

Phonemic-level variability in English loans in Japanese: Code-switching within the morpheme

The Japanese language has borrowed thousands of loanwords from the English language, and continues to borrow more at a rapid pace. The adaptation process of these English-based loanwords into Japanese is said to follow this simple guideline: “the English sounds that do not belong to the Japanese sound system are substituted by sounds that exist in Japanese” (Tsujimura 1996: 98). For example, the vowels used in English-based loanwords are restricted to the five vowels of Japanese native vocabulary. Likewise, the loanword phonotactics mostly adhere to the phonotactics of the Japanese native vocabulary, the exception being several phoneme combinations found in recent loanwords, such as /ti/ and /wi/. Other descriptions of loanword pronunciation (for example, Kobayashi 2005) also take this approach.

The objective of this talk is to show that, in spite of the above description, variability in loanword pronunciation exists, ranging from English code switches to fully assimilated loanwords. Furthermore, I argue that in order to adequately account for the full range of variation, the concept of code switching as morpheme-level variability (Myers-Scotton 1997) needs to be modified. Consider the following utterance from the Kansai Corpus of Spoken Japanese:

逆にベンチに戻すタイミングが難しかった。(KSC012M04:1561)

gyaku ni benchi ni modosu taimingu ga muzukashikatta

This utterance contains the loanword *taimingu* “timing”. This speaker did not realize the final vowel of *taimingu* (i.e., [taimi]), making the pronunciation more like the English word. This non-realization of word-final vowels is common, and other examples include *burando* “brand” realized as [burand] and *bokkusu* “box” realized as [boks]. Note that in these cases, the Japanese phonemes are maintained, ruling out the possibility of morpheme-level code switching.

The static notion of loanword pronunciation is unable to adequately account for the observed patterns. Likewise, the more dynamic notion of morpheme-level code shifting also cannot account for the word-internal variability in pronunciation. Thus, in order to adequately account for the observed patterns, the concept of a code switch needs to be extended to include code-switching at the level of the phoneme.

References

- Kobayashi, Yasuhide. 2005. 日英外来語の発音 [*The pronunciation of English loans in Japanese*]. Tokyo: Keisuisha.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 1997. Code-switching. In Florian Coulmas (ed.) *The handbook of Sociolinguistics*, pp. 217-237. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tsujimura, Natsuko. 1996. *An introduction to Japanese linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

The data presented in this study was extracted from a corpus of Kansai dialect vernacular Japanese. The Kansai area of Japan is indicated by the circle in the middle of Japan. At the core of the dialect regions is Osaka City, the second largest city in Japan. Although all dialects of Japanese are under pressure from the expansion of standard Japanese, this dialect variety is considered to be somewhat prestigious and is spoken by all age groups. It is associated with stand-up comedy, and often it is heard on television in for example, drama shows or entertainment shows. It is spoken by about 30 million people. The dialect itself is not a focus of my study.

