

What can be learned from borrowed words?

-The case of Japanese language borrowing words ending with a closed syllables-

Claude Roberge, Norico Hoki

When language A borrows words, it borrows them according to its own phonetic rules. In other words, language B, where borrowed words coming from, has to comply with the phonetic requirements of language A. It may be added that language A only borrows the elements, the types of syllables and accentuation that already exist in its own phonetic structure and rejects all the rest that are not compatible. It operates exactly like a sieve. That is why borrowed words offer an excellent observation post to notice how react in phonetic contexts.

The Japanese language has borrowed and is borrowing extensively from other languages and cultures, mainly from the English ones in the fields of sports, medicine, industry, commerce, and natural sciences. Relatively very few new words are created using the ancient Chinese or native backgrounds.

This presentation will look for the rules of borrowing and try to show that this way of borrowing represents an organized system of its own. Three levels would be particularly studied :

- the phonemic level
- the syllable level and
- the accentual level.

This last point would be specially targeted with the question of syllable tension-relaxation.

Such a study of languages in phonetics contacts could shed some new light on the phonetic characteristics of Japanese language and will confirm or weaken some conclusion already demonstrated otherwise.

We will be aiming specially at the endings of the borrowed words where, it seems, Japanese language manifests itself very strongly.