

## The Meaning and Use of *Waseieigo* in Present-Day Japanese

While considering the subject of *waseieigo*, it is essential to mention two important aspects of its present-day usage in Japanese language. The first refers to the etymology of *waseieigo* and its phonetic and morphologic layer (linguistic aspect). The second might be regarded as an attempt to present the link between the popularity of words which belong to the *waseieigo* group and some kind of sociological diversity in Japan (sociological aspect). Although Japanese society is often depicted as homogenic and collective, its internal structure is varied. The aim of this short paper is to introduce and describe the above-mentioned aspects of *waseieigo* in order to emphasize the mutual dependence between the language and its users.

### ***Waseieigo* – Linguistic Aspects of the Phenomenon**

The term: *waseieigo* 和製英語 can be literally translated as ‘English words made (or produced) in Japan’. *Eigo* 英語 means ‘English’ or ‘English words’, *wasei* 和製 – ‘produced/made in Japan’. However, this way of translation is not completely correct – one cannot consider *waseieigo* expressions as *English words*, since it is obvious that only English native speakers are able to create new ones, whilst the Japanese definitely not. Nevertheless, the term *waseieigo* is with no doubt connected with the English language. It refers to all vocabulary containing Japanese expressions made from English words or morphemes. However, we have to take into consideration that the meaning of these words has been extended from the original one and thereupon the safest way is to translate this term as a group of Japanese words which were made from English words or morphemes and where *katakana* symbols are used for its transcription. The most proper Polish term for *waseieigo* is: *wyrazy anglojapońskie*.

It is difficult to identify precisely when the first *waseieigo* expression appeared in the Japanese Archipelago. However, this matter is strongly related to the large-scale arrival of loanwords from English, firstly after the Meiji Restoration (1868- ) and then after the Second World War (1946- ) when Japan was under American occupation.

The process of borrowing some words or morphemes from English and forming new Japanese words is not a modern phenomenon. It can be compared to the process of forming Japanese words from Chinese

morphemes in the 5th and 6th centuries when numerous Chinese words were absorbed by the Japanese and now are still in use as *kango* (e.g. words like: *benkyō* 勉強 ‘science’, *en* 円 ‘yen’, *isha* 医者 ‘doctor’, *tenki* 天気 ‘the weather’ etc., or prefixes such as: *zen* 全 ‘all’, *sai* 最 ‘the best/the most’). Furthermore, analogically to *waseieigo* nowadays we can find in Japanese a huge group of *waseikango* 和製漢語 (Japanese-made kanji words). This term refers to Japanese words, written by *kanji*, which were mostly formed after the Meiji Restoration to express new notions that had appeared in Japan (e.g. *jiyū* 自由 ‘freedom’, *kaisha* 会社 ‘company’, *bunka* 文化 ‘culture’, *kannen* 觀念 ‘idea, notion, conception’, *kakumei* 革命 ‘revolution’).

While each *waseieigo* expression consists of some English-like words, its pronunciation should resemble the English one. Therefore, the understanding of them may appear to be not difficult for English native-speakers. However, it is essential to know that while forming a new *gairaigo* or *waseieigo* its pronunciation must fit to diction rules which are obligatory in the Japanese language. Furthermore, the way of spelling *waseieigo* is based on how the Japanese hear and assimilate English language and, as a result its pronunciation differs from the original.

In comparison to loanwords (*gairaigo*), *waseieigo* equivalents do not exist in English at all. For example, the Japanese way of calling Los Angeles city (which belongs to *waseieigo*) sounds: *rosu* ロス and was formed as a loan of the first part of the geographical name: *Los Angeles*. The abbreviation: *Los* does not exist in English as a way of calling this American city, so it is rather impossible to guess what the real meaning of *rosu* is. While reading Japanese newspapers or watching Japanese TV, we might come across some Japanese people titled by the word: *desuku* and then we can ask ourselves: who might Tanaka-desuku be? As we can guess *desuku* デスク is not an example of the loanword (*gairaigo*) but it is a typical *waseieigo*, which was made from the English word: *desk*. The meaning of this word has been completely changed – desk is not regarded here as an object, but as a title for a person who works as a reporter or editor in charge of a department at a newspaper. We can notice that every language is subjective and always reflects the specific reality we live in. As a result, some things which exist in one language sometimes cannot be understood by people from a different society and different culture, and therefore searching for accurate equivalents for those words in other languages may appear as a difficult or almost impossible matter.

### On some Aspects of *Waseieigo* Phonetics

Japanese vocabulary can be classified into three categories: *wago* (native Japanese words), *kango* (words of Chinese origin) and *gairaigo* (words of foreign origin). *Waseieigo* belongs to the *gairaigo* category, where one can find some phonetic differences in comparison with *wago* and *kango*. Therefore, only in *gairaigo* and *waseieigo* it is possible to distinguish the following phonetic changes:

1. fricative consonant [ç] can be followed by the vowel [e]:

sheipu pantsu シェイプ・パンツ eng. *shape + pants* ‘tight shorts’

2. flap (tap) consonant [ɾ] can be substituted for [l]:

rō tiin ロー・ティーン eng. *low + teen* ‘kids between 10 and 15 years of age’

3. fricative bilabial consonant [ɸ] can be followed by all Japanese vowels, not only by [u]:

fittonesu wōkingu フィットネス・ウォーキング eng. *fitness + walking* ‘walking to keep fit’

4. stop consonant [g] is spelled only as a non-nasal consonant (as for *kango* and *wago* it can be spelled either as nasal [ŋ] or non-nasal [g]):

ragu matto ラグ・マット eng. *rug + mat* ‘rug’

5. voiced labialized velar approximant [w] may be followed by all vowels (in *wago* and *kango* only by [a]):

uīntamu ウィンタム eng. the contraction for *wint(er) + (aut)umn* ‘shirt on a slip’

6. stop consonants [tʰ], [dʰ], occur only in *gairaigo* and *waseieigo* units:

disukomyunikēshon ディスココミュニケーション eng. *discommunication* ‘inability to speak one’s mind’

7. combinations of labiodental consonant [v] and vowels exist:

Reonarudo Dayinchi レオナルド・ダヴィンチ it. *Leonardo da Vinci*

8. combination of affricate consonant [dʒ] and vowel [e]:

jetto kōsutā ジェット・コースター eng. *jet coaster* ‘rollercoaster’

9. gemination of voiced consonants (as for *wago* and *kango* only voiceless consonants can be geminated):

*Buraddo Pitto* ブラッド・ピット eng. *Brad Pitt*

### **Waseieigo Morphology**

The morphology of *waseieigo* should not be regarded as a problematic issue. Its morphological structure is mostly based on one fundamental rule which is: creating a new word by connecting some borrowed from English morphemes or words. The next step is to phonetically adjust them to the Japanese language.

Nevertheless, we should mention one matter which is worth considering – the tendency to make contractions of words (e.g. *Tōdai* 東大 contraction of *Tōkyō Daigaku* 東京大学 ‘Tokyo University’, *kōkō* 高校 contraction of *kōtōgakkō* 高等学校 ‘high school’, etc.)

In present-day Japanese we can find numerous *waseieigo* that were formed as a contraction of two loanwords from English. The most common pattern is to take the first two moras of each of the two words, and combine them to form a new, single one:

*deko tora* デコ・トラ contraction of *dekoratibu torakku* デコラティブ・トラック ‘decorative truck’

*seku hara* セク・ハラ *sekushuaru harasumento* セクシュアル・ハラスメント ‘sexual harassment’

*rorikon* ロリコン *roriita konpurekkusu* ロリータ・コンプレックス ‘Lolita complex’

*pasokon* パソコン *pāsonaru konpyūta* パーソナル・コンピュータ ‘personal computer’

*famiresu* ファミレス *famirii resutoran* ファミリー・レストラン ‘family restaurant’

The same or similar pattern is used to make contractions of words for popular names, inventions, products or TV shows (not only of English origin):

*Burapi* ブラピ contraction of *Buraddo Pitto* ブラッド・ピット ‘Brad Pitt’

*Dikapuri* ディカプリ *Reonarudo Dikapurio* レオナルド・ディカプリオ ‘Leonardo DiCaprio’

*purikura* プリクラ *purinto kurabu* プリント・クラブ ‘print club’ ‘an automated photograph machine’

ポケモン *poketto monsutā* ポケット・モンスター ‘pocket monster’

### **Sociological Aspects**

The above-mentioned spheres (linguistic and sociological) undoubtedly influence each other and one cannot be detached from the other. This mutual dependence between some linguistic and sociological changes is not only based on individual, current needs of members of each society, but it also refers to some common phenomena, which exist around us. The word: *mutual* is the key-word here. The society we live in, and all changes and transformations which we meet in our every-day life have a great influence on the way we speak; on the other hand language can influence some aspects of each society as well (e.g. gaps between young and elderly people, or between people from different environments, determined by the usage of different vocabulary; the existence of femiolect, sociolect, etc.). *Sociolinguistics* is a science which analyses the connection between these two spheres. This term refers to the study of the effect of all aspects of society, including cultural, expectations, and context, on the way is used. These aspects determine the usage of *waseieigo* in present-day Japanese as well. Based on the results of a survey which was carried out by me amongst the Japanese to find out *what is their attitude toward waseieigo and who uses it mostly*, I would like to answer some basic questions about this matter.

### **Popularity**

The popularity of *waseieigo* obviously refers to the continuing increase in fascination with American culture. Once Japan was opened to Western influences, the possibility of learning English became a common thing and, therefore, nowadays the usage of some words which refer to English should bring no difficulties. What is more, we cannot disregard the importance of the Media, as we find them to be the most influential *carrier* of new vocabulary, especially foreign words, which are widely used by all TV and radio presenters.

However, it is essential to take into consideration that *waseieigo* is used especially when there is no possibility to call some things by using *wago* or *kango* expression. In Japanese vocabulary we can find plenty of examples of some *differences in nuance* between two words which, on the surface can mean the same, but in fact they refer to two different matters. One of

the most known examples is the *waseieigo* expression: *ofisuredii* オフィスレディー (consisting of two English units: *office* + *lady*). In comparison to: *joseijimuin* 女性事務員 (which is a *kango* term and means: ‘a female office worker’), *ofisuredii* describes a woman who is unmarried, still lives with her parents and usually works as a secretary. As we can see, the term: *joseijimuin* has a more general meaning, whilst *ofisuredii* has more particular connotations.

The common feature of every language is that their users always strive to make their language simpler. Some examples of *waseieigo* and *gairaigo* expressions are formed as a result of shortening loanwords [such as: *baito* バイト, shortened from *gairaigo*: *arubaito* アルバイト – a loanword from the German *Arbeit* (however, here *baito* refers to ‘a part-time job’, not to a regular job or a full-time job)]. Some of them are formed as a result of combining two loanwords together, which can be illustrated by the unit *basujakku* バスジャック ‘bus kidnapping’ (created from original English units: *bus* + [*hi*]jack)

There are plenty of reasons why people who responded to the survey find *waseieigo* useful and characteristic for present-day Japanese. They also claim that *waseieigo* is regarded as something *kakkoii* かつこいい ‘cool, trendy’, which makes their language more *up-to-date*.

### Users’ Identity

A characteristic feature of every culture and its language is the fact that the group of people considered to be most influenced by the latest modern things are teenagers. Japanese youngsters, who demonstrate a real admiration for Western culture and nowadays have an opportunity to study English, use *waseieigo* and *gairaigo* more often than elderly people, which is not surprising.

Those who are responsible for popularizing the usage of *waseieigo* are of course people connected with the Media industry (TV stars, singers, TV and radio presenters, also businessmen and people interested in mass culture). The Media touts, on a mass scale, all innovative things. *Waseieigo* is used mostly in areas such as: TV shows, commercials, pop culture, science and technology, newspapers and magazines, which is determined by the fact that in these areas we can observe the great impact of Westernization (fashion, music, movies etc.). We can also find many examples of *waseieigo* use in manga and anime (e.g. titles of popular manga and anime: *Sērā Mūn* セーラー・ムーン ‘Sailor Moon’ which is well-known by all Polish teenagers; some jargon terms, such as: *gāruzu*

*rabu* ガールズ・ラブ ‘girls love’ – Japanese jargon term for ‘a genre involving love between women in anime and manga’). We can also find many examples of *waseieigo* in modern literature, e.g. the name of a new genre of Japanese novel: *raito noberu* ライト・ノベル ‘light novel’, which refers to ‘small and portable illustrated books’.

Japanese slang is full of *waseieigo* constructions as well, and what we find more interesting – some of them are surprisingly difficult to interpret or even associate with English language. These colloquial expressions are often connected with the subject of sex, and belong to Japanese vulgarisms. We can introduce here some softer examples of these colloquialisms (however, we have to take into consideration that most of them were used until the 1980s and may now appear as quite out-of-date): *rēiji* レーイジ, shortened from the *gairaigo* unit *kurēiji* ‘crazy’, *apo* アポ<sup>o</sup> eng. *appointment* ‘a date’, *moderugan* モデルガン eng. *model* + *gun* ‘penis’, *hādo koa* ハード・コア eng. *hard core* ‘tough-looking homosexual’, *reinkōto* レインコート eng. *raincoat* ‘condom’, *maniakku* マニアック eng. *maniac* ‘someone who is a know-it-all about a subject’.

On the other hand, survey respondents suggested that the areas where the usage of *waseieigo* is not so common are: education, ceremonial speeches, and some cultural performances, as we can find there the impact of traditional culture. The group of people who uses *waseieigo* least is undoubtedly elderly Japanese people. According to the suggestions of the respondents of our survey – elderly people feel no need to use these unknown, English-like words and claim that they feel no bond with them. The survey also corresponds to the conviction that the older we are the more difficult it is for us to pronounce and remember new words, especially when they are loanwords.

### Difficulties

As mentioned earlier the pronunciation of *gairaigo* and *waseieigo* words must correspond with Japanese phonetic system, thus, theoretically the usage of them should not bring any difficulties. However, elderly people find it quite troublesome to pronounce some new sound combinations, such as: *wi* ウイ, *di* デイ, *vi* ヴイ, *je* ジェ, which often occur in *gairaigo* and *waseieigo* (Imamura 1996: 83).

One of the respondents of the survey claims that, in her opinion, all words written by katakana symbols can cause some difficulties for Japanese people. As they live in the world of kanji, it can be hard for them to

completely understand a word if they cannot imagine the sign of this word in their head.

What we find more troublesome is the fact that the term *waseieigo* usually refers to new words, new notions or names for things which did not exist before. We can find an expression, such as: ペーパー・ドライバー (*pēpā doraibā*) eng. *paper* + *driver* ‘the way of calling a person who has a driving license, but does not drive a car at all’, which is known by most Japanese people because it refers to something that is common in Japan. On the other hand, in some dictionaries we can find an expression, such as: デコ・トラ (*deko tora*) eng. *deco(rative)* + *tru(ck)* ‘the truck which was decorated on purpose’, which refers to something rare and unknown.

As we can see, the knowledge and usage of these kind of expressions depend on whether something is close to us, exists in our surroundings, or how often it is used by us in our everyday life.

### **The *Waseieigo* Consciousness**

People are able to speak and communicate using (easily and freely) their native languages, but they rarely consider why they use *that word* and not *the other*, or why they pronounce *these words* and not their synonyms. Being an ordinary person means that we do not have to be completely aware of our language, or possess more detailed knowledge of any linguistic matter. That is the reason why some respondents said that while answering our survey, for the first time, they were obliged to think about their language and consider things, which had seemed to them obvious before.

Do we know and completely understand the language we use, or is it rather a matter of context, which influences the way we understand an expression and use it, or just a matter of our speaking habits? In Japanese we can find some confusing pairs of words (the first one belongs to *kango* or *wago* and the second one belongs to *gairaigo*) which (on the surface) seems to be synonyms, but in fact, they are not. The difference between them depends on the context and prevalence [e.g. *chiketto* チケット and *kippu* 切符, both mean: ‘a ticket’; the latter unit usually refers to a bus or train ticket, while the former is rather used as general reference to tickets]. Analogically, there is a Japanese way of calling *wife* as *tsuma* 妻, or *waifu* ワイフ however, *waifu* is not so popular nowadays and is rather classified as *shigo* 死語 (dead language, which is sometimes used by elderly people). *Waifu* is also used by comics when they are joking about women from the West. On the other hand, the word *tsuma* has different connotations – it is a modest way of referring to one’s own wife in Japanese. In spite of the fact

that these words belong to the same semantic fields, differences between them are dictated by context.

As we can observe, context has a leading role in Japanese conversation, and sometimes it is even more significant than words. Here, I would like to mention the work of Edward Hall, entitled *Beyond culture*, where he presented his concept of dividing cultures into two particular types: high-context cultures and low-context cultures (Hall 1976). The first type refers to all groups and societies where people have close connections and interaction over a long time, which makes their communication more implicit and helps them to understand each other with fewer words. Edward Hall has claimed that Asian cultures (the Japanese and Korean) are more like that, when European cultures (especially from the North) should be classified as low-context cultures, as the communication between people living there is more explicit, requires more detailed information and words are more valuable than non-verbal communication. Consequently, we find it troublesome to understand some Japanese expressions, although we do our best to learn Japanese. According to Edward Hall's conception this inconvenience might be determined by the fact that, as living in central Europe, we belong to a low-context culture.

To conclude, no matter whether the attitude toward a still increasing number of loanwords and *waseieigo* in Japan is positive or rather negative, we can be sure that its growing use is unavoidable. The process of borrowing words from one language and incorporating them into another one is common and characteristic for all languages, not only for Japanese. However, the way the Japanese create their English-like words from some borrowed morphemes and use them in their everyday life on such a mass scale seems to be quite astonishing.

The use of *waseieigo* can be regarded as the most suitable way of calling something that is new, exotic, or has a peculiar connotation and it makes spoken language more up-to-date as well. Being aware of this fact can help us believe that this huge group of words is an irreplaceable part of the Japanese language.

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