On the origins of *gairaigo* bias: English learners' attitudes towards English-based loanwords in Japan

Keywords
loanwords; *gairaigo*; vocabulary acquisition

Although *gairaigo* is a resource for Japanese learners of English, attitudes in Japan towards English-based loanwords are ambivalent. This paper examined university freshmen's attitudes towards *gairaigo* through a questionnaire. Despite their ambivalence, participants generally felt that loanwords did not hinder their English studies. Yet their opinions were based on scant information, as teachers had seldom spoken of *gairaigo*, or had spoken of it only disparagingly.

「外来語」は日本人が英語を学ぶ際に情報源の1つとなっているが、日本における英語由来の外来語の捉え方には曖昧なところがある。本論は、大学1年生の外来語に対する捉え方をアンケート調査したものである。曖昧な部分があるにもかかわらず、アンケートの参加者が全般的に感じていたのは、外来語が英語学習の弊害にはなっていないということだった。しかしこれらの意見は、教える側がそれまでほとんど外来語のことを教えてこなかった、あるいは単に過小評価してきたため、十分ではない情報に基づいたものだった。

Frank E. Daulton
Ryukoku University

During a presentation on how English-based loanwords (LWs) in Japanese—known as *gairaigo*—can be used to teach English (see Rogers, 2010), a Japanese participant commented, "I have never heard such information before; I had no idea that *gairaigo* were helpful." That *gairaigo* LWs are *cognates*—L1 and L2 words similar in form (e.g., sound) and sometimes meaning (Carroll, 1992)—is recognized internationally (see Ringbom, 2007). Yet there remains in Japan an incongruous disdain for *gairaigo*; for simplicity, I will refer to it as "*gairaigo* bias." A subtle but striking example of *gairaigo* bias soon followed. Arguing that empirical findings are not always applicable to Japanese EFL, a Japanese Ph.D candidate had cited that Japanese has *no cognates*. When I challenged this assumption during her dissertation defense, she confessed being unaware of another perspective, which explained why her claim lacked any supporting evidence. This paper will briefly introduce English-based LW cognates in Japanese, clarify the concept of *gairaigo* bias, and posit some origins. Then it will present a study investigating learner attitudes towards *gairaigo* and their genesis.

English-based loanwords in Japan

Many Western words have been borrowed into Japanese and are known as *gairaigo*, the vast majority of which are from

English. Specialty dictionaries list from 20,000 to 50,000 *gairaigo* LWs (Olah, 2007). Indeed some 10 percent of the Japanese lexicon, as seen in dictionaries (see Park, 1987), newspapers (see Oshima, 2004), and daily conversation (see Honna, 1995) consists of *gairaigo*. Factors that encourage Japan's unparalleled English borrowing include: a high-tolerance for ad-hoc (see Park, 1987) and redundant borrowing (see Kay, 1995); the semantic and grammatical malleability of borrowed words (see Kay, 1995); and a dedicated script (see Honna, 1995).

Empirical studies consistently indicate that English-based LWs in Japanese assist various aspects of English learning. These include: aural recognition and pronunciation (Hashimoto, 1992); spelling (Hashimoto, 1993); listening comprehension (Brown and Williams, 1985); retention of spoken and written input (Kimura, 1989); and recognition and recall at especially advanced levels of vocabulary (Daulton, 1998). The Japanese strongly prefer LW cognates to non-cognates in their English production (see Daulton, 2007). Moreover, around half of the high-frequency word families of English (e.g., the headword *apply* and the derivation *application*) correspond to common *gairaigo* LWs (e.g., *apurikeeshon*), suggesting a "built-in lexicon" of valuable cognates (see Daulton, 1998, 2008).

Gairaigo bias

An aversion to *gairaigo* has been noted in both society (see Tomoda, 2005) and the classroom (see Uchiwa, 2007). Underlying it is the assumption that *gairaigo* LWs are destructive to the Japanese language and culture, a common theme of newspaper editorials (see Otake, 2007). This perspective contrasts the ubiquity and popularity of *gairaigo* in most areas of Japanese society, including daily communication.

In EFL academic discussion, the criticism of *gairaigo* relies upon descriptions of interlingual differences and transfer errors. For example, both Simon-Maeda (1995) and Sheperd (1996) catalog various *gairaigo* "pitfalls"; while Simon-Maeda advocates discussing LWs in class, Sheperd recommends shunning them. Anecdotal rather than empirical, these studies ignore how errors are often developmental and a benign result of facilitated production. A certain "giggle factor" is inherent in papers such as Smith (1974) *Ribbing Ingrish: Innovative Borrowing in Japanese*. While such one-sided and dismissive papers have not appeared recently, more subtle and destructive manifestations of *gairaigo* bias potentially include the topic being held in contempt by editorial advisory boards. Meanwhile, EFL educators in Japan typically believe that *gairaigo* hinders English acquisition. Many or most Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) avoid *gairaigo* in the classroom (see Uchiwa, 2007), and when mentioning it, emphasize its pedagogical dangers.

What is the origin of gairaigo *bias?*

There is little research to explain Japan's jaundiced view of *gairaigo* in regards to EFL. In general, cognates can produce ludicrous or otherwise memorable errors that assume an exaggerated importance in teachers' and learners' minds (Ringbom, 2007). Therefore the dangers of *false friends* (or *faux amis*)—such as *konsento* for an electrical outlet in Japanese—should not be overemphasized, since helpful cognates (e.g., *takushii* and taxi) usually outnumber deceptive ones (see Daulton, 2010).

Regarding *gairaigo* bias, an important factor may be a vocal minority's opposition to the flood of English following the Pacific War. Few languages have absorbed as many LWs as Japanese (see Miller, 1967). Yet because *gairaigo* is written in the sound-based *katakana* script rather than meaning-based Chinese *kanji*, *gairaigo* can be opaque. And LWs such as *kisu* (kiss) can displace native equivalents (e.g., *seppun*), leading some academics to fear Japan's cultural decay. Such social angst regarding foreignisms has likely entered the language classroom. Another cause may be that the *katakana* script is used not only for authentic LWs but anything foreign-sounding. For instance, *katakana* is also used for innovative compounds, such as *kii horudaa* (key chain), and English-sounding product names such as *delica*, which are *not* loanwords, per se. The public and academia typically fail to distinguish among foreignisms written in *katakana*, classifying and condemning both authentic borrowings and pseudo-English alike as *gairaigo*.

Study: Learner attitudes towards *gairaigo* and their origins

English-based LWs in Japanese constitute a resource for English learners. However, the efficacy of *gairaigo* as cognates is likely affected by how learners perceive them. While it has been observed that JTEs are negatively disposed towards *gairaigo* (see Uchiwa, 2007), Olah (2007) found Japanese university students favorably disposed towards discussing LWs in class. The present study will clarify how freshman university students regard *gairaigo*, and the sources of their perspectives.

Participants

The participants were 113 freshmen at a large, medium-level Japanese university. Their responses would reflect their EFL experiences in junior and senior high school, and university students are of much pedagogical interest. None were English majors, but represented three faculties: Business, Economics, and Law. All had scored relatively well on the English placement test.

Instrument and procedure

The questionnaire was presented, in Japanese, during the first class. Its purpose was explained in a subsequent class. A five-point Likert scale was used for the first nine of 11 questions. Given the Japanese cultural tendency to prefer neutral, non-committal answers (Brown, 2000), in the analysis, the neutral "three" answers were dealt with differently than the responses that reflected a clear opinion—"one" or "two" (strong and mild disagreement) and "four" or "five" (mild and strong agreement). Questions 10 and 11 were multiple-choice.

Results and analysis

Following is a summary of each question's responses with an analysis. For the first nine questions, the number of responses for each answer choice is totaled, with the neutral "three" choice in bold. Below it, the data for agreement versus disagreement—excluding neutral response—is displayed in bold in brackets.

I think there are too many gairaigo words. There was no dominant viewpoint regarding the number of *gairaigo* LWs in Japanese.

Table 1. Responses to " … too many *gairaigo* words"

① 3	② 17	③ **57**	④ 31	⑤ 5
<20 vs. 36>				

While fewer participants disagreed with this statement than agreed (n=20 vs. n=36), the number of neutral "three" responses (n=57) was the highest among all questions, indicating considerable ambivalence.

I use lots of gairaigo. Most participants feel they use many LWs.

Table 2. Responses to " I use lots of *gairaigo*"

① 1	② 8	③ **23**	④ 64	⑤ 17
<9 vs. 81>				

Most participants agreed (n=81), with relatively few neutral responses. Indeed, the Japanese between the ages of 18 and 29 have the most affinity with *gairaigo* (Loveday, 1996), and the youth are among its heaviest users and innovators (Uchimoto, 1994).

Gairaigo is hard to understand. Also, most participants did not feel difficulty in understanding LWs.

Table 3. Responses to "*Gairaigo* is hard to understand"

① 12	② 44	③ **48**	④ 8	⑤ 1
<56 vs. 9>				

Most either disagreed that *gairaigo* LWs are difficult to understand (n=56) or had no opinion (n=48). That the youth have the best ability to comprehend *gairaigo* has been previously noted (e.g., Shibatani, 1990).

In learning English, gairaigo is an obstacle. Participants tended to be ambivalent or disagree that *gairaigo* is an impediment to English learning.

Table 4. Responses to "… *Gairaigo* is an obstacle"

① 12	② 32	③ **45**	④ 18	⑤ 6
<44 vs. 24>				

Twice as many participants disagreed with the statement than agreed (n=44 vs. n=24), with many non-committal responses (n=45). These judgments are likely subjective and not deeply rooted, for as we will see, *gairaigo* is not often discussed in class. For the following two questions, as responses regarding junior high (JH) and senior high (SH) teachers were virtually identical, they are presented together.

My junior high/senior high school teachers often mentioned gairaigo. Most participants reported that their teachers had avoided mention of *gairaigo*.

Table 5. Responses to "My JH teachers often ..."

① 28	② 44	③ **28**	④ 12	⑤ 1
<72 vs. 13>				

Table 6. Responses to "My SH teachers often ..."

① 26	② 48	③ **28**	④ 10	⑤ 1
<74 vs. 11>				

Participants largely disagreed with the statement regarding both JH (72 vs. 13) and SH (74 vs. 11), supporting Uchiwa (2007).

My junior high/senior high school teachers thought gairaigo helped us learn English. When and if teachers had mentioned *gairaigo*, they had focused on its negative aspects in regards to EFL.

Table 7. Responses to "My JH teachers thought gairaigo helped ..."

① 33	② 33	③ **41**	④ 5	⑤ 1
<66 vs. 6>				

Table 8. Responses to "My SH teachers thought *gairaigo* helped …"

① 31	② 38	③ **38**	④ 6	⑤ 0
<69 vs. 6>				

Most participants disagreed with the statements for JH (66 vs. 6) and HS (69 vs. 6). Compared with the responses regarding teachers' mentioning *gairaigo*, disagreement weakened slightly while neutral responses increased (n= 41; n=38). This emphasized participants not understanding their teachers' opinion of *gairaigo*—another indication of its not being discussed in class.

I'd like to hear more about gairaigo. Most participants were amenable to learning more about *gairaigo*, supporting Olah (2007).

Table 9. Responses to "I'd like to hear more about *gairaigo*"

① 5	② 10	③ **36**	④ 47	⑤ 15
<15 vs. 62>				

Far fewer participants disagreed with the statement than agreed (15 vs. 62). The numerous neutral responses (n=36) may reflect participants' not understanding the relevancy of *gairaigo* to their English studies.

What is the biggest weakness of gairaigo? For this question, participants were shown four possible weaknesses of *gairaigo* as cognates and instructed to choose one. Responses indicated that "pronunciation" was perceived to be LWs' biggest weakness, followed by "meaning".

Table 10. Choices and responses to "What's the biggest weakness … ?"

① meaning – 37
② pronunciation – 69
③ grammar – 5
④ other – 2

Most participants (n=69) chose "pronunciation", Indeed, pronunciation strongly affects both cognate comprehension and recognition (e.g., Daulton, 2008). Most other participants chose "meaning" (n=37). However, there is no preponderance of false friends as participants may believe. Rather, a common problem is *gairaigo* LWs having but one meaning (e.g., *dairekutaa* as in 'movie director') as opposed to the polysemy of English words (e.g., a company director; see Daulton, 2008) .

What are the origins of your attitudes towards gairaigo? Participants selected as many of the nine choices as they wished. Regarding the origins of their attitudes towards *gairaigo*, participants indicated particularly: the mass media, their own conclusions, and the people around them.

Table 11. Choices and responses to "What are the origins … ?"

① family – 15
② junior high teachers – 15
③ junior high classmates – 4
④ high school teachers – 16
⑤ high school classmates – 8
⑥ cram school teachers – 26
⑦ mass media – 63
⑧ people around me – 41
⑨ own conclusion – 48

"Mass media" (n=63) attracted the most responses. Japan's highly developed mass media is influential, and the use of poorly understood *gairaigo* (e.g., nonce borrowings) is common in advertising (see Loveday, 1996) and news reporting (see Daulton, 2004). Indeed this unconstrained use of *gairaigo* may skew individuals against it. The second most common response was each participant's "own conclusion" (n=48). This can be interpreted to mean not participants forming opinions in isolation, but synthesizing their experiences and the opinions of others. Revealingly, most participants who circled this response circled other responses. Third was "people around me" (n=41). This vague answer choice likely elicited the gestalt of "family" (n=15), and junior and senior high "classmates" (n=4; n=8) and "teachers" (n=15; n=16). That few participants ascribed their attitudes specifically to junior or senior high also supports that *gairaigo* is seldom mentioned in an educational context (Uchiwa, 2007). Meanwhile the relative popularity of the "cram school" answer (n=26) may indicate that these teachers, focused on exam preparation, are proactively (and mistakenly) warning their students away from *gairaigo*.

Conclusions and limitations

The results indicated that although university freshman are ambivalent, they generally do not suffer from a *gairaigo* bias. Yet Japanese learners opinions about English-based LWs are partially a product of one-sided or inadequate information, as teachers have spoken disparagingly of them, if at all. Despite this, learners grasp that pronunciation discrepancies are the major weakness of *gairaigo* as cognates. This study could not determine whether English proficiency affects attitudes towards *gairaigo* although it has been noticed that cognate recognition skills correlate to higher English proficiency (Van Benthuysen, 2004). And it did not distinguish between JTEs and native-speaking English teachers (e.g., ALTs). The seeming contradictions involved in certain answering patterns, for which this study offered likely explanations, should be clarified by follow-up interviews of learners and teachers. By understanding Japanese EFL learners' attitudes towards English-based LWs in Japanese—and the sources of these attitudes—learners and teachers can be encouraged to explore the *gairaigo* resource rather than fear it.

References

Brown, J. B., & Williams, C. J. (1985). Gairaigo: A latent English vocabulary base? *Tohoku Gakuin University Review: Essays and Studies in English Eibungaku 76*, 129-146.

Brown, J. D. (1990). What issues affect Likert-scale questionnaire formats? *SHIKEN: JALT Testing and Evaluation SIG Newsletter, 4*(1), 18-21. Retrieved from <jalt.org/test/bro_7.htm>.

Carroll, S. E. (1992). On cognates. *Second Language Research 8*(2), 93-119.

Daulton, F. E. (1998). Japanese loanword cognates and the acquisition of English vocabulary. *The Language Teacher, 20*(1), 17-25.

Daulton, F. E. (2004). The comprehension of English loanwords in the Japanese media. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 25*(5), 285-296.

Daulton, F. E. (2007). Japanese learners' built-in lexicon of English and its effect on L2 production. *The Language Teacher, 31*(9), 15-18.

Daulton, F. E. (2008). *Japan's built-in lexicon of English-based loanwords*. Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

Daulton, F. E. (2010). High-frequency English-based loanword cognates for EFL in Japan. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 20*, 65-80.

Hashimoto, C. (1993). *The influence of English loanwords on Japanese natives' spelling accuracy of the English model words* (Unpublished masters thesis). Brigham Young University, Department of Linguistics, Provo, Utah.

Hashimoto, R. (1992). *English loanword interference for Japanese students of English* (Unpublished masters thesis). Mankato State University, Mankato, Minn.

Honna, N. (1995). English in Japanese society: Language within language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 16*(1), 45-61.

Kay, G. (1995). English loanwords in Japanese. *World Englishes, 14*(1), 67-76.

Kimura, M. (1989). *The effect of Japanese loanwords on the acquisition of the correct range of meanings of English words* (Unpublished masters thesis). Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Loveday, L. J. (1996). *Language contact in Japan*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, R. (1967). *The Japanese language*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company.

Olah, B. (2007). English loanwords in Japanese: Effects, attitudes and usage as a means of improving spoken English ability. *Bunkyo Gakuin Daigaku Ningen-gakubu Kenkyuu Kiyo, 9*(1), 177-188.

Oshima, K. (2004). The movement of *gairaigo* usage: The case of the Asahi newspaper from 1952 to 1997. *Bunkyo Gakuin Daigaku Gaikokugo Gakubu Bunkyo Gakuin Daigaku Tankidaigaku Kiyo, 3*, 91-102.

Otake, T. (2007, September 23). Japanese: A language in a state of flux–'Torrential' import of foreign words threatens the basis of communication. *The Japan Times*. Retrieved from <search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20070923x1.html>.

Park, W. (1987). *Western loan-words in Japanese*. Department of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University, Stockholm.

Ringbom, H. (2007). *Cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Rogers, J. (2010). Applications, training, and strategies regarding loanwords for Japanese students of English. *Temple University Journal, 29*, 95-107.

Sheperd, J. (1996). Loanwords: A pitfall for all students. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Retrieved from <iteslj.org/Articles/Shepherd-Loanwords.html>.

Shibatani, M. (1990). *The Languages of Japan*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Simon-Maeda, A. (1995). Language awareness: Use/misuse of loan-words in the English language in Japan. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Retrieved from <iteslj.org/Articles/Maeda-Loanwords.html>.

Smith, D. (1974). Ribbing Ingrish: Innovative borrowing in Japanese. *American Speech: A Quarterly of Linguistic Usage, 49*(3/4), 185-196.

Tomoda, T. (2005). Change in script usage in Japanese: A longitudinal study of Japanese government white papers on labor. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*. Retrieved from <japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2005/Tomoda.html>.

Uchimoto, H. (1994). *Outline history of the Japanese language 1: Phonology, orthography, and changes in grammar*. Tokyo: Heinle.

Uchiwa, E. (2007). Oral and written identification of L2 loanword cognates by Japanese learners of English. *The Language Teacher, 31*(9), 19-22.

Van Benthuysen, R. V. (2004). Japanese EFL students' awareness of English loanword origins. *Bunkyo Gakuin Daigaku Gaikokugo Gakubu Bunkyo Gakuin Daigaku Tankidaigaku Kiyo 4*, 169-174.

Frank E. Daulton is a professor at Ryukoku University. His interests include language transfer and vocabulary acquisition. In 2004, he completed his doctorate under the tutelage of Paul Nation. He is the author of the book *Japan's Built-in Lexicon of English* (2008, Multilingual Matters).