu board is intended for Japanese speakers, who, as previously discussed, are considered to be monolingual speakers, it is linguistically interesting that the menu contains a large amount of English-derived vocabulary. Indeed, the vast majority of linguistic elements on the menu are English-derived words. This

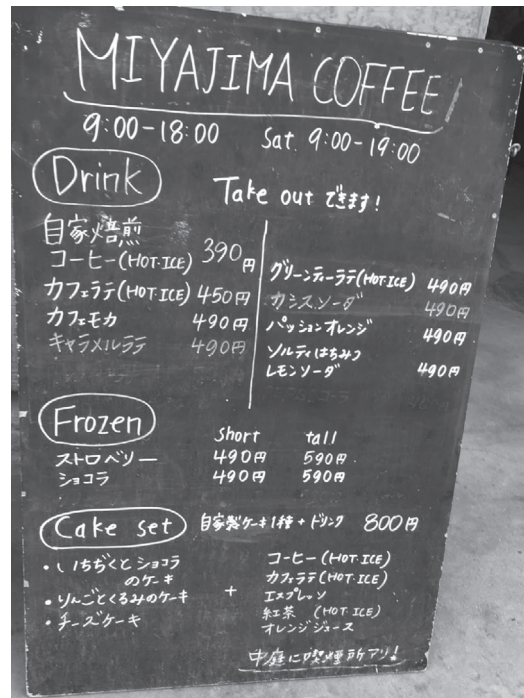


Figure 2. A shop menu board with mixed types of English

means that there is an expectation made on the part of the Japanese-speaking consumer of this sign that they can process the various types of English used. The discussion below describes some of these bilingual expectations which are considered from the point of view of a Japanese-speaking monolingual consumer of the sign.

## **Bilingual Expectations made of Monolingual Speakers of Japanese**

The title of the menu board, Miyajima Coffee, suggests that at least two bilingual expectations are being made. First of all is the expectation that the consumer of the sign can decode the Latin alphabet. This assumption is fair considering that studying the Latin alphabet is a standard part of English education in Japan. There is also an assumption that the consumer of the sign can semantically process the English word Coffee, which appears to be copied English. The gairaigo form in Japanese, コーヒー/*koohii* is similar but has been phonologically adapted, particularly due to the loanword's original arrival in Japan via the Dutch language. Admittedly, this loanword form does appear lower down on the menu meaning that even if the title word Coffee could not be processed, the overall type of shop could be understood from a closer analysis of the menu options. But it is fair to assume that the writer of the menu is expecting the Japanese-speaking consumer of the sign to be able to understand the denotations of the English word Coffee.

Looking at the words Drink, Frozen, Cake set, Short, Tall, Hot, and Ice, there is another expectation that Japanese-speaking people have a sufficient knowledge of the Latin alphabet in order to decode them. Then there is the added expectation that they have sufficient knowledge of the semantic references of these words in order to at least basically process the different categories of products in the shop. The most interesting aspect here is that the bilingual expectation is not being made externally to Japanese-speaking people's understanding of English language vocabulary (i.e. copied English), but internally to English-derived loanwords which are an integrated and common part of the Japanese lexicon (i.e. adapted English). The words Drink, Frozen, Cake set, Short, Tall, Hot, and Ice are all borrowings which are recorded in standard Japanese dictionaries. Indeed, the lack of the plural marker on words such as Drink and Cake set suggest that whilst they may appear to be copied English, they are better categorised as adapted English using the Latin alphabet simply for visual effect.

Looking in more detail at the words which have been written in katakana, it is clear that there is an expectation made on the part of the sign's consumer that they have a working knowledge of the foreign vocabulary used to describe various types and flavours of drinks. Whilst a few of these can be traced back to French origins, such as ショコラ/*shokola*, the large majority are English-derived, such as ジュース/*jyusu* (juice) and ソルティ/*soruti* (salty). As these words are being used to describe the exact details of the individual menu options, there is the expectation that the denotations of these words are readily understandable to the everyday Japanese speaker. For example, under the Frozen category is the option of ストロベリー/*sutoroberii* (strawberry) without any other description of the product. Therefore, for this option, the consumer of the sign needs to not only be able to process the Latin alphabet to decode the word of Frozen, and then understand the semantic referent of this term, but then needs to know what is referred to by the word ストロベリー.

## Conclusion

Whilst it is widely accepted that the majority of the Japanese population is monolingual, this surface appearance is actually underpinned by a very complex multilingual structure. At the deepest level, much of what is considered present-day Japanese vocabulary is actually derived from Chinese. However, this borrowing has such a long history that except for linguistic purposes, this Chinese vocabulary is generally treated as a regular part of the modern-day Japanese vocabulary, which uses the scripts of hiragana and kanji for its orthographic form. Built upon this layer of the Japanese lexicon is a modern-day bilingual interaction of Japanese and English vocabulary, where the English vocabulary still maintains its distinction from the rest of the Japanese lexicon through the regular use of the katakana script. The quantity of English vocabulary that has been borrowed, and its extensive integration into the Japanese syntactic structure, mean that the use of English vocabulary is now an everyday part of what it means to communicate in Japanese. In this way, it is clear that the monolingual speakers of Japanese have expectations put upon them even in their Japanese communicative strategies that they will not only be able to decode words written in the Latin alphabet, but that they will also be able to understand the semantic referents of words which have originally been borrowed from English.

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