

How New Words Enter into a Language

David ELMES*

Abstract

As societies evolve with their people, so true is with language. Languages continue to expand in use and in content, outgrowing some words while others are acquired or coined for their applicability or purpose. These new additions to lexicons enter in various forms: borrowed, compounded, blended, back formed, clipped, converted, coined, created from acronyms, or derived through the attachment or inclusion of various bits and pieces – a list that somewhat resembles the *what's what* of the local salon and, not surprisingly, with a range of creativity not far from the flexibility of a hairstyle! English includes a huge number of loanwords from languages ranging from Arabic (*alcohol*) to Zulu (*impala*), with Thomas Finkenstaedt and Dieter Wolff (1973) estimating that over 80% of the English language to be comprised of French and Norman (28.3%), Latin (28.24%), and Germanic languages (25%). The Japanese language, a language highlighted by a separate alphabet primarily used to transcribe loanwords, borrowing from languages has long been commonplace with thousands of English words in use, from technical vocabulary to sports terms and to advertising jargon. (Fromkin et al, 2000, p. 458) Moreover, with another of its alphabets holding foundations in the characters of Chinese, each character often including multiple and various pronunciations, the language also allows for combinations of characters and words and a coexisting flexibility of meaning. Using the Japanese and English languages as models for reference, this paper explores the various ways in which words come to be part of a language.

KEY WORDS : language, loanword, compound, back formation, derivation

When a new word is acquired by a speaker, it is not 'gradually' acquired, although full appreciation for all of its possible uses may come slowly.

(Fromkin, 2000)

For languages sharing similar pronunciation and alphabet, some are borrowed from other languages just as they are, while others take on altogether new forms, transcribed phonetically or fashioned in the recipient's pronunciation or usage. The latter is largely the case with Japanese. With the internationalization of Japan and the Japanese language, Japanese learners have encountered borrowed words as part of first language acquisition for many years. Historically and linguistically, Japan has been in

contact with the Portuguese and the Dutch much longer than the English, and therefore has borrowed a large number of words beyond that of English. Tracing the etymology of these borrowed words is often straightforward, though questions do arise as to whom they were borrowed from. For etymologists, the origins in Japanese of borrowed words like 'button' and 'tobacco' (claimed to be borrowed from the Portuguese), and 'beer' and 'coffee' (noted to be borrowed from the Dutch), is not as easy, as often the words have also been previously borrowed and in use in more than one language.

JOEY: I can't believe you. You told me it was a nubbin.

* 鹿屋体育大学国際交流センター National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya
International Exchange and Language Education Center

ROSS: *Joey, what did you think a nubbin was?*

JOEY: *I don't know, you see somethin', you hear a word, I thought that's what it was.*

(Friend's Café, 2009)

As simplistic as the above example of someone seeing and hearing something for the first time, or on a larger scale in the form of something evolutionary or revolutionary, new words are most often alluring for one reason or another. The latest technologies and cultural offerings similarly present attractive packaging for continual changes in need and their accompanying vocabulary. Consider the introduction of WiFi to the world of technology or, better yet, curling to the Olympics. In Japan, the Nagano Olympic Games brought with them a cute and successful Japanese women's curling team, an inevitable bandwagon, and a wagonload of new curling terminology. For Japan, a largely non-curling nation, but a nation that, nevertheless, supports wholeheartedly the efforts by its people in any sporting arena, the introduction of curling to the Olympics inserted into the language and everyday dialogue of the masses new terminology which could be heard from Hokkaido to Okinawa. In these cases, as noted by Fromkin et al. (2000, p. 477), the new words are not so mysterious in their introduction as they generally arrive to serve a purpose. WiFi is now a term inseparable from such things as personal computers, video games, and smart phones, all of which comprise the hotbed of our modern electronic lives. In the case of curling and the introduction of other sports to the world, the purpose is also quite obvious and offers a somewhat easy and quick path to changes in even the most resilient of languages.

... *If you hear someone complain problems with the project have **snowballed**, the final term can be noted as an example of 'compounding', whereby **snow** and **ball***

*have been combined to form the noun **snowball**, which has undergone the 'conversion' to be used as a verb."* (p. 56. Yule)

Compounding, is evident in everyday use with words like *hanabi* ([hana] meaning 'flower' and [bi]* meaning 'fire'; together forming the English word fireworks) and *asagohan*, *hirugohan* and *bangohan* ([asa] meaning 'morning', [hiru] 'noon' and [ban] meaning 'evening' compounded together with [goohan] meaning 'boiled rice' or 'meal' forming the meaning of 'the three meals'). It is also observable in daily use in newspapers. For many native Japanese speakers, newspapers, although understandable through character connotation, present an interesting challenge as journalists often combine characters to create words which uniquely or *efficiently* represent their idea or the situation, making the actual reading of the words sometimes quite difficult. In a compound (in English), the first word is usually stressed (produced somewhat louder and usually higher in pitch)... however in Japanese, the stress appears to depend on the speaker and the weight to which they put on the reading of the characters. (p. 81. Fromkin et al)

Words like smog, because, goodbye, o'clock have gotten such wide acceptance that we cannot know about their blending. This is the living nature of English language. (Share and Smile, 2009)

Another method in which new words enter a language, blending, involves the merging of two words. Although similar to that of a compound, unlike a compound, parts of the word or words are deleted, to form one new word that shares the meaning of both. In English we can see this with words like *brunch* ('breakfast' + 'lunch'), *motel* ('motor' + 'hotel')

and edutainment (a recently evolving word related to Japanese English conversation teaching, combining ‘education’ and ‘entertainment’). Due to the consonant–vowel or singular vowel syllabic structure of the Japanese language, blending is not overly apparent in the language but instead takes more the form of compounding, though there are words like *pasokon* (personal + computer) and *jūipan* (jeans + pants), and even karaoke, a combination of the Japanese *kara* (empty) and the English orchestra, that have even ping–ponged back into the English language.

As mentioned, words are quite often borrowed in response to a need. In Japan, words like soccer are often originally borrowed in noun form and then combined with *suru* [suru] or *yaru* [jaru] (*yaru* being the more informal form of the two) to create a verb form. In Japanese, the rough equivalent of the English word ‘do’ is seen in two verbs, *suru* and *yaru*. These can be attached to borrowed words like ‘get’ (pronounced [getou] with the [t] pronounced with the tongue stopped briefly against the alveolar ridge) and ‘soccer’ (pronounced [saka] with the [k] being a prolonged velar stop) to create verbs.

Such *suru* and *yaru* examples of noun–to–verb transformations, or back–formation, are abundant in Japanese, almost to the point that any word in any part of speech can be picked up and changed to formulate verbs in tense and function. Back–formation involves a word adapting a new part of speech such as in the cases of ‘soccer’ and ‘get’ which have changed from a noun to a verb and a verb to a noun respectively. The Japanese suffixes *-tekina* [teɾkina] and *-tekini* [teɾkini] are also responsible for changing many nouns to adjectives and adverbs with their suffixing to a noun. With the addition of these two suffixes, Japanese words like *jikan* [dʒikan] (‘time’)

and *okane* [oukaneɾ] (‘money’), etymologically nouns, have acquired the ability to be modified into adjectives and adverbs. Recently, these changes have become quite commonplace in Japan, expanding to include nouns previously left unchanged.

As with back–formation, clipping is most apparent with borrowed words in Japanese. Clipping refers to multisyllable words being shortened and the newly abbreviated word becoming a lexicalised item. In many cases the words become unrecognizable to even native speakers of the language of origin. The syllabic structure of the Japanese language is partially to blame for any radical changes to borrowed words, but the ease of pronunciation the shortened form provides also lends support to change. Two examples of the clipping of borrowed words in Japanese can be seen with the English words ‘convenience store’ which has gone from (albeit variations all still presently acceptable and understandable) [koonbinieɾnsu sutoo:ə] → [koonbini:] → [koonbi], and with spaghetti, which is now sometimes referred to as [supə].

Previously, the verb attachments *suru* and *yaru*, along with *~tekina* and *~tekini* which transform nouns into adjectives and adverbs were outlined respectively. With the latter, *~tekina* and *~tekini* are attached directly to nouns, changing the word itself unlike *suru* and *yaru* which do not effect the word but do change the part of speech. With the same feelings that ‘Beer me’ (‘Give/get me a beer.’) and subsequent verb tense formations like ‘beered’ (i.e. ‘Have you *given him a beer* (beered him) yet?’) bring, so too have *suru* and *yaru* evolved to encompass a similar function as ‘–ed’ to convert words to new parts of speech. Conversion is a change in the function of the word without any change in the word itself such as [koompiuta:] *suru/yaru* (use or do a computer). This very common process is also

referred to as ‘category change’ and ‘functional shift’.
(p. 54. Yule)

Coinage, the process of everyday words being formed from names, is also evident in Japan. Coined words such as Coke (used in Canada to mean the equivalent of *beverage*) and Walkman (referring to any portable ‘pocket-sized’ cassette recorder with headphones, have also been borrowed into Japanese from a number of languages. Although Walkman and Coke do not represent all portable stereos or drinks, the borrowed names Corn Flakes, Band Aid and Saran Wrap are all used in Japan as standard names for their respective products. The Japanese product *Electon*, an electric organ made by Yamaha in Japan, is also used as a generic name for the electric organ in Japan. This ability of a word to enter a language through this process is generally dependent on that product’s history, its share of its respective market and the people’s familiarity with the product.

New words are also formed from phrases which are difficult to pronounce or too lengthy to remember. These phrases are reduced using the initial letters to form easy to remember words. In English, scuba (‘self contained underwater breathing apparatus’), laser (‘light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation’), and numerous international organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI, are in everyday use; so much so that many people have forgotten what some of these acronyms actually stand for. The most obvious use of acronyms in contemporary Japanese has been a result of the computer with its RAM, OS, WiFi and numerous other terminology which have been reduced to acronyms so even computer-illiterate people are able to produce these words without panicking upon hearing a salesperson’s advice or setting their eyes

upon the page one of the manual. Sports leagues and terminology such as the NBA (National Basketball Association), the PGA (Professional Golfers’ Association) and the NFL (the National Football League) are also commonly found in the daily newspapers and are rarely written in their full form.

The versatility and power of English is evident in its prefixes, suffixes and even infixes to create unique and understandable words. This creative process is known as derivation, and it is accomplished through the use of numerous small ‘bits’ of the English language which are not usually given separate listings in dictionaries. Examples of these small ‘bits’, called affixes, are the additions like un-, mis-, pre-, -ful, -less, -ish, -ism, and -ness. (p. 54 Yule) In Japanese, along with the previously mentioned *~tekina* and *~tekini*, there are also affixes to equal most of the examples given by Yule. (Figure 1)

Figure 1

English Affix	Japanese equivalent
un-	fu [hu]
mis-	hi [hi]
pre-	pure[purei]
-ful	-tekina [teikina]
-less	<i>no suffix</i>
-ish	[teikina] / -poi [o]
-ism	- shugi [ʃugi]
-al	-teki[teiki]
-ness	-sa [sa]

As every child will or has discovered, these small ‘bits’, or ‘bound morphemes’, allow speakers the power to create unique yet understandable utterances. For the most part, correct usage is taught through trial and error in relation to the

success or failure of the intended meaning. English is also capable of forming words through infixes, unlike Japanese for the most part, although depending on how one would linguistically label the flexibility of the order of the Chinese characters, Japanese may also be considered to have the ability to create words through this process. Infixes are word segments that appear in the middle of a word as opposed to the beginning and the end like prefixes and suffixes. In English, until recently, the flexibility of the infamous four letter word beginning with ‘F’ has given it the strength to be probably the language’s most common infix. Words like *misunderstanding*, *delicious*, and *unbelievable* can easily (and understandably) be altered to become the more emphatic words of *misf^{***}ing- understanding*, *def^{***}ing- licious*, and *unf^{***}ing-believable*. Due to its generality of meaning, this infix is no longer considered by many to be the *evilly* profane word of the past, with the Canadian Press (2005) even entering the word in its 40th anniversary edition handbook, The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling.

Languages borrow, compound, blend and apply several other processes to expand their lexicon. To view each of these processes as independent of the others or finite is a great underestimation of the power and flexibility of language. As a result of this power and flexibility, it is sometimes the case that particular words are a product of more than one of these processes. “For example the term *deli* seems to have become a common American English expression via a process of first ‘borrowing’ delicatessen (from German) then ‘clipping’ that borrowed form.” (p. 56. Yule) Whatever the reason, whether it be need or simple originality, languages will continue to apply the process or processes needed to help them evolve and progress in response to the world around them.

References

- CBC.ca (2005) The Canadian Press: Caps and Spelling. Canada: The Canadian Press. Retrieved from: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2005/08/14/CP_manual_adds_four-letter_expletive20050815.html on July 22, 2011.
- Ellis, R. (1994) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Melbourne: Oxford.
- Finkenstaedt, T. and Wolff, D. (1973) *Ordered profusion; studies in dictionaries and the English lexicon*. Heidelberg: C. Winter.
- Friend’s Café (2009) The one with Phoebe’s husband. Retrieved from <http://www.friendscafe.org/scripts/s2/204.php> on June 30, 2011.
- Fromkin, V., Blair, D., & Collins, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Language* (4th ed.). Marrickville, NSW: Harcourt.
- Share and Smile (2009) Portmanteau or blending in English. Retrieved from <http://thatlovedflower.blogspot.com/2009/04/portmanteau-or-blending-in-english.html> on July 31, 2011.
- Swan, M and Smith, B. (Eds.). (1993) *A teacher’s guide to interference and other problems*. Great Britain: Cambridge.
- Yule, G. (1993). *The Study of Language: An introduction*. Great Britain: Cambridge.

新語はいかにして成立するか

デイビット・エルメス*

要 約

社会は人々と共に進化し、言語もまた進化する。諸言語はその使用と内容において拡大を続けており、進化につれて廃れる語がある一方で、適用可能性や目的に応じて獲得されたり、造語として作り出されたりする語もある。このような、新たに語彙に加わる言葉は、多種多様な形で成立する。借用語、合成語、混成語、逆生語、短縮語、品詞転換による語、新造語、頭字語などがそうである。あるいは、さまざまな要素の付加又は包含により派生する語もある。「借りる」「合わせる」「混ぜる」「切る」などと、何やら筆者の地元の美容院のメニューのようであるが、当然のことながら新語の形成過程は非常に創造的であり、その自在さは、まさにヘアスタイルのそれに近いのである。英語には莫大な数の借用語が含まれており、それぞれがアラビア語 (alcohol) からズルー語 (impala) まで、多様な言語に由来している。Thomas Finkenstaedt と Dieter Wolff (1973) は、英語の80%以上はフランス語およびノルマン語 (28.3%)、ラテン語 (28.24%)、ゲルマン語 (25%) で構成されていると推計している。日本語には、主に借用語の表記に用いられる種類の文字があり、これが大きな特徴となっている。日本語における他言語からの借用は、長年にわたってごく一般的に行われ、現在、日本語として使われている英語は、技術用語からスポーツ用語、広告業界用語まで、数千に及ぶという (Fromkin 他 2000, p. 458)。さらに、日本語においては中国語をもとにした文字も使用されており (この文字はそれぞれ複数の異なる発音をもつことが多い)、異なる文字や語の組み合わせが可能となっている。また同時に、言葉の意味の面でも柔軟性がもたらされている。本稿では、日本語と英語をモデルとして参照しながら、ある言語において新語が成立する際のさまざまな過程について考察する。

キーワード：言語； 借用語； 合成； 逆性； 派生

* 鹿屋体育大学国際交流センター National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya
International Exchange and Language Education Center