

Motives for Semantic Borrowing and Calquing from Old Chinese into Japanese

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LSA Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, January 2–5, 2014

1. Introduction. The influence of the Chinese language¹ on Japanese over the past two millennia has been immense, ranging from the wholesale adoption of the Chinese writing system (*kanji*), to the adoption of Chinese as a literary language (*kanbun*) and the borrowing of multitudes of Chinese words (*kango*). In the past, the main focus of Chinese-Japanese borrowing has been on loanwords and loanword phonology (Yamada 1958, NINJL 2006, etc.). In addition to loanwords, a large number of substitution-based loans (calques and semantic loans) have also occurred through Chinese-Japanese contact. Although previous studies have acknowledged the existence of such substitution-based loans (Yamada 1935, Satō 1981, Ōtsubo 1981), until recently, very little research has been available on the subject and no thorough analysis of how such loans occur. More recently, Ishizuka (2005, 2012, 2013) and Zisk (2009, 2010, 2012, 2013abc) have revisited the topic, but the motives behind such substitution-based loans still remain largely unclear.

Perhaps the most unique feature surrounding substitution-based loans is the method in which these loans entered the Japanese language. The vast majority (if not all) substitutions from Chinese occurred through *kanbun kundoku* (translated by Whitman et al. 2010 as ‘vernacular reading’), a systematic process in which Chinese texts are translated word-by-word spontaneously through a series of reading glosses. Through vernacular reading, one can interpret Chinese texts in Japanese with little to no knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the original language. The goal of this paper is to look into the motives of such substitution-based loans.

2. A typology of linguistic borrowing from Old Chinese into Japanese. Linguistic borrowing is typically broken down into two main categories: 1. Importation, in which phonetic/lexical items are directly transferred from donor to recipient language, and 2. Substitution, in which items of the donor language are reproduced indirectly using lexicon of the recipient language (Betz 1949, 1959, Haugen 1950, 1969, Duckworth 1977). Substitutions in Chinese-Japanese contact can be further broken down into loan grammar, in which Japanese grammar and syntax is influenced by Chinese, loan coinages, in which new words are formed based on Chinese models, and loan meanings, in which the sense of a word is expanded or constricted to match a Chinese model.

Loan grammar consists of loan POS (part of speech)-shifts, where a word’s lexical category is altered to match a Chinese model and loan syntax, where word order is altered to match Chinese syntax. Loan coinages consist of loan translations, in which a new compound (loan compound) or phrase (loan phrase) is formed based off of the direct translation of a Chinese model; loan renderings, in which a new compound or phrase is formed based off of a partial translation; loan creations, where a new word is formed independent of the Chinese source but nonetheless due to cultural contact; annotational renderings, in which a new compound is formed based on a direct or approximate translation of an annotation in a text or dictionary describing the meaning of a Chinese character; and etymological renderings, in which a compound is formed by directly translating each component of a Chinese character.

* Acknowledgements: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25870077.

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¹ In this paper, the term ‘Old Chinese’ is used to refer to all pre-modern variants of the language and not any particular linguistic period. Unless otherwise stated, the term ‘Chinese’ is used to refer to Old Chinese in the above sense.

3. Calquing and semantic borrowing in vernacular reading. Above, I have outlined the various types of Chinese loans observed in the Japanese language. In the following section, I will take a more detailed look at substitution-based loans using actual examples.

3.1 EXAMPLE #1: *IFA-KU* (SOV → SVO) (LOAN SYNTAX). Since Japanese is an SOV language and Chinese is an SVO language, it was necessary to invert either the Chinese or Japanese word order when vernacularly reading Chinese texts. In many cases, inversion glosses consisting of numerals or symbols were added to the text and word order was inverted to fit Japanese syntax. However, in a few cases, the glossator would use the nominal form (irrealis + *-ku*) of a verb to form a SVO sentence, preserving the original Chinese word order. While this construction was used with a number of verbs, it was by far most frequently used with the verb for ‘to say,’ *ifu*. For example, in vernacular reading, the Chinese verb 曰 *yuē* (‘to say’) at the beginning of a quotation would typically be glossed with the nominal form of *ifu* (= *ifa-ku*):

- (1) *Bonwau no ifa-ku, "Kono genke no fito fa karada kore aru ni arazu..."*
 Brahmā GEN sav.NMNL this māyā GEN person TOP body this have LOC have.NEG
 ‘Brahmā said, ‘This person is a māyā [‘illusion’] and has no physical form...’
Konkōsaishōmyōōkyō [Golden Light Sutra] Saidaiji M.S. vol. 5 (early 9C)²

In the example above, Ch. 曰 *yuē* is glossed verbatim, SVO word order intact, with Jp. *ifa-ku*. While examples of inversion (or more appropriately, anastrophe) can be found in Old-Middle Japanese prose and verse (*wabun* and *waka*), it is typically used as a literary technique to express emphasis and we find very few examples of a verb such as *ifu* being used to open a quotation.

4.2 EXAMPLE #2: *OYOBI / NARABI-NI*. *Oyobu* (‘to reach’) and *narabu* (‘to be parallel to’) are two Japanese verbs which underwent a major shift both semantically and morphologically in vernacular reading. In Old-Middle Japanese prose and poetry, these verbs are used to express the two senses listed above; however, through continuous use of these two verbs to gloss Ch. 及 *jí* and 並 *bìng*, possessing the same two verbal senses as *oyobu* and *narabu* respectively, they each acquired the conjunctive usage (‘and’) that 及 *jí* and 並 *bìng* also possess:

- (2) *Sho-ten oyobi yo-bito mi-te, kore ni mina kanki-su*
 devatas and (reach.ADV) world-people look-GER this LOC everyone rejoice-do.CONCL
 ‘The devatas [‘gods’] and the people of the world looked upon this and all rejoiced.’
Daichidoron [Treatise of the Perfection of Great Wisdom] vol. 3; Shōgozō M.S. (880 A.D.)³

In the example above, the part of speech of *oyobu* is morphologically altered by using the adverbial form of the verb to form a conjunction.

4.3 EXAMPLE #3: *TORAFE-BITO / TORAFARE-BITO*. The compounds *torafe-bito* (capture.ADV-person) and *torafare-bito* (be.captured.ADV-person) each denote a ‘prisoner’ and are found primarily in Chinese-Japanese glosses or Chinese character dictionaries as a gloss for Ch. 囚人 *qiú-rén* (capture-person > prisoner) or 囚徒 *qiú-tú* (capture-fellow > prisoner):

- (3) *Arayuru torafe-bito (Ch. 囚徒 qiú-tú), jifu ni si-te iti wo mattaku-se-zu.*
 All prisoner ten LOC do-GER one ACC endure-do-NEG.CONCL
 ‘Out of all the prisoners, not even one in ten could endure (the pain).’

² Kasuga (1985).

³ Kobayashi (2012).

Both *torafe-bito* and *torafare-bito* are not found in traditional Japanese prose and verse and make their first appearance in the Chinese-Japanese glosses. Considering that the concept of a prisoner of the law was originally foreign to Japan and introduced from China during the seventh-eighth century, it is only natural that these words first appear in glosses, and thus highly probable that they were coined as loan translations of 囚人 *qiú-rén* and 囚徒 *qiú-tú*.

4.4 EXAMPLE #4: *NOSU*. In modern Japanese, the verb *noseru* (Old-Middle Japanese *nosu*) has the following two senses: 1. ‘to put in/onto a vehicle, horse, or other mountable animal’; 2. ‘to record (an event, a name, etc.).’ When we look at the meaning of *nosu* in Old and Early Middle Japanese prose and verse, we find that *nosu* is used exclusively for sense #1; however, if we are to observe Chinese-Japanese glosses from the same period, we find this word taking on the new sense #2 as a vernacular reading for Ch. 載 *zǎi*:

- (4) *Furuki fon ni naki tokoro wo, kono fumi ni tomo-ni nose-tari.*
old.ADN book LOC nonexistent.ADN place ACC this text LOC together-LOC record-PER.CONCL
‘(I) have recorded here in this tome that which is not in the ancient books.’

*Daijōdaishūjizōjūringyō [Ten Chakras of Kṣitigarbha,
Mahāyāna Great Collection utra] Tōdaiji Library M.S. Preface (892 A.D.)⁵*

Since 載 *zǎi* possesses the same sense #1 as Japanese *nosu*, ‘to put on/into a vehicle,’ it is highly likely that *nosu* was chosen as a vernacular reading for 載 *zǎi* and then expanded to cover the sense ‘to record,’ which at the time had no equivalent in Japanese, as the recording of documents was a novel concept in Japan up until the adoption of Chinese characters and literature.

4.5 EXAMPLE #3: *AKASU*. The verb *akasu* is used to express the following two senses in Modern Japanese: 1. ‘to spend the night (doing something)’ and 2. ‘to clarify.’ If we look at Old-Middle Japanese prose and verse, we find *akasu* used primarily for sense #1; however, when looking at Chinese-Japanese glosses, we find that *akasu* is frequently used as a gloss for 明 *míng* to express the act of clarification or enlightening.

- (5) *Kofe no naka ni mimeu no kata no sange no fofu akasu...*
voice GEN inside LOC marvelous GEN gāthā GEN ksama GEN doctrine clarify.ADN
... ‘Within the voice (of the gong), a marvelous gāthā [‘verse’] on the doctrine of ksama
[‘confession and repentance’] was revealed.’

Konkōmyōsaishōkyō [Golden Light Sutra] Saidaiji M.S. vol. 2 (early 9C)⁶

This usage of *akasu* as a gloss for 明 *míng* is predominant throughout Early Middle Japanese manuscripts of Buddhist texts; however, we very rarely see *akasu* used in this sense in traditional prose and verse. Therefore, it is only logical to conclude that *akasu* borrowed the sense ‘to clarify’ from 明 *míng* through the vernacular reading process in a fashion similar to *nosu*.

While 明 *míng* does not possess the sense ‘to spend the night’ that we see in *akasu*, it is commonly used in Tang poetry, as a transitive verb with the sense, ‘to light up’ or ‘to illuminate.’ The root of *akasu*, *ak-*, also expresses this meaning light and brightness (cf. *akasi*: ‘bright’) and thus,

⁴ Kōten Hozonkai (1938). Interpreted text (*kakikudashibun*) reconstructed by author.

⁵ Nakada (1979). Nakada mistakenly interprets *chū* 注 as *jū* 住.

⁶ Kasuga (1985).

it is believed that through analogy of this fundamental sense of light and brightness, seen in both *akasu* (or more specifically, the root *ak-*) and 明 *míng*, *akasu* came to be commonly used as a vernacular reading for 明 *míng* and borrowed sense #2 ‘to clarify’ from this character.

5. Motives for substitution-based loans in vernacular reading. Looking at the five examples given above, we can see the following two characteristics, each of which could be said to be a motivating factor of the initial borrowing: loan coinages and loan meanings tend to be deeply linked semantically with cultural adoption and loan grammar tends to be heavily connected to the practice of prescribing set vernacular readings (‘prescribed readings’) to Chinese characters.

5.1 CULTURAL ADOPTION. Each of the loan meaning examples given above represent cultural concepts: *nosu* is an expression of writing and *akasu* is an expression of elucidation, both relatively new concepts in Japan at the time of the adoption of Chinese characters and writing. While native expressions for writing did exist prior to Chinese contact, these expressions were too broad or general to express the relatively specific expressions used in Chinese literature. For example, the word *kaku* is attested back to the Old Japanese period; however, *kaku* is used to express the general concept of writing including drawing, sketching, painting, etc. and is thus too broad to adequately express the more specialized meaning of 載 *zǎi*. There were no so-called expressions of elucidation prior to Chinese contact, but there were similar expressions. For example, the word *tutafu* represents the transmission of knowledge from one person to another; however, *tutafu* tends to focus on the transmission of practical knowledge, such as how to play an instrument, rather than pure theoretical knowledge, which is usually the object of 明 *míng*.

5.2 PRESCRIBED READING. In the vernacular reading practice, each Chinese character is typically given a *kun* or native reading which is used to render the character in Japanese. Chinese characters tend to possess several distinct meanings and due to the isolating nature of the language, Chinese characters (or morphemes) are often used to express more than one part of speech. Thus, it was common for Japanese glossators to ascribe multiple readings to a single character depending on meaning and part of speech. Over time, however, through years of glossing and dictionary traditions, a set of established readings, known as *teikun* (‘prescribed readings’), which were easily recallable by both glossator and reader came to develop. While it was still common for a single character to have multiple prescribed readings, in many cases, prescribed readings would cover much more territory, semantically, morphologically, and at times syntactically, than their traditional Japanese prose and verse counterparts. Ritual adherence to such prescribed readings in vernacular reading eventually lead to the development of unnatural and bizarre constructions, such as word order inversions (SOV > SVO: *ifaku*) and shifts in part of speech (*oyobi*), as well as a large number of not impossible but improbable semantic extensions.

6. Conclusion: Vernacular reading as a contributing factor to the formation of Japanese. As the examples in this paper demonstrate, the influence of Chinese on the Japanese language is massive, covering, but not limited to, vocabulary (loanwords), semantics (loan meanings), morphology (loan POS-shifts), and syntax (loan syntax). While in Indo-European languages, the main motive for substitution-based loans is usually said to be homonymy between the donor and recipient language, in Japanese, we see zero homonymy (since Chinese and Japanese are genetically unrelated), but instead, vernacular reading and prescribed readings as the major motive for substitution-based loans. This heavy adherence to prescribed readings and over-systematization of the vernacular reading process gave rise to the formation of highly metaphrastic constructions and improbable semantic expansions, greatly contributing to the formation of the Japanese language.

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