

KATAKANA TRANSCRIPTION MOTIVATION OF LOANWORDS FROM ENGLISH¹⁾

by Wesley RICHARD

My reasons for this study are basically pragmatic. I have encountered the problem of how to pronounce an English loanword in acceptable Japanese so many times that I began to wonder what rules or conventions were employed in their transcription. The longer I pondered the problem the more I became convinced that whatever rules there were, certain English loanwords did not accommodate themselves to them.

In particular, some *katakana* transcriptions appeared to be based upon the pronunciation of the original word while others seemed to depart from what might be called an "approximation of native pronunciation" and resembled more nearly a "romaji reading" of an English word. To test this hypothesis, I gathered a corpus of about 700 *katakana* words from a newspaper and examined them.

If the basic principle outlined in the *NHK Gaikokugo Katakana Hyooki* that foreign words are to be transcribed "as nearly to their original pronunciation as possible" (NHK, Tokyo, 1963, page 3) can be considered normative, then we have a standard against which we can measure the appropriateness of the *katakana* transcription for a particular word. We can ask if, in fact, it is transcribed as nearly to its original pronunciation as possible, and if not, in what respects it departs from its original.

However, the application of this simple principle may be complicated by one or more of the following factors:

1. Time of entry. Certain English words that entered Japanese relatively early, somewhat before the sophisticated linguistic awareness of the

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present day, often depart radically from their native pronunciation. Transcriptions of some such words don't fit either the spelling or the pronunciation motivation pattern and thus are not useful for this study—e. g. 'drawers' (*zuroosu*).²⁾

2. Mixed or undeterminable origins. Many words can claim multiple source languages because they have their origins in Latin and are employed in several of the Western languages. In such cases it is difficult to pin down any one of them as the source of the loanword in question. The resultant *katakana* transcription, therefore, which appears to be irregular may, in fact, simply reflect an unexpected source, e. g. words like 'pump' (*ponpu*), current in Dutch (*pomp*) German, French, and English, and 'tunnel' (*tonneru*), current in Dutch, English, German, and Russian (*tonnel*) likely did not come from English at all since they seem to have been in use by at least 1798 and 1865 respectively. (S. Arakawa, ed. 1972, *Gairaigo Jiten*. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten).

3. Pronunciation differences. A similar difficulty in determining transcription motivation is that the British pronunciation of a word may differ slightly from the American pronunciation. The resulting *katakana* transcription, therefore, may reflect the pronunciation from which it was borrowed. (See *Observation 2b* below).

4. Phonetic approximation. The fourth difficulty is found in the concept of transcribing words "as closely as possible" to their original pronunciation." For those sounds having exact counterparts in the two languages, there is obviously no problem. But where five Japanese vowels must carry the load of a much larger repertoire from the source language, the difficulties involved are obvious. For instance, if the original vowel sound is 'open o' /ɔ/, which is closer phonetically, /o/ or /a/? This is not an idle question when one considers the large number of lexical items that employ the /ɔ/ sound in English.

5. Pronunciation / orthography alignment. There is a large number

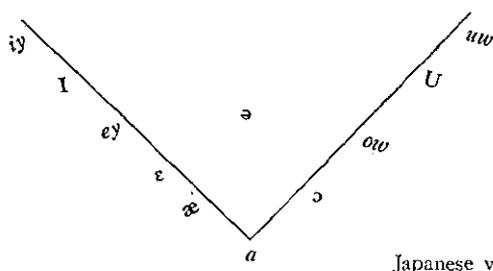
2) NHK concedes that for words such as 'radio' (*rajio*) which are already so much a part of daily life, transcription must bow to popular well-established usage, thus leaving the marks of time indelibly stamped on this item and others like it. (p. 3)

of borrowings about which no conclusive observations about the route through which they entered can be made, simply because their spelling and pronunciation agree and happen, at the same time, to line up with *katakana* transcription conventions, e. g., cord (*koodo*), diver (*daibaa*), sportsman (*supootsuman*).

Having now eliminated a large number of items due to the above considerations, is there still room to suggest that there may be both eye and ear oriented influence in *katakana* transcription? I present the following observations for consideration.³⁾

Vowels

A glance at the vowel systems of English and Japanese will quickly indicate how great the load is when five Japanese vowels must carry the heavier load of numerous English vowels.



One would expect, therefore, that substitution of vowel sounds would be carried out in as close proximity (on the chart) as possible. The particular problem here is that of the mid-central /ə/. On the chart it is in equal proximity to nearly all the others since it is in the center. If it is true that the Japanese /u/ is closest to /ə/ acoustically (Julie Lovins, *Loanwords And The Phonological Structure of Japanese*. Ph. D. Dis-

3) The corpus on which I based this study was taken from specified sections of HOKKAIDO SHINBUN over a 15 day period (September 1-15, 1973). All suspected English loanwords were recorded (except proper nouns) and later checked for transcription motivation. Examples not taken from the corpus are asterisked.

4) The transcriptions to follow will not include the glides /y/ and /w/ for Japanese. Japanese transcription will not be phonetic in the strict sense of the term but will use Romaji.

sertation 1973 p. 65), we should expect to find /u/ in any transcription process involving /ə/. But the evidence does not appear to bear this out. *Observation One.* Reduced vowels (English unstressed /ə/) tend to have transcriptions based on spelling. The English reduced vowel is pronounced /ə/ in most phonetic environments. There is no equivalent sound available in Japanese for use in transcription, thus one of the five vowels must be chosen.

1. Unstressed /ə/

a. /ə/ →

e

camera	/kæməɾə/	kamera
top level	/tap levl̩/	toppu reberu
elevator	/ɛləveyt̩ɾ/	erebeetaa
hostess	/howst̩ɛs/	hosutesu
science	/sayəns/	saiensu
license	/laysəns/	raisensu
model	/mad(ə)l/	moderu
system	/sist̩əm/	s'isutemu
ceremony	/sɛrəmowniɪ/	seremonii
cancel	/kænsəl/	kyanseru
siren	/sayr̩ən/	sair̩en
television	/teləviʒ̩ən/	terēbiz'on

With regard to 'camera,' it is of interest to note that 'cameraman' is given as *hamuraman* in Hawaiian Japanese (Lovin, p. 65). The difference can probably be attributed to closer contact with American English. Other exceptions can also be found in Japan proper: e. g., 'open' (oopen), *'oven' (oobun), 'shortening' (s'ootōningu). The last one may have been formed on the pattern of 'short' (s' ooto).

b. /ə/ →

i

alibi	/æləbai/	aribai
denim	/dɛnəm/	denimu
rehabilitation	/riyhəbilit̩eɪʒ̩ən/	rihabiritees'on
harmonization	/harmənəzeɪʒ̩ən/	haamonizees'on

In certain environments, i. e. when the tongue is far forward, the /ə/

sound may be pronounced more nearly like /ɪ/. One exception to the above data is that of 'raisin' (reezun). However, it may be that this transcription was adopted to preserve the consonant /z/ which would have automatically become /ʒ/ if transcribed in the above pattern.

c. /ə/ →	o	
community	/kəmyunətiy/	komyunitee
computer	/kəmpyuuwətər/	kōnpyuutaa
diamond	/daymænd/	dayamōndo
pistol	/pɪstəl/	pisutōru
pilot	/paylət/	pairōtto
mayonaise	/meyəneyz/	mayōneezu
badminton	/bædmɪntən/ (tn)	badomintōn
chocolate	/čakələt/	c'okoreeto

Except for the possible exception of 'mayonaise', none of these unstressed neutrals would be pronounced /o/ in English. In this connection two exceptions were discovered: 'motorization' (mootarizees'on) which may have been patterned after its root 'motors' (mootaazu), and 'season' (s'iizun). A third exception can be found in Hawaiian Japanese: 'gasoline' (gyasurin).

We should probably note that at least one of the exceptions in each of the three environments listed above is that of the syllabic N: 'season', 'raisin', and possibly 'oven' and 'open', which may or may not be an influential factor in the /u/ transcription.

d. /ʒən/ →	ʒon
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English words that end in '-tion' are consistently transcribed with s'on.

conception	/kənsɛpʒən/	kōnsɛpus'on
attraction	/ətɾækʒən/	atorakus'on
information	/ɪnfərmeyʒən/	infuomees'on
old fashion	/owld fæʒən/	oorudo fuas'on
rehabilitation	/riyhəbilətɛyʒən/	rihabiritees'on
recreation	/rɛkriyeyʒən/	rɛkuriees'on
(champion	/čæmpyən/	c'anpyōn)

One can only conclude here that either Japanese tend to hear the /ə/ as the sound nearest to /o/ or that the transcription is influenced by spelling. To the best of my knowledge, none of these words would be pronounced /-sɔn/ by an English speaker. Not found in the corpus, but useful as a contrast is *'technician' (təkunis'an), an English /-sɛn/ word but with different spelling. This item would seem to suggest that English spelling has influenced the transcription of the /sɛn/.

Observation Two. Stressed English vowels tend to be transcribed in accordance with English spelling rather than pronunciation.

2. Stressed vowels

a. Stressed /ə/ → o

Many loanwords containing stressed /ə/ are transcribed /a/: *'lunch', *'rush'. However, when the /ə/ is represented by English 'o' in its spelling, the transcription tends to be aligned with it.

ton	/tən/	ton
golf	/gɒlf/	gorufu

Exceptions are: 'color' and *'love', transcribed *karaa* and *rabu* respectively. An interesting footnote here is the NHK directive that loan words are not to be transcribed according to their spelling but according to their pronunciation. The example used in this directive is 'glove;' not *guroobu* but *gurabu*. (NHK p.34).

b. /a/ → o

copy	/kapij/	kopii
concrete	/kankriyt/	konkuriito
nonstop	/nanstap/	nonsutoppu
observer	/abzervər/	obuzaabaa
model	/madəl/	moderu
locker	/lakər/	rokkaa
rocket	/rakət/	roketto
office	/afəs/	ofuisu
dock	/dak/	dokku
cross country	/kraskəntriy/	kurosukantorii
shock	/śak/	s'okku

stop	/stap/	sutoppu
stock	/stak/	sutokku
smog	/smag/	sumogu

As a speaker of midwestern American English, I would pronounce all of the above with the low central /a/. However, British speakers employ a sound very close to, if not identical with, the low back /ɔ/, which in turn is nearly always transcribed as /o/ in katakana. Nevertheless, the following exceptions were found in my data: 'volley ball' (baree booru), 'nonsense' (nansensu), and 'collar' (karaa).⁵⁾ At least the latter two appear to have been taken directly from English speech rather than from written sources or at least were transcribed with a conscious awareness of their original pronunciation.

Observation Three. English loanwords ending in 'ey' tend to be transcribed /ee/ and those ending in 'y' tend to be represented by /ii/ in *katakana*. English speakers make no distinction between the final vowels of words like 'money' and 'copy' even though the spelling is different. Transcription evidence, however, points to the possibility that a distinction is drawn between them in Japanese.

3. Final /iy/ →	<i>ii</i> or <i>ee</i>		
/iy/	<i>ii</i>	/iy/	<i>ee</i>
copy	kopii	community	komyunitee
country	kantorii	melody	merodee
ceremony	seremonii	handy	handee
mystery	misuterii	money	manee
		volley	baree

In the above list, all words ending in English 'y' are transcribed *ii* except when it follows a dental stop which in Japanese would automatically become *c'i* or *j'i*. It appears, therefore, that in order to preserve the stop, the vowel sound was compromised. There is no similar reason

5) With regard to 'volley ball,' two transcriptions appear to be available for the stressed vowel (/a/ and /o/). This leads me to suspect that the /o/ was a spelling oriented transcription and that the /a/ was a later entry (corrective attempt?) based on American pronunciation. Current usage, however, employs the /a/ transcription.

to expect the same of 'money,' though. It seems safe to assume that it is transcribed because of its spelling. One exception is *'monkey' (monkii) but by and large orthography appears to be the influencing factor in words of this type.

With regard to consonants, the following observation can be made. *Observation Four.* Double 'n' or 'm' in English is transcribed as *nm* or *nn* in Japanese. Doubling of consonants in English is not contrastive; but in Japanese it is. The following double nasals are all transcribed thus in *katakana*.

/n/ or /m/ →	<i>nn</i> or <i>nm</i>
dilemma	j'irenma
ammonia	anmonia
planning	puranningu
thinner	s'innaa
hammer	hanmaa
mammoth	manmosu
(tunnel)	tonneru

The following exceptions were found in the corpus:

community	komyunitee
antenna	antena
announce	anaunsu
*comment	komento

Arakawa lists both readings for 'community,' *'communication,' and *'commune.' The single nasal reading appears to be more recent. This may indicate a shift toward more "colloquial borrowing," although it is too early to predict which will win out in each of these cases.

Other double-consonant loanwords present a confusing picture when transcribed into Japanese. The corpus used for this study did not yield adequate examples to permit drawing conclusions about specific environments. From the evidence presented above, one is tempted to conclude that the double consonant transcriptions have been influenced by English spelling, i. e. they came by way of literature of literature or through writing—the eye road. Particularly interesting in the list below is the

contrast of 'necktie' (nekutai) and 'necklace' (nekkuresu). Would it be out of the way to conjecture that the former entered Japanese through speech and the latter through writing?

<i>Single</i>		<i>Double</i>	
classmate	kurasumeeto	necklace	nekkuresu
miss	misu	message	messeeji
missile	misairu	massage	massaji
stress	sutoresu	compressor	konpuressaa
appeal	apiiru	top batter	toppu battaa
attraction	atorakus'on	* soccer	sakkaa
lobby	robii		
necktie	nekutai		

One other minor problem for which there is inconclusive evidence is that of the transcription of the so-called English "soft g" as a "hard g." This can be observed in the word 'margarine' (maagarin). The only explanation available to me at this point is spelling influence. The only other transcription of this type is of the word 'energy,' a loanword originally, at least, from German. But there seems to be no relation between them.

Conclusion

Many of the lexical items considered above show clear signs of orthographic influence in their transcribed status. However, we cannot thus assume that all of them were borrowed through literature or some other written source since 1) it seems quite likely that later entries could well have been transcribed on the pattern of earlier ones, i. e. analogy, and 2) some words while appearing to have phonetically oriented transcriptions are not consistent, e. g. 'volley ball.' Even though the stressed vowel is transcribed /a/ as opposed to /o/, the only transcription available for '-ey' is *ee*. If this item were truly phonetically oriented, the transcription should be *ii*.

In light of these two factors, it is impossible to declare inconclusively that one item is orthographically oriented and another is phonetically

oriented. Nevertheless, the above observations do point up the phonetic environments in which orthography is likely to influence transcription.

A Note on *Heart of Darkness*

Tokizo SANADA

The casual reader probably objects to *Heart of Darkness* on the grounds of its redundancy in the use of words like "inconceivable" and "mysterious," and its vagueness. Yet the vagueness and abstract elaboration of *Heart of Darkness* are intentional on the part of Conrad. A proper understanding of them will throw significant light on Marlow's narration of his spiritual voyage of self-discovery.

This essay seeks to analyze the evasiveness and symbolism of *Heart of Darkness* and Kurtz's deterioration.

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Wesley RICHARD

The *Katakana* transcription of English loanwords in Japanese is supposedly based upon pronunciation (phonetically motivated). However, a considerable number of words, even after taking into account various complicating factors appear to have transcriptions based upon spelling (orthographically oriented). This is true especially of certain English vowel sounds (/ə/ and /a/), final '-y' and '-ey' spellings, and double consonants. While evidence does not warrant precise classification of loanwords into each of the two classes, this study does point up those environments likely to be affected by spelling oriented transcription.