The Incorporation of English Noun Loanwords into Japanese Syntax

Tabatha Mason, Simon Fraser University

Abstract

This paper was originally written for Heather Bliss's LING 282W course *Writing for Linguistics*. The assignment asked students to write a short experimental or argument paper expanded from an earlier practice writing exercise. The paper uses APA citation style.

Introduction/Background

Suru is a commonly used auxiliary verb in Japanese, loosely translated as "to do", known to form light verb constructions (Wang and Ikeda, 2008). Wang and Ikeda (2008) define light verb constructions as multiword expressions that consist of a light verb and a complement. Japanese light verb constructions[1] can be formed in two ways: a) a verbal noun (VN) and the light verb *-suru* and b) a verbal noun (VN), an accusative marker *-wo*, and the light verb *-suru* (Sode, 1995).

All VN's in Japanese have the ability to attach to the light verb *-suru* (option a) but not all verbal nouns can form light verb constructions with an accusative marker (option b) (Sode, 1995). There are different views on what is considered a VN in Japanese. Sode (1995) takes on the point of view that VN's are a class of nouns with their own argument structure that can directly attach to *-suru*.

Day to day conversation sees the use of the light verb *-suru* with English loanwords in colloquial Japanese.

---

[1]There is a debate among researchers over whether *-suru* constructions should be considered light verbs or heavy verbs; in this study we will take the position that they are light verb constructions.

Japanese has seen a large influx of English loanwords in its vocabulary in recent year, topping 45,000 words in the year 2000 (Rebuck, 2002). Loanwords are words that are adopted from foreign languages, with little to no modification (Merriam-Webster). Seeing as English vocabulary has such a salient influence on Japanese, I question how it is incorporated into Japanese syntax. Does it follow the same light verb construction formation as standard Japanese?

Many papers address the structure of light verb constructions in Japanese, however, the relationship of English loanwords and Japanese LVC's is an

understudied area. In an attempt to address this, the present pilot study will examine English noun loanwords in relation to Japanese light verb constructions. Following what Wang and Ikeda (2008) and Sode (1995) say about light verb constructions, I hypothesize that English noun loanwords can transform into Japanese verbs using the light verb *-suru*. Should the hypothesis be true, I predict that English noun loanwords will act as verbal nouns to form light verb constructions when paired with the suffix *-suru*.

      To provide background for this study, I will introduce myself. I am a simultaneous bilingual Japanese-English speaker. I was born in Kyoto, Japan and raised in British Columbia, Canada. I am a second-year student at Simon Fraser University with a disciplinary background in Linguistics.

Methodology

Data collection and procedure

Data was collected from 5 Japanese interviews on YouTube. 50 English loanwords were extracted by examining the video transcripts. Of the 50 words, 45 English noun loanwords were used for the corpus. A survey was created using the corpus. In the survey, each English noun loanword was paired with the light verb *-suru*. Seeing as the accusative marker is not used with all light verb constructions (Sode, 1995), it was not taken account for in the present study. The sole participant who took part in this case study was a native Japanese speaker, age 54. They were born and raised in Japan for the majority of their life, in the Mie prefecture. They have since moved to B.C, Canada, where they acquired English as their L2. The survey was printed, and took place in a quiet room of a private residence in B.C. The participant was asked to underline either grammatical or ungrammatical for the English noun loanwords paired with *-suru* (conjugated in both the past and present tense). A sample of the questions given can be seen in (1) and (2).

(1) チェックインしてる。(grammatical/ungrammatical)
    tyekkuin   shiteru
    check-in   do
    'I am checking in'

(2) チェックインした。   (grammatical/ungrammatical)
    tyekkuin   shita
    check-in   did
    'I checked in'

Results/Discussion

Initial results
The results of the survey found that 14 of the 45 English noun loanwords were considered grammatical as displayed in Table 1. These loanwords were indicated to be grammatical both in present tense (*-shiteru*) and past tense (*-shita*), as show in example (3) and (4). Sentences (5) and (6) are examples of loanwords that were indicated to be ungrammatical, both in present and past tense.

English Noun Loanword	Noun + suru	LVC Meaning
Cut	katto suru	To cut
Image	ime-ji suru	To image/ picture
Mask	masuku suru	To wear a mask
Communication	komunike-shon suru	To communicate/talk to someone
Check-in	tyekkuin suru	To check-in
Sign	sain suru	To sign
Tattoo	tatoxu- suru	To have tattoos
Minus	mainasu suru	To subtract
Request	rikuesuto suru	To request
Band (musical)	bando suru	To be in a band
Wrap	rappu suru	To wrap
Joke	jo-ku suru	To joke
Hug	hagu suru	To hug
Process	purosesu suru	To process

Table 1: Results from survey indicating English noun loanwords that can be paired with *-suru.*

(3) yakuza   wa   tatoxu- shiteru
    mafia   NOM tattoo do
    'The mafia members have tattoos'

(4) yakuza   wa   tatoxu- shiteta
    mafia   NOM tattoo did
    'The mafia members had tattoos'

(5) kyou wa   doa- shita*
    today NOM door do
    'Today I do door'

(6) kyo   wa   doa- shimasu*
    today NOM door did

'Today I did door'

The results indicate that the hypothesis for this study was not entirely correct in that not all English noun loanwords can be turned into Japanese verbs by simply attaching the light verb *-suru*. However, English noun loanwords that were indicated to be grammatical did follow the prediction correctly. As seen in sentences (1) and (2), English noun loanwords that were indicated to be grammatical functioned like Japanese verbal nouns with *-suru* to Japanese light verb constructions.

Brief discussion of results

The results concluded that not all English noun loanwords were found to be able to take on verb forms as hypothesized. This brings up the question of categorization. What determines which English noun loanwords can and can't turn into light verb constructions using the light verb *-suru*? As discussed in the introduction, Japanese verbal nouns attach to the light verb *-suru* to form a light verb construction (Sode, 1995). Therefore, I propose alternatively that only English noun loanwords that are already verbal nouns in English can be transformed into Japanese light verbs.

Second Analysis

In an attempt to support the new proposal, an analysis of the 'grammatical' LVC's formed with English noun loanwords in Table 1 was conducted. A search for patterns in the English noun loanwords found that 11/14 were English verbal nouns. A verbal noun in English is a very broad term for all verb-derived words that can function as nouns (Grammar monster, 2020). Table 2 outlines the English verbal nouns found in Table 1 and their respective verb counterparts.

Verbal Noun	Verb
Cut	To cut
Image	To image (something/someone)
Communication	To communicate
Check-in	To check-in
Sign	To sign
Tattoo	To tattoo
Request	To request
Wrap	To wrap
Joke	To joke
Hug	To hug
Process	To process

Table 2: Verbal nouns extracted from Table 1

The remaining nouns (mask, minus, band) were not considered verbal nouns, which suggests that light verb constructions formed with English noun loanwords are not limited to English verbal nouns. However, without a larger corpus, it is impossible to try and categorize these other English noun loanwords. Although the second analysis did find that most of the English noun loanwords shown to work in Japanese LVC's were English verbal nouns, no other significant results were provided.

General Discussion

Unlike what was originally hypothesized, the results found that the adaptation of English noun loanwords into Japanese light verb constructions was much more complex than anticipated. Despite not showing any significant results, the general finding that English verbal nouns can become Japanese verbs does suggest some other possibilities. For example, would English slang, such as the word "flex" (to show off/a boast), suggested to have both verb and noun properties (Dictionnary.com, 2020) , also be grammatical with *-suru?* What about other parts of speech such as English adjectives, or verbs? Are there any limitations? These questions are areas that could be examined in further research.

Limitations and further research

The present pilot study has several limitations. The biggest limitation would be the significant lack of participants. This left room for biased answers affected by the demographics (Age, background, English knowledge) of the participant. A more appropriate study would involve more Japanese participants of varying ages who still reside in Japan. Another significant limitation would be the size of the corpus. The initial corpus of 50 words was quite small. In the first experiment, a larger corpus could produce a wider range of results. In the second analysis, categorization proved to be impossible due to the corpus size. A corpus of at least 200 words might be better suited for this study. I suggest for this study to be expanded with these limitations in mind, to provide more accurate results.

Conclusion

Although the predictions were found to be true in the study, the hypothesis was found only to be partially true. It was found that not all English noun loanwords could form Japanese light verbs with the suffix *-suru*. An analysis of the English noun loanwords that could form Japanese light verbs found that most were English verbal nouns. However, the remaining English noun loanwords were not able to be categorized, as the remaining corpus was too small to analyse. It is important to recognize that this study did not attempt to examine the structural relationship of English noun loanwords and Japanese LVC's, but rather attempted to categorize English noun loanwords that can and can't turn into verbs in

Japanese. This study showed potential in understanding how English is adopted into the Japanese language. Further expansion of this study was suggested, with a larger corpus and a greater number of participants for better accuracy.

_____

The research in this paper was reconducted with a different corpus, slight changes to the methodology and more participants for the Linguistics Student Union Research Conference at UBC 2021. The conclusion to the research was the same. More information can be found following the QR code.

Appendix A: Corpus

	ENGLISH	ROMAJI (MODERN HEPBURN)	*-suru*
1.	Animator	anime-ta-	anime-ta- suru
2.	Scene	shi-n	shi-n suru
3.	Character	kyarakuta-	kyarakuta- suru
4.	Fantasy	fuxantaji-	fuxantaji- suru
5.	Chance	chansu	chansu suru
6.	Position	pojishon	pojishon suru
7.	Mike	maiku	maiku suru
8.	Cut	katto	katto suru
9.	Writer	raita-	raita- suru
10.	Image	ime-ji	ime-ji suru
11.	Manner	mana-	mana- suru
12.	Bus	basu	basu suru
13.	Café	kafye	kafye suru
14.	Out	auto	auto suru
15.	Table	te-buru	te-buru suru
16.	Door	doa-	doa- suru
17.	Mask	masuku	masuku suru
18.	Influenza	infuruenza	infuruenza suru
19.	Communication	komunike-shon	komunike-shon suru
20.	Camera	kamera	kamera suru
21.	Video Camera	bideokamera	bideokamera suru
22.	Hotel	hoteru	hoteru suru
23.	Check-in	tyekkuin	tyekkuin suru

24. Sign	sain	sain suru
25. Restaurant	resutoran	resutoran suru
26. Menu	menyu-	menyu- suru
27. Escalator	esukare-ta-	esukare-ta- suru
28. Level	reberu	reberu suru
29. Percent	pa-sento	pa-sento suru
30. Artist	a-chisuto	a-chisuto suru
31. Stress	sutoresu	sutoresu suru
32. Tattoo	tatoxu-	tatoxu- suru
33. Minus	mainasu	mainasu suru
34. Media	medhia	medhia suru
35. News	nyu-su	nyu-su suru
36. Request	rikuesuto	rikuesuto suru
37. Band	bando	bando suru
38. Wrap	rappu	rappu suru
39. Shock	shokku	shokku suru
40. Joke	jo-ku	jo-ku suru
41. Hug	hagu	hagu suru
42. Drama	dorama	dorama suru
43. Scale	suke-ru	suke-ru suru
44. Mainstream	meinsutori-mu	meinsutori-mu suru
45. Process	purosesu	purosesu suru

References

Asian Boss. (2019, June 4th). What's considered rude in Japan? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4dIOh56tr0&list=PLNcsrDKckqt iGaGMSHd0JRZamcM_Mxosu&index=1

Asian Boss. (n.d). Can Japanese speak in pure Japanese? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88Nh0wvQGYk

Asian Boss. (2018, February 3). What the Japanese think of tattoos. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzjwc6uo6rE

Asian Boss. (2017, April 21). What Japanese think of America. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z87PPu05sdY

Dictionary.com (n.d.). Flex. In Dictionary.com. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/rebuff?s=t

Easy languages. (2015, January 19th). Easy Japanese 14-Why do Japanese wear masks? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW67Hd7RJgQ&list=PLNcsrDKck qtiGaGMSHd0JRZamcM_Mxosu&index=5&t=243s

Grammar Monster. (n.d). What are verbal nouns? https://www.grammar-monster.com/glossary/verbal_nouns.htm

Matsumoto, Y. (1996). A syntactic account of light verb phenomena in Japanese. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00215071

Merriam-Webster (n.d). Loanword. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/ dictionary/loanword.

Miyamoto, T. (1999). The Light Verb Construction in Japanese: The Role of the Verbal Noun. https://dspace.library.uvic.ca//handle/1828/9772

Rebuck, M. (2002). The Function of English Loanwords in Japanese https://www.nucba.ac.jp/themes/s_cic@cic@nucba/pdf/njlcc041/06R EBUCK.PDF

Shimada, A., & Kordoni, V. (2003). Japanese "Verbal Noun and Suru" Constructions. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.531.9537&re p=rep1&type=pdf

Sode, R. (1995). Intentionality and VN-suru constructions in Japanese. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/489588.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A797 921bd1158249cf3a1d2162e322227

Wang, Y., & Ikeda, T. (2008). *Translation of the Light Verb Constructions in Japanese Chinese Machine Translation*. https://www.cicling.org/2008/RCS-vol-33/11-Wang.pdf

By submitting this essay, I attest that it is my own work, completed in accordance with University regulations. I also give permission for the Student Learning Commons to publish all or part of my essay as an example of good writing in a particular course or discipline, or to provide models of specific writing techniques for use in teaching. This permission applies whether or not I win a prize and includes publication on the Simon Fraser University website or in the SLC Writing Commons Open Journal.

Available from: https://journals.lib.sfu.ca/index.php/slc-uwc