

Made-in-Japan English and the Negative Impact on English Language Learning

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Abstract : The number of loanwords borrowed into the Japanese language is increasing rapidly in recent years, and many linguists argue that loanwords make up more than 10% of the Japanese lexicon. While these loanwords come from various Western languages, 80%-90% are borrowed from English. Also, there is a separate group of words and phrases categorized as 'Japanese English'. These made-in-Japan linguistic creations may look and sound like English, but in fact are not used by native speakers and are often incomprehensible to them. Linguistically, the important thing to remember is that these terms are not English ones, but in fact, 100% Japanese words. A problem arises in language teaching, however, when Japanese English learners are unable to distinguish authentic loans from Japanese English terms. This confusion could greatly impede language acquisition and communication. The goal of this paper is to determine to what degree this potential misunderstanding may interfere with communication. Native English speakers living in the United States were interviewed and shown a list of romanized Japanese English terms, which are both commonly used and often mistaken for authentic loans. Then, the words were put into the context of a sentence in order to ascertain if context in any way aided comprehension. The results showed that while some terms are understood on their own, and others are understood better in context, a large number of the terms are entirely incomprehensible to native English speakers. If that is the case, and a Japanese learner mistakes a Japanese English term for an authentic loan, a communication breakdown may occur during interaction in English. With the ever-increasing presence of both groups of terms in the Japanese language, it is more important than ever that teaching professionals address this topic in the language classroom.

Keywords : Japanese, Japanese English, language acquisition, loanwords

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