

Can Japanese Speak in Pure Japanese?: *The Inevitability of Gairaigo in Japanese*

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Abstract—Japanese lexicon are divided into four categories, namely 1) *Wago* (words with pronunciation and morphology are in accordance with native Japanese linguistic conventions), 2) *Kango* (words introduced from China with kanji which are read using *on-yomi* pronunciation), 3) *Gairaigo* (words borrowed from foreign language), and 4) *Konshugo* (words come from combination of three previous categories). *Gairaigo* is one of Japanese lexicon that has the longest history. Other than Chinese, the first *gairaigo* came from Portuguese to Japan in 1549. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of *gairaigo* use in recent Japanese daily conversation, by examining the use of *gairaigo* in a Youtube social experiment video entitled “Can Japanese Speak in Pure Japanese?” and four other Japan’s trending Youtube videos using transcription method. The results showed that Japanese speakers are rather difficult to speak in pure Japanese and use *gairaigo* occasionally, which tendency appeared in all videos. There are four reasons found why *gairaigo* is used frequently, namely 1) providing an alternative tone of discourse; 2) Naming imported things or ideas which did not exist in Japanese culture previously; 3) Often associated with a sophisticated culture, so the modern image is stronger; 4) Availability of more helpful common vocabulary. Along with globalization, contact between Japanese and other languages created more *gairaigo*, and *gairaigo* is getting widely used because of its aforementioned advantageous functions. Hence, it is necessary to include *gairaigo* when learning Japanese.

Keywords: *gairaigo, Japanese, konshugo, lexicon*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Gairaigo*

Japanese lexicon, in general, is divided into three main categories: 1) *Wago*; 2) *Kango*; and 3) *Gairaigo*. In addition, words that combine features of three main categories named *konshugo*. 1) *Wago* or also well known as Yamato *kotoba*, as the name Yamato referred to Japan and *kotoba* mean words, literally mean ‘Japanese words’. It refers to words with pronunciation and morphology is in accord with native Japanese linguistic conventions; 2) *Kango* is term used to refer to words that were introduced from China with kanji are read using *on-yomi* pronunciation; 3) *Gairaigo* literal meaning is “came from outside” also known as “loanword”. It refers to words borrowed from foreign language; 4) *Konshugo* literal meaning is “combination words”. These words come from a

combination of three main categories such as *kango* plus *wago*, *kango* plus *gairaigo* and *wago* plus *gairaigo* (Tomoda, 2005).

Nowadays, there are thousands of *gairaigo* in Japanese. Too many that it is requiring much effort to categorize them. Let alone the first massive borrowing words from Chinese, the first *gairaigo* was from Portuguese. The Portuguese arrived in Japan in 1549, the time when the world was being explored by Portuguese, Spanish, English and Dutch. By discovering new places, new foods were also discovered just like squash, tomatoes, potatoes, beans and so on. These foods were then introduced by the Portuguese and the Dutch to all over the world, including Japan. However, Japanese were not aware of the source of the food. Instead, they named the food according to the direction from which the sailors had come. For this reason, potatoes become *Jagaimo*, because it is ‘roots’ coming from ‘Jakarta’, corn becomes *Tomorokoshi*, meaning Chinese Corn and many others (Otake, 2008).

The process of creating *gairaigo* was rather simple through the early days of Meiji Era. In a Japanese dictionary in 1889, there were 72 English origin *gairaigo* and 85 Dutch origin *gairaigo* listed. However, after Meiji Era, the amounts of words coming into the language make it very complex trace the process by which words entered Japanese and change. But, the number still fairly easy to trace. By the middle of Taisho Era (1911-1924), from *gairaigo* listed in dictionaries, 51% were English origin (Otake, 2008). Now in this modern Japanese era, 94,1% of *gairaigo* are English origin (Champ, 2014).

An appearing of new words or disappearing of words can be considered as natural language phenomenon. In Japanese according to a dictionary, the Koujien, in 1955 there is 12.7% of the total number of words contained *gairaigo* (see Table I). With the same dictionary edited in 1991, the number of words containing *gairaigo* increased to 16.6% (see Table II). In exchange, it seems that there were Japanese words that disappeared and being replaced with *gairaigo* (Oshima, 2002).

TABLE I. VOLUME OF *GAIRAIGO* IN JAPANESE DICTIONARY OF 1955 PUBLICATION (FIRST EDITION, PP. 1-82)

Words start with "a" / ' /	5824 words	100%	
<i>Gairaigo</i>	737 words	12.7%	
<i>Gairaigo</i> proper nouns	213 words	3.7%	(28.9% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
<i>Gairaigo</i> nouns	475 words	8.2%	(64.5% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
<i>Gairaigo</i> verbs	21 words	0.4%	(2.8% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
Other <i>gairaigo</i>	28 words	0.5%	(3.8% of <i>gairaigo</i>)

TABLE II. VOLUME OF *GAIRAIGO* IN JAPANESE DICTIONARY OF 1991 PUBLICATION (FOURTH EDITION, PP.1-104)

Words start with "a" / ' /	5914 words	100%	
<i>Gairaigo</i>	979 words	16.6%	
<i>Gairaigo</i> proper nouns	266 words	4.5%	(27.2% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
<i>Gairaigo</i> nouns	671 words	11.3%	(68.5% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
<i>Gairaigo</i> verbs	17 words	0.3%	(1.7% of <i>gairaigo</i>)
Other <i>gairaigo</i>	25 words	0.4%	(2.6% of <i>gairaigo</i>)

Gairaigo has always an issue. One of that is it alleged increasing volume. Along with the new technology and new products imported from the West, the number keeps increasing especially after World War II. As the material and goods are imported, the names of foreign words are imported and being adopted. Because of that, it is natural to see even more western names of places and a person written in *gairaigo* form (*katakana*) are seen in public and media when Japanese have more contact and relations with other languages. Even with this kind of growth and change *gairaigo* has been kept out of the classroom and not discussed in school textbooks (Oshima, 2002).

There are already numbers of studies talking about the increasing of *gairaigo* volume and the reason why it happened. But, there is almost no study yet has specifically talking about the use of *gairaigo* in everyday life by the Japanese. It is important to know how *gairaigo* is being used in Japanese daily life with the aim that it can raise the awareness of Japanese learner of *gairaigo* so it can be included in Japanese learning process.

B. "Can Japanese Speak in Pure Japanese?"

On September 25, 2018 a Youtube channel named Asian Boss published a video titled "Can Japanese Speak in Pure Japanese?". This is a social experiment video trying to find out is it possible to speak in pure Japanese by conducting a short interview in Japanese to a random pedestrian.

Two presenters on the video will start the interview with "How good would you say you are in speaking Japanese?" question. Then several other questions will be asked and the interviewee will try to answer the questions without using *gairaigo*. Out of 14 interviewees, all of them find it extremely

difficult to named things without the helped of *gairaigo*. Although some are able to name things by describing it, some are completely lost in thought.

There is a written disclaimer saying that the opinions express in this video are those individual viewers alone and do not reflect the views of Asian Boss or the Japanese population. Despite the disclaimer, we cannot help but think that it is difficult to speak in pure Japanese.

II. METHOD

A. Data Sampling

This is a qualitative study that features descriptive data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). The data is *gairaigo* and *konshugo* used by Youtuber, but the *konshugo* is limited to combination of *wago* plus *gairaigo* and *kango* plus *gairaigo*.

This study focused on Japanese used by Japanese Youtuber on their video. Youtube video was chosen because the Youtuber usually try their best to keep up with the change and trends. So that the language used by the Youtuber also is the language that is currently still socially acceptable.

Videos for data were chosen from the list of Japan Trending Youtube Videos. This list updated every day, but the video being chosen is one video from each 13, 14, 15 and 16 May list. The 4 videos have different content and also different duration.

B. Data Analysis

The first stage of analyzing is by transcripts the videos. The second stage is collected the *gairaigo* and the frequency it is being used in each video.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4 videos chosen for this study were taken from the list of Japan Trending Youtube videos. It has different lengths and also created by different Youtuber with different topics. Even so, after transcribed the videos, it is clear that in every video *gairaigo* is being used. However, one uses it for different reasons than the other.

A. First Video

Title : 限界まで一蘭で替え玉大食いして1日でどれだけ太れるのか! ?

(*Genkai made ichiran de kaedama okui shite 1-nichi de dore dake futoreru no ka!?*)

Duration : 11:44 Minutes

Channel : ヴァンゆんチャンネル (*Wan yun channeru*) / Powered by VAMBI

Published Date : 13th May 2019

This first video is about two Youtubers challenging themselves to eat *kaedama* ramen to the limit and see how many kilograms they gain. Because the main of this video is eating ramen to the fullest, the conversation mostly only at the start of the video that is right before the challenge and the end

of the video that is right after the challenge. From this limited conversation of two Youtubers, found 10 *gairaigos* and 2 *konshugos* with 1 repeated for each word except キロ(kiro) that been repeated 6 times (see Table III).

Gairaigo has several functions, one of that is to provide an alternative tone of discourse. The English origin *gairaigo* often helped to create a modern atmosphere (Kay, 1995). That is why even there are several words that even it has equivalent meaning in Japanese, the Youtuber chooses to use the *gairaigo* one instead (Kay, 1995).

TABLE III *GAIRAIGO* AND *KONSHUGO* FOUND IN FIRST VIDEO

<i>Gairaigo</i> and <i>Konshugo</i>	Meaning	Frequency
チャレンジ (Charenji)	Challenge	1
フルコース (furukoosu)	Full course (meal)	1
キロ (kiro)	Kilogram	6
ユーチューバー (Yuuchuubaa)	<i>Youtuber</i>	1
ペース (Peesu)	Pace	1
プライベート (Puraibeeto)	Private	1
デブ飯セット (Debubansetto)	Big set (name of a food set)	1
ダイエット (Daietto)	Diet	1
ラスト (Rasuto)	Last	1
ギブアップ (Gibuappu)	Give up	1
ラスト一口 (Rasutooro)	Last bite	1
プレゼント (Purezento)	Present	1

B. Second Video

Title : 【ダサすぎ?】ふくれなと M 君はどっちがヘアセット上手いのか対決してみた【ふくれな】【M 君】

([Dasasugi?] Fukurenato Mkun wa docchi ga hea setto umai no ka taiketsu shitemita [Fukurena][M-kun])

Duration : 09:20 Minutes

Channel : えむれなチャンネル (*Emurena channeru*)

Published Date : 14th May 2019

This second video is about 2 Youtubers by male and female challenging to style each other hair. Different from the first video this second video has more conversation because they speak almost the entire video about what kind of hairstyle they choose or the name of tools they use. From this 09:20 lengths video, 20 *gairaigo* and 2 *konshugo* were found. From this list there are 3 words that are repeated more than 1, which is ヘアセット(*heaasetto*) being repeated by 5 times, ヘアアレン

ジ(*heaarenji*) being repeated by 3 times and ユーチューバー(*yuuchuuba*) being repeated by 2 times.

In Table IV most of the words are about hair style or hair styling tools that is might be not exist in previous Japanese culture. As another function of *gairaigo* is to name imported things or ideas which did not exist in Japanese culture previously, *gairaigo* is being used for the term. Also another reason why *gairaigo* is being more preferable than *wago* is because it often associated with a sophisticated, so the modern image is stronger (Kay, 1995).

TABLE IV. *GAIRAIGO* AND *KONSHUGO* FOUND IN SECOND VIDEO

<i>Gairaigo</i> and <i>Konshugo</i>	Meaning	Frequency
チャンネル (Channeru)	Channel	1
ヘア企画 (Heaa kikaku)	Hair plan	1
ヘアセット (Heaa setto)	Hair set (hair dressing)	5
ボンバー (Bonbaa)	Bomber	1
セット (Setto)	Set	1
プラス (Purasu)	Plus (as an extra)	1
オッケー (Okkee)	Okay	1
プロダクト (Purodakuto)	Product (name of a brand)	1
ウェット感 (Wetto kan)	Wet feel	1
センター (Sentaa)	Center	1
ウェーブ (Weebu)	Wave	1
コテ (Kote)	Iron (hair curler)	1
ランダム (Randamu)	Random	1
ヘア (Heaa)	Hair	1
エクステ (Ekusute)	Extention (hair)	1
ブリーチ (Buriichi)	Bleach	1
ロング (Rongu)	Long	1
ウルフ (Urufu)	Wolf (wolf hairstyle)	1
ツーブロック (Tsuuburokku)	Two block (undercut hairstyle)	1
ヘアアレンジ (Heaarenji)	Hair arrange (arrangement)	3
イメージ (Imeeji)	Image	1
ユーチューバー (Yuuchuubaa)	<i>Youtuber</i>	2

C. Third Video

Title : 【大流行】このアプリだけで美女にもイケメンにもなれるぞ www【スナップチャット】

([Dairyuukou] Kono apuri dake de bijo ni mo ikemen'ni mo nareru zo www [sunappuchatto])

Duration : 05:50 Minutes
Channel : はじめしゃちょー (hajimeshachoo)
Published Date : 15th May 2019

The third video is pretty short compare to the others. This 05:50 minute's video is about a Youtuber trying various filters in a social media name Snapchat. The video started by a Youtuber, the owner of the channel trying all kinds of filters that are currently becoming a big hit in Japan. After trying the filters himself then he called 2 of his friends to join him. From this short but hilarious video 9 *gairaigo* are found with フィルター (*firutaa*) as the main content being repeated 3 times while other only repeated once (see Table V)

The reason why *gairaigo* is being used in this video is also because most of the words are current things, that does not exist before in Japan.

TABLE V. *GAIRAIGO* AND *KONSHUGO* FOUND IN THIRD VIDEO

Gairaigo and Konshugo	Meaning	Frequency
スナップチャット (Sunappuchatto)	Snapchat	1
フィルター (Firutaa)	Filter	3
ビッグウェーブ (Bigguweebu)	Big wave	1
ネット (Netto)	Internet	1
ダンディー (Dandii)	Dandy	1
マッチングアプリ (Macchinguapuri)	Matching application (date)	1
アイコン (Aikon)	Icon	1
ネクタイ (Nekutai)	Necktie	1
ハンサム (Hansamu)	Handsome	1

D. Forth Video

Title : The Real Fast & Furious: Tokyo Drift Queen
Duration : 15:18 Minutes
Channel : Asian Boss
Published Date : 16 May 2019

Forth video is the longest among other. This is an interview video with Tokyo Drift Queen. The interview is start from how she starts have interest in F1 and then continued to how she becomes the Tokyo Drift Queen. From this 15:18 minutes video, 43 *gairaigos* and 4 *konshugos* are found. ドリフト (*dorifuto*) as the main topic being repeated 15 times, ドライバー (*doraiba*) being repeated 4 times, タイヤ (*taiya*) also being repeated 4 times, ツードア (*tsuudoa*) and セダン (*sedan*) being repeated 3 times, シリーズ (*shirizu*), カテゴリー (*kategori*), ポイント (*pointo*), ライセンス (*raisensu*), モータースポーツ (*mootaa supootsu*) and フォードア (*foodoa*)

being repeated 2 times, and the rest being said once (See Table VI).

Drift is a Japan origin sport. But, with rapid international exchange, competition and items that might be imported from abroad, *gairaigo* are also being used in this video. It is because the availability of a common vocabulary will be helpful for the viewer (Kay, 1995).

TABLE VI. *GAIRAIGO* AND *KONSHUGO* FOUND IN FORTH VIDEO

Gairaigo and Konshugo	Meaning	Frequency
ドリフトドライバー (Dorifuto doraibaa)	Drift driver	1
レースクイン (Ressu kuin)	Race queen (car model)	1
オーディション (Oodishon)	Audition	1
ジャンル (Janru)	Genre (category)	1
ドリフト (Dorifuto)	Drift	15
ドライバー (Doraibaa)	Driver	4
コース (Koosu)	Course (track)	1
コンクリート (Konkuriito)	Concrete	1
プロ (Puro)	Professional	1
シリーズ (Shirizu)	Series	2
アンダーカテゴリー (Andaakategorii)	Under category (another category under a category)	1
カテゴリー (Kategorii)	Category	2
ヘルメット (Herumetto)	Helmet	1
グラブ (Gurabu)	Glove	1
ランキング (Rankingu)	Ranking	1
ポイント (Pointo)	Point	2
ライセンス (Raisensu)	License	2
レディースシリーズ (Rediisu shirizu)	Lady series	1
タイヤ (Taiya)	Tire	4
アクセル (Akuseru)	Accelerator	1
ハンドル (Handoru)	Handle	1
シンプル (Shinpuru)	Simple	1
ステージ (Suteeji)	Stage	1
ゲスト (Gesuto)	Guest	1
ストーリー (Sutoorii)	Story	1
モータースポーツ (Mootaa supootsu)	Motor sport	2
ドリフトレース	Drift race	1

(Dorifuto reesu)		
ストリート (Sutoriito)	Street	1
ドリフトシーン (Dorifuto Shiin)	Drift scene	1
スクランブル交差点 (Sakuranburu kousaten)	Multiple intersection	1
スピード (Supiido)	Speed	1
シートベルト (Shiito beruto)	Seat belt	1
セーフティー (Seefutii)	Safety	1
ツードア (Tsuudoa)	2-door	3
フォードア (Foodoa)	4-door	2
スポーツカー (Supootsu kaa)	Sports car (car use for sports)	1
セダン (Sedan)	Sedan	3
ナンバー (Nanba)	Nanba (license plate)	1
ドリフト車 (Dorifuto kuruma)	Drift car	1
サイドブレーキ (Saido bureeki)	Hand brake	1
サイド (Saido)	Hand brake	1
ワイヤー (Taiyaa)	Wire	1
オイル (Oiru)	Oil	1
タイヤ屋 (Taiya ya)	Tire shop	1
プロ選手 (Puro senshuu)	Professional athlete	1
ドリフター (Dorifutaa)	Drifter	1
プロのレーサー (Puro no reesaa)	Pro racer (professional drifter)	1

E. Speaking in Pure Japanese

From the four videos above, we can see that it is rather difficult to speak in pure Japanese. Not only the topic but also the atmosphere can be created using *gairaigo*. As mention in the first, second, third and fourth videos, *gairaigo* has several functions such as first, to provide an alternative tone of discourse. Second, to name imported things or ideas which did not exist in Japanese culture previously. Third, it often associated with a sophisticated, so the modern image is stronger. Forth, the availability of a common vocabulary will be helpful.

Gairaigo is the result of the Japanization process in a situation where Japanese contacts with foreign languages. Even it has advantages, it also causes some issues. The most common one is confusing themselves when start learning Japanese for foreigner and start learning English for Japanese (Oshima, 2002). To become *gairaigo* the loan words have to go through the process, one of that is morphological change (Hara, 2011). The example of morphological change can be seen in

table 6, were word accelerator is being back clipping to become *akuseru*.

Another process that the example can be seen in the Table 6 is semantic change. The ナンバー (*nanba*) in Table VI literal meaning is number, but because of semantics widening, the word ナンバー (*nanba*) extended it meaning to license plate. This example just emphasized the need to discuss *gairaigo* in class.

IV. CONCLUSION

Gairaigo has a long history and a part of the general main lexicon. But it is often forgotten and being left out of the class. A social experiment video published in Youtube titled “*Can Japanese Speak in Pure Japanese?*” shows that it is rather difficult to speak in pure Japanese. Especially in this era where information and things change rapidly and internationally.

To see the use of *gairaigo* in the daily life of Japanese four videos from Youtube Trending video list being chosen. The four videos are taken from a different day with different topics. After transcribed the video, it can be seen that in every video the Youtuber are using *gairaigo* and *konshugo*. There are 4 reasons why *gairaigo* are being used: to provide an alternative tone of discourse, to name imported things or ideas which did not exist in Japanese culture previously, to be associated with a sophisticated so the modern image is stronger, and to be the availability of a common vocabulary that will be helpful.

By this, we can understand that *gairaigo* is inevitable with various functions. Nevertheless, because the object of this study is limited maybe there are still more functions that have not been found yet that can raise the awareness of Japanese learners to discuss *gairaigo* when learning Japanese. So in the future, it is better to use different objects with different methods to discover more functions of *gairaigo*.

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