

Stress in Japanese Loanwords in English: Faithfulness or Adaptation?

This paper aims at studying the word stress patterns of Japanese loanwords in English. There are hundreds of Japanese loanwords in English today, and the process of borrowing was particularly significant during the twentieth century.

The phonological systems of these two languages radically differ, for Japanese is a pitch-accent language, which means that the pitch falls after the accented syllable, whereas English is a stress-accent language, whose stressed syllable is mainly characterized by a phenomenon of intensity (the aspiration of specific onset consonants such as /p/ being an excellent indicator). Nevertheless, the “prominence” of a specific syllable in both systems makes it possible to compare them. This study of loanwords raises several questions. How does English behave towards Japanese loanwords? Does English borrow from both the lexicon and the phonological structure of the source language, or does the loanword follow the English phonological system? Does the location of the accented syllable of the Japanese loanword correspond to the stressed syllable in the English item or not?

The first step of this study consists in establishing the list of Japanese loanwords in English. The etymological data of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is valuable because it determines the type of loanword considered. This study is only interested in “direct” loanwords, with no intermediate language between Japanese and English, whose phonological system may have influenced the resulting stress pattern. English translations or adaptations are also rejected because these items are no longer representative of the Japanese phonological system. Then, the phonetic transcriptions of Japanese loanwords in English are analysed, focusing on primary stress. Our transcriptions are based on three sources: the *Oxford English Dictionary* and two pronunciation dictionaries (the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* and the *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary*). These transcriptions are finally compared to the corresponding Japanese transcriptions to observe the correspondence (or the absence of it) between the accented syllable of the source language and the stressed syllable of the target language.

The corpus of this study is composed of 514 “direct” Japanese loanwords. It turns out that there is a stress correspondence when the structure <CVCV#> is preserved in the process of borrowing. However, when the syllable structure is modified from Japanese (the Japanese syllable structure is based on its romanized version) to English (for example <CVCV#> in Japanese <CVCCV#> in English), different stress patterns emerge in English. In that respect, we have to bear in mind that syllable weight is a major factor for word stress assignment in both languages.

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