

# English Loanwords from Japanese: A Survey of the Perceptions of American English Speakers

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近年英語に取り入れられた日本語語源語彙に対する  
北米英語話者の理解とその文法的使用

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## ABSTRACT

As Japanese cultural patterns and icons have become more familiar to English-speaking North Americans, several new vocabulary items have entered the English language from Japanese sources. A selection of some of the more common and newer terms from Japanese was made based on print sources and conversational use by American English speakers. The words chosen were: *geisha*, *tsunami*, *kamikaze*, *honcho*, *hibachi*, *karaoke*, *anime*, *manga*, *otaku*, *edamame*, and *sudoku*. A survey of speakers of American English of a wide range of ages and backgrounds was conducted to determine the sense of the meanings of these words from the informants' point of view, the ways in which the words are used in grammatical structures, and the degree of awareness of the language origin of the words. A comparison of the response rates by the participants is made to a historical timeline of the words in dictionaries and their frequency of use in a major American English corpus. A report on the emerging consensus of meaning, grammatical usage, and collocation by communities of speakers is presented. Each item is also analyzed for changes that have occurred in meaning as compared to the original and present meaning in Japanese.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is well-documented and known even to the casual linguistic observer that a large number of English and other language vocabulary has entered the Japanese language and been transformed in both meaning and form in the process. The reverse has been happening on a much smaller but escalating scale in English. While the English language has been a prolific absorber of vocabulary from other languages, typically this vocabulary has been from the European languages in which English has its roots. However, the Japanese language has contributed the highest number of new vocabulary items to English for a non-European-based language in recent years (McArthur).

## II. BACKGROUND

Loan words enter a language for a variety of reasons, some of which may apply to loanwords from Japanese:

- 1) Speakers are very familiar with the other language and may be bilingual speakers. This can be ruled out as a reason for borrowing from Japanese. The only term on the survey that may have occurred because of close proximity of speakers is *honcho*, from World War II prison camps.
- 2) Close contact with the loaner culture: this may apply in certain fields because of the ease of access to information on the Internet, especially for certain media forms such as *manga* and *anime*.
- 3) A sense of need: terms for new technology or education (including entertaining forms), such as *tsunami*, which was deliberately selected as a scientific term in 1963 (Chamfort), and *karaoke* and *sudoku*.
- 4) New food or other material items: *edamame*.
- 5) Terms borrowed to make a distinction between similar items: *hibachi* as a smaller form of a barbecue grill.
- 6) Prestige associated with the borrowed words: for young people, being in the “know” about terms for pop culture, again *manga*, *anime*, and also *otaku*.
- 7) Cultural images that make such a strong impact that the word from the culture where the image originally occurred is the term adopted: *geisha* and *kamikaze*.

In the process of being contextualized in the new language, loanwords undergo a transformation in pronunciation (a process not addressed in this paper), in form, by becoming shortened or added to another word, and in grammatical function, for instance, changing from a noun to a verb (Kemmer, Mahouney).

The typical sources for confirming whether or not a loanword has actually entered the English lexicon are traditional dictionaries, which base their entries on use of the term in print, and, more recently, language corpora, which are able, through the use of computer analysis, to include numerous examples of the word in print and in the voice media.

Loanwords in English with Japanese roots appear in a wide variety of media: magazines, novels, Internet broadcasts, even store advertisements. While corpora can document how often loanwords appear and what contexts they occur in, to what extent an average American speaker of English is familiar with these loanwords is a question that warrants some exploration.

Another way to examine the acceptance of a loanword into English is to discover how it is used among a

community of speakers. Language is very much a social activity and its patterns are not much varied among speakers of the same language with a community. One feature of language is how stable and set the patterns are in a group (McArthur). A community of speakers coordinate their language patterns beyond what would be necessary for communication (Hudson). By examining how a loanword is perceived and used by people who live in a similar setting and who share a common language, it should be possible to see to what extent and in what fashion a loanword has been absorbed into the language.

### III. THE STUDY

A survey was conducted of a variety of mainly American English speakers to see how familiar they were with a list of Japanese loanwords and to see how they used these terms for meaning.

#### 1. Method:

A list of Japanese loanwords was created based on words seen in various print and on-line media as well as words heard in daily conversations with English speakers living in the U.S. Categories of words that belonged to special interests or hobbies were eliminated, including terms for martial arts such as karate or judo, terms for clothing known to those interested in Japanese art and fabrics, such as kimono and obi, and terms for food items known to groups of vegetarians or other health-food conscious people, such as kombu and hijiki.

The list of Japanese loanwords chosen was (in order as they appeared on the survey): *manga*, *otaku*, *honcho*, *kamikaze*, *sudoku*, *anime*, *karaoke*, *tsunami*, *hibachi*, *geisha*, and *edamame*. Informants were asked to write out a meaning and then to write out a sample sentence using the word. Informants were asked not to discuss the words with anyone else nor to look them up in a dictionary until they had completed their answers.

In the process of designing and conducting the survey, it became obvious that many of the informants were unaware of the Japanese roots of the words about which they were being asked. In an effort to discover how aware the informants were of the roots of the words, informants were asked to identify from what language they thought the word had originated. Group B informants were not asked this question (though the impetus for the question came from remarks about language origin made by informants in this group).

In order to see if informants were just guessing “Japanese” as the origin because of the nature of the survey, 3 distracters from other Asian loanwords in English were added: *boondocks* from Tagalog, *kimchi* from Korean, and *bamboo* from Malay (via Dutch and Portuguese.) Even though many informants probably guessed “Japanese” for many of the items, many left this question blank and didn’t guess, and there are actually quite a few who put down other languages than Japanese for origin.

#### 2. Survey Informants:

Group A consisted of 12 informants, all native English speakers, interviewed on September 8, 2009. There were 11 12th graders (ages 17-18) at Cliff Senior High School in Cliff, New Mexico, and 1 English teacher. Cliff is a small village far from any urban area in the ranching country near a wilderness area.

Group B consisted of 6 informants, all native English speakers, interviewed in late July, 2009. There

were 6 adults (ages 48-71) who have lived on the East Coast and West Coast of the U.S. One informant is of Japanese-American ethnic descent, though that didn't seem to influence her answers.

Group C consisted of 11 informants, all native English speakers, interviewed in September, 2009. They were adults from ages 18 to 60, all living in New Mexico or Arizona in the Southwest of the U.S. Three of the informants were taking a class in Japanese popular culture at the University of Arizona. One of the college students was bilingual in Spanish and English.

Group D consisted of 15 informants (ages 12-13) chosen out of a group of 34 middle school students who answered the survey at International School Bangkok, Thailand, in October, 2009. These students were chosen because they self-reported that English was their first language. Classes at the school are conducted in English and the supervising teacher for this survey is American. None had lived, studied, or had family connections in Japan.

Group E consisted of 6 informants, (1 age 50, 5 ages 80-90), all native English speakers, who were interviewed in October, 2009. There were 5 adults residing in a residence for retired people in the suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the manager of the residence.

A total of 51 people filled out the survey. On the first page, informants were asked about their age, language in which they felt most comfortable, and experience in or with Japan. For the responses about loanwords, there are several cases where the informant wrote a meaning but no sample sentence, and vice versa. A few informants did not fill out a final page of words, resulting in fewer than 51 responses for certain words.

For a few of the words on this survey, kamikaze, honcho, and suudoku, a similar brief survey was given to two groups of Japanese college students in order to discover how they understood the meaning of and used these words in Japanese. (For the purposes of this paper, when used as a loanword that is on the survey, the word is italicized, when used as Japanese, it is underlined, and when used as part of a reproduced text from either survey samples or other text sources, it is neither underlined nor italicized.)

After compiling the results of the survey, the results were compared to two sources in order to better triangulate the meanings of the loanwords as used in English. The first source was five different dictionaries spanning the years from 1964 to 2009, used in order to establish a timeline as to when the survey words had been recognized as legitimate English words. The list of dictionaries below is followed by Table 1, which shows which words appeared in which dictionary.

#### **IV. HISTORICAL COMPARISON**

##### **DICTIONARIES** (in order of date of publication)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1964).

*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1979).

*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1980).

*The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*. American ed. (1996).

*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (2009).

*Wiktionary*. Online. (27 October, 2009).

Table 1: Appearance of Loanwords in Dictionaries from 1964 to Present

	1964 The Concise Oxford	1979 Webster's	1980 American Heritage	1996 Oxford	2009 Cambridge	Oct. 27, 2009 Wikipedia
tsunami	O	O	O	O	O	O
geisha	O	O	O	O	O	O
kamikaze	X	O	O	O	O	O
hibachi	X	O	O	O	X	O
honcho	X	X	X	O	O	O
karaoke	X	X	X	O	O	O
otaku	X	X	X	X	X	O
manga	X	X	X	X	O	O
anime	X	X	X	X	X	O
edamame	X	X	X	X	X	O
sudoku	X	X	X	X	O	O

## V. COMPARISON OF SURVEY RESPONSES TO CORPUS RESULTS

The Corpus of Contemporary American English, hereafter referred to as COCA, was consulted for the frequency of appearance of each loanword per million words. Also, the first 100 examples of each loanword were briefly examined to see what similarities or glaring differences there were with the results from the survey.

Table 2 below compares the number of survey responses with the rate of frequency tables for each word in COCA. The words have been listed in approximate order of when they appear in the dictionaries, not in the order they appear on the survey.

Table 2: Comparison of Survey Response Rates and COCA Frequency Rates

	No. of Informants	No. of Meaning Responses	% of Responses for Meaning	No. of Sample Sentence Responses	% of Responses for Samples	No. of Lang. Origin Responses	No. of Items Identified as Japanese	% of Jpn. Identification Responses	COCA 2005-2009	COCA 2000-2004	COCA 1995-1999	COCA 1990-1994
geisha	51	34	66.7%	32	62.7%	20	19	95%	0.93	0.78	1.66	0.17
tsunami	51	50	98.0%	47	92.2%	25	23	92%	14.05	2.04	0.97	0.73
kamikaze	51	35	68.6%	32	70.0%	24	23	95.80%	0.49	0.83	0.63	0.8
hibachi	51	20	39.2%	20	39.2%	11	10	90.90%	0.12	0.18	0.1	0.1
honcho	51	31	60.8%	31	60.8%	14	4	28.60%	0.32	0.46	0.54	0.29
karaoke	51	46	90.2%	45	88.2%	23	21	91.30%	2.01	1.84	0.69	1.23
manga	50	28	54.9%	28	56.0%	22	16	73%	0.84	0.22	0.17	0.13
anime	51	31	60.8%	28	54.9%	22	14	63.60%	0.42	0.44	0.08	0.01
otaku	50	6	12.0%	5	10.0%	12	11	91.70%	0.01	0.02	0	0
edamame	47	15	31.9%	14	29.8%	9	6	67%	1.28	0.8	0.02	0
sudoku	51	43	84.3%	44	86.3%	26	26	100%	0.41	0	0	0

## VI. SURVEY FINDINGS

Below follows an analysis of the survey results of each loanword and some comparison with the meaning of the word in present-day Japanese, English dictionary meanings, and the COCA results. The categories considered were: Japanese meaning, meaning for informants, grammatical usage, and collocation. Not all categories are included for every word. (When examples from the data are given, the spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been left as it was written in the original survey.)

Loanword: *Geisha*, Japanese: geisha, gei ‘talent’, ‘art’ + sha ‘person’, a singing girl; a professional beauty and entertainer.

**Meaning:** 18 of the 32 sample sentences for *geisha* clearly relate the word to the traditional geisha of Japan. This original meaning was obviously reinforced by the popular movie, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which was actually mentioned in some sentences.

D12: The movie Geisha has been a popular movie representing

A10: There was a movie about geicha a few years ago.

However, many of the other sample sentences show an expanded meaning to female (paid) companion who may perform other services besides dancing and singing:

C3: I cannot afford a Geisha tonight.

C7: A woman said to her husband, “Stay away from those Geisha girls.”

This expanded meaning of *geisha* can be found almost 50 years ago, in a quote by Miller of an excerpt from a letter written by the American writer Thornton Wilder, “Peggy was fired, I guess. ... And is replaced by Haydee – there’s this floating population of waitresses-bar attendants ? each several times divorced; each with several children ... our geishas.” (Miller)

**Grammar:** Of the 32 sample sentences, 10 use the word in a discernable plural sense. Of these 7 use the plural with no “s”:

A4: Geisha go through many years of training in music, manners, and joke-telling.

All dictionaries except the 1964 Concise Oxford show both “geisha” and “geishas” as acceptable plural forms.

**Collocation:** In 6 out of 32 samples, the respondents used “girl” or “girls” with *geisha*:

A6: The Geisha girls look amazing tonight.

However, the first 100 examples in the COCA database only show two uses of “geisha girl.” Perhaps the alliterative quality of this phrase makes it easy for speakers to remember.

Unless there is another popular movie or book, the word *geisha* will probably lose some of its literal connection to the actual occupation of geisha in Japan and will continue to acquire a wider meaning as a synonym for a variety of female entertainers or companions.

Loanword: *Tsunami*, Japanese: tsunami, tsu ‘harbor’ + nami ‘wave’, a tidal wave, a seismic wave.

**Meaning:** *Tsunami* was the most recognized word on the survey. The almost sevenfold increase in frequency from 1999 to the period of 2000-2004 which shows in the COCA statistics can be attributed to the worldwide news of the December, 2005, tsunami that struck Indonesia, Thailand, and other areas in south Asia.

All of the informants’ meanings and sample sentences gave literal interpretations and examples related to large waves or (mistakenly) to storms. Obviously, the huge *tsunami* of 2005 made a big impact on people’s memories. Twelve samples specifically mentioned that *tsunami*.

COCA shows other uses of meaning: “a man in a personal tsunami,” “the coming second wave of this economic tsunami,” “that gray tsunami of dark feelings,” and so on, where *tsunami* represents an overwhelming amount of something, usually negative.

*Tsunami* appears in all the dictionaries consulted, with two, American Heritage and Wiktionary, referring to the colloquial use of “tidal wave” as a synonym. None of the dictionaries show the metaphorical meaning of *tsunami* as found in the COCA examples. The Japanese use of the word does include the metaphorical meaning of an overwhelming amount, so the two words are parallel in meaning in English and Japanese.

**Grammar:** Two samples include the plural, both spelled as *tsunamis*. *Tsunami* is used as a noun in every sample.

COCA shows examples of *tsunami* in an attributive position in addition to the main use as a noun: “*tsunami* warning,” and “*tsunami* relief.” Also, *tsunami* appears as part of a phrase: “tsunami of despair,” “tsunami of blood,” and “tsunami of innovation.” It is interesting to note that neither the survey nor the corpus show “tsunami wave.” The meaning of *tsunami* is obviously thought to incorporate “wave”.

*Tsunami* is here to stay in its literal meaning as a large wave, the metaphorical meaning of an overwhelming, usually negative, amount of something will expand, and the Japanese roots of the word may gradually be forgotten.

Loanword: ***Kamikaze***, Japanese: kami ‘divine’, ‘god’ + kaze ‘wind’, term used for the typhoon of the 1300s which destroyed the naval fleet of the Mongols and thus saved the Japanese mainland from invasion; also applied to similar typhoons.

**Meaning:** Seven of the informants show knowledge of the original Japanese meaning: “divine wind” while the other 19 show a similar meaning to “suicide mission”. Other answers are about insane behavior or some kind of warrior without the meaning of suicide attached. Since the World Trade Center attacks of airplanes on buildings in September, 2001, there seems to have been a great increase in the use of the term *kamikaze*.

This contrasts greatly with the answers from a group of 34 college students who were asked to write down the meaning of kamikaze in Japanese and give a sample sentence. Fourteen students said they didn't know the word. Seven correctly identified it as "divine wind" with a historical reference, while 6 identified it as part of the phrase used for the special forces who dove airplanes into enemy ships in World War II: kamikaze tokkotai. Six made guesses that it meant some kind of lucky or powerful wind, but gave no historical reference, and one said that it was the name of a brand of sake.

So while the Japanese term remains more narrowly attached to historical events and is even unknown by over 40% of the surveyed college students, the English term has greatly expanded to mean any kind of behavior that is impulsive and perhaps contrary to one's own best interest.

**Grammar:** *Kamikaze* almost always is used as a noun or an attributive (adjectival) noun. However, this is the only word on the survey which is used as a verb in two samples:

A2: The planes kamikazed into the ship.

A5 Cody kamikazed him self for the betterment of the nation.

It also appears one time as an attributive noun:

B4: The man was running around kamikaze-like.

**Collocation:** This word appears with "pilot", "plane", and "mission".

This word will remain in English as a well-known and powerful idiomatic expression and may change grammatical form. In Japanese it will either become less known or will re-enter Japanese with more of the English meaning attached.

Loanword: *Honcho*, Japanese: hancho, han 'group' + cho 'leader'.

**Meaning:** *Honcho* only had a mid-range level of recognition. However, much of the non-recognition was by the international middle school students.

Almost all the samples and meanings on the survey use *honcho* as a synonym for boss, particularly in the sense of being the person with the most authority in an organization, including the U.S. president:

E5: Obama is the honcho of U.S.

C6: Bush was the head honcho of our country for too long!

The dictionary and COCA examples, too, share this meaning of a powerful leader. This is an expanded interpretation of the meaning from the way the word is used in Japanese.

In contrast, the survey of Japanese college students shows 30 respondents all recognizing the word, but all give the narrow definition of hancho, 'leader of a han,' a group that exists particularly in (elementary) school

settings. The hancho is seen more as an organizer and the person who has to carry out tasks of responsibility for the group than as someone who has much power. The word is not presently used in a metaphorical sense outside of this setting.

The word *honcho* is assumed to come from U.S. soldiers who heard it being used by Japanese soldiers during World War II. In the Japanese military setting, the naimu hancho was all powerful and exercised a lot of authority over the group. The American English version of the word probably has its roots in the Japanese military and Korean military (where the Japanese term was used) of the 1940s and 1950s, but the Japanese meaning and usage has reverted to a limited and specific meaning (Otake, Y.).

Of the 14 informants who gave a response for the language or origin item, only 4 correctly identified *honcho* as coming from Japanese. Five chose Spanish and 4 chose English or English slang, while one chose another language, even though the instructions for the survey specify that language or origin should be chosen from an Asian language. *Honcho* is the Japanese item on the survey that had considerable recognition as an English word but little recognition as originating from Japanese.

The choosing of Spanish can be attributed to the fact that Spanish vowels are very similar to Japanese vowels. Many Spanish words that have entered English end in a consonant/vowel “o” combination: amigo, taco, gringo. In fact, one example in COCA, “Joining us here in New York is the woman who is the head honcho – or maybe I should call her the head honcha at “Star Magazine,” shows *honcho* being conjugated to “honcha” as a Spanish feminine noun would be.

**Grammar:** *Honcho* is the only word in this survey where the English spelling is different than how the word is represented in Romanization of the Japanese word: hancho. English pronunciation has probably affected this spelling: the short vowel sound of “o” is closer to the way that the word sounds to a native English speaker than the pronunciation of “a” in hancho (using “a” would make the sound similar to the “a” in ‘hat’.)

**Collocation:** *Honcho* has the strongest collocation of any item on the survey: 22 out of 31 respondents used the alliterative phrase *head honcho* in their sample.

*Honcho*, particularly as part of the collocation *head honcho*, will continue to be part of American English, a standard slang phrase, for many years, but it will not be so widely recognized by non-native speakers.

Loanword: **Hibachi**, Japanese: hibachi, hi ‘fire’ + hachi ‘bowl’, a (charcoal) brazier, typically used as a small, usually round, heating device rather than as a cooking device, though water is often heated on top in a kettle.

**Meaning:** 19 of 20 informants gave a meaning of some kind of grill, like a barbecue grill, for cooking food, with several using the words “small” or “portable” to describe a *hibachi*. None of the middle school students in Group D nor the high school students in Group A provided a response for this word, while most of the adults did.

**Grammar:** *Hibachi* appears as a stand-alone noun with no “s” on the plural. Only one informant used *hibachi* with “grill”.

**Prediction:** *Hibachi* fills a niche as a word to describe a smaller type of barbecue grill, so it will remain in the English lexicon.

Loanword: **Karaoke**, Japanese: karaoke, kara ‘empty’ + oke, shortened version of okesutora ‘orchestra’, from English.

**Meaning:** *Karaoke* first appears in the 1996 Oxford Dictionary. The 3 dictionary entries (Oxford, Cambridge, Wiktionary) all define *karaoke* as singing to pre-recorded music. This word was the second most recognized item on the survey.

Sixteen of 46 informants include this aspect of pre-recorded lyrics or the use of a machine such as a mike, computer, or screen as part of their definition. Five informants use the word “sing-along” as part of their definition, though it isn’t always clear whether they mean to sing along with a machine or to sing along with other people. Four of the informants define *karaoke* as not very talented singing:

B1: musical entertainment involving singing for non-singers

E5: Untrained singing

This group also gave imaginative sample sentences:

B3: Stop him before he commits another karaoke!

C3: My karaoke is much better after 4 drinks.

**Grammar and collocation:** *Karaoke* stands alone as a non-count noun in 29 of 45 samples. It appears once as a verb:

A12: I like to karaoke.

*Karaoke* appears as an attributive noun with “machine”, “night”, and “party”, but it appears more often in the phrase “karaoke bar”. There seems to be some gravitation to calling an establishment where one can sing karaoke a “karaoke” with no following noun (2 samples):

D2: I was singing at a karaoke with my friends yesterday.

D14: My friends and I went to the Karaoke to sing the new songs.

Fourteen informants used the verb “sing” with *karaoke* as a direct object with 4 informants using “do” as the verb with *karaoke* as the direct object.

Loanwords: **Manga** and **Anime**, Japanese: manga, man ‘unorthodox’ or ‘rambling’ + ga ‘picture’, ‘drawing’; anime: loanword from “animation”, shortened to fit Japanese (Otake).

Meaning: All of the informants who gave correct (for this survey) answers, clearly knew the difference

between *manga*, the print form of cartoons, and *anime*, the film variety. One sentence uses *manga* in a somewhat idiomatic sense:

C3: She has manga eyes.

*Manga* entered English a little more quickly, but, as can be seen from the COCA results above, *anime* may be overtaking *manga* in recognition. It is no surprise that both words are more recognized by the young: the D group of middle school students recognized these words the most (*manga*, 9 out of 15 and *anime*, 8 out of 15), while the high school students in the A group didn't recognize *manga* (2 correct out of 12), but did recognize *anime* more (6 out of 12.) And it is no surprise that neither word was recognized by any of the 6 E group members from the retirement home. All the other groups (B and C) in between these age groups showed high recognition of these words: meanings for *manga* were provided for 12 out of 17 responses and for *anime*, 15 out of 17.

**Grammar:** Both *manga* and *anime* appear in the samples in the unmarked form with no "s" for the plural. Both words appear as nouns and as attributive nouns, but in no other grammatical form.

**Collocations** *Manga* appears as an attributive noun with "art", "titles", "book", and "drawings", and "eyes". *Anime* appears with "film", "show", "movie", and "character".

Both *manga* and *anime* are certainly widely recognized as being art or media forms that are distinct from Western-style comic books and cartoons, so these words will probably remain and become even more recognized. Perhaps because of the ease of instantly accessing *anime* on TV or on the Internet as opposed to having to obtain the print form of *manga*, *anime* may become much more widely recognized and may come to be the word that encompasses both the print and film versions of this popular art form. Also, these media forms have greatly encouraged the study of the Japanese language, which may lead to more Japanese words entering English. (Kotaka, Schmidt).

Loanword: *Otaku*, Japanese: otaku, polite prefix, + taku 'house' or 'residence', a term for people who are so absorbed in or obsessed by their interest in a hobby, typically manga or anime, that they don't leave their homes much. It is also used in a broader idiomatic sense.

**Meaning:** *Otaku* was the least known word in the survey. It was a popular term in Japan and is still used in Japanese conversation. It appeared in a newspaper advertisement video games for Best Buy Computers, an electronics store in Columbus Ohio, in August, 2004, as "for the otaku in your family", (no italics), so was obviously recognized by enough consumers in that area to warrant including in an ad. Only the most recent Wiktionary includes *otaku* as a definition: "(fandom) One with an obsessive interest for something, particularly *anime* or *manga*."

A survey was conducted of Japanese college students, mostly ages 18 to 20. Of 26 students, all recognized the word *otaku* and gave similar definitions: *otaku* is someone who knows something in great detail, particularly *anime* and *manga*, though several used the word for fans of other hobbies. A few identified the word with the

Akihabara entertainment district of Tokyo. One older student referred to its negative image, but the younger students did not hold a particularly negative image of those considered *otaku*.

**Grammar:** The samples only use the word *otaku* as a noun or as an attributive noun.

Loanword: *Edamame*, Japanese *eda* ‘branch’ + *mame* ‘bean’, means “young soy bean”. The word can refer to either the green soybean itself or to boiled, salted pods served as snack food, typically with alcohol drinks. This is a new food item that is spreading throughout Europe and North America.

**Meaning:** 12 of 15 informants listed the meaning as “soybean” or “bean”. Three referred to the snack of boiled, salted soybeans.

*Edamame* is perhaps the second newest addition to the English lexicon of words on the survey. The survey informants had a rather low rate of identification for this word: 15 out of 47 informants provided a meaning and 14 of the 47 provided a sample. The results for this item were the most regional: the A group in Arizona and New Mexico had only one response – and that was from the informant with the most international experience. The C group, too, again residents of the Southwest, only provided three responses. The B group, residents of the East and West Coasts of the U.S. identified *edamame* in 5 of 6 responses. The D group at the international school in Thailand, where most must have actually eaten *edamame*, did not recognize the word (2 out of 15 responses). This may be because of their youth – awareness of foods and plants grows with age. The biggest surprise was that 4 of 6 informants from the senior residence in Minnesota correctly identified *edamame*. Apparently, *edamame* are served in the dining room there – not so surprising, though, because Minnesota is a major agricultural growing area for soybeans. Also, *edamame* adapt well to the Midwest palate since it is bland and not spicy.

**Grammar:** 2 samples used *edamames* as the plural, the rest used *edamame* as a non-count noun.

Loanword: *Sudoku*, Japanese: *suudoku*, *suu* ‘number’ + *doku* ‘single’ or ‘alone’.

Meaning: *Sudoku* is probably the newest loanword to enter English, but was the third most recognized word on the survey. The 43 informants all showed the meaning to be “number puzzle” or used very similar words. There were no mistaken meanings and no metaphorical meanings. This was the only word where all informants who answered listed Japanese as the language of origin.

*Sudoku* is a word that is bouncing back and forth across the ocean. It was originally created by a Japanese man who took the idea from a similar puzzle in the U.S. called “number puzzle” (Nakamura). This name “number puzzle” is used in Japanese — *namba-pazuru*, now sometimes abbreviated to *nampura*. Just recently, the word *suudoku*, has actually come to be recognized as representing the same puzzle as news of the *sudoku* boom overseas has spread in Japan. An informal survey of a group of Japanese college students showed that all 8 knew the word *suudoku* and what it meant, but 5 of the 8 were not sure of the correct *kanji* ‘Chinese character’ for *doku*. They wrote the character as “read” (*doku*), a homophone for the *doku* in *suudoku*.

**Grammar:** *Sudoku* is used as a noun or an attributive noun in all 44 samples. Two of the samples misspell the word as “soduku”. This probably reflects pronunciation since the word is still pronounced several different

ways.

**Collocation:** 12 of 44 samples use “Sudoku puzzle(s)”, as do many of the COCA samples. Although not a collocation, there seems to be some correlation between “grandma” or “grandmother” and *sudoku* since it was used in 4 samples.

It will be interesting to see if *sudoku* in English acquires any metaphorical connotations and if suudoku in Japanese becomes the preferred term for the puzzle because of the English influence.

More examples of each word can be found in the Appendix.

## VII. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

In spite of the linguistic gulf between Japanese and English, at least two features of Japanese allow vocabulary to be easily absorbed into English. All of the Japanese vowels and almost all the consonants can be easily approximated in English. Second, English prefers a unified, single-concept word (Sapir). Japanese nouns, based as they are on Chinese ideograms, fit this English preference well.

As with all loanwords, English loanwords from Japanese have often changed or expanded from the original Japanese meaning. *Geisha*, *kamikaze*, and *honcho* have taken on a larger meaning than that of Japanese. *Tsunami* has remained parallel to the Japanese, including in its metaphorical sense. *Manga*, *anime*, *edamame*, and *sudoku* have retained essentially the same meaning as the Japanese counterpart without any metaphorical sense attached. While *karaoke* has the same essential meaning as the Japanese, there are cultural differences in both the way it is participated in and the facilities for it. *Hibachi* is an example of specialization, a word that has taken on a narrow and changed meaning from the original language (Wilton). *Otaku* doesn't seem to have gained a foothold in English.

Although the number of participants in this survey is too small to establish statistically relevant data, there are some interesting parallel findings with the COCA results. *Tsunami* and *karaoke* top both the survey and the COCA frequency chart and *otaku* appears at the bottom of both. *Sudoku* appears high on the survey response list but is in eighth place on the COCA list. Perhaps its daily appearance in the newspaper and other media sources makes it very familiar but not an item that is incorporated in various kinds of writing. On the other hand, *edamame* appears high on the COCA list, in third place, but is in tenth place on the survey. A perusal of the first 100 sample sentences in COCA show that *edamame* appears almost exclusively — and often — in cooking and gardening publications, which may account for its high frequency.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In addition to corpora and historical timelines based on dictionaries, the investigation of what vocabulary is used by communities of speakers can add to a more complete picture of how new language is incorporated and interpreted.

Perhaps the most important finding, though again, statistically unverifiable from this survey, is that new language seems to be accrued throughout life. The two groups A and D, which consisted mainly of young students, ages 18 and younger, were the ones who provided the fewest responses for the survey and who failed

to recognize common items, such as *honcho*, in print. Though the general perception may be that young people are the ones who bring new vocabulary to their language, and this may be true of words on this survey such as *manga* and *anime*, the adults were the ones who recognized the most items. The acquisition of the wisdom of language and culture seems to be a lifetime process.

Another finding is that the middle school students living outside of their mother-language culture had a particularly low recognition of idiomatic expressions such “head honcho”. English as second or foreign language teachers might take note of how idioms are very culture-bound.

Many of the adults in this study are college-educated. The process of leaving the local school environment and being exposed to various cultural concepts and various people may also contribute to a wider understanding of language old and new.

The study of loanwords from Japanese, because of their distinctly different form from words borrowed from European languages and because of their rather recent entry into English, provides a good way to study language adaptation.

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**APPENDIX—SAMPLE OF SURVEY RESPONSES**

	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Sample Sentence</b>
	<b>GEISHA</b>	
D8	Women who dress in pretty robes, and white paint. They dance beautifully.	One time I would like to see some geisha dancing.
E5	Party Girls	The meeting was served by Geisha.
	<b>TSUNAMI</b>	
A7	Big Storm	The Tsunami hit Indonesia 4 or 5 years ago.
B6	tidal wave that covers the land	The beach was destroyed by a Tsunami.
D9	A big title wave that happens when an earthquake occurs in the ocean	There was a tsunami in Phuket in 2006 that killed a lot of people.
	<b>KAMIKAZE</b>	
C6	devout, focused and willing to risk/lose life (=commit suicide) for a cause	The kamikaze pilots on the enemy's side made us aware that the war was "no holds barred."
D6	sacrifice	Kamikaze!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
E4	A military airplane used to directly strike a	He is a Kamikaze pilot.
	<b>HONCHO</b>	
A1	Boss, in charge	He is the head honcho of the ranch.
C1	Boss or boss-like	I'm usually the honcho on building jobs.
E1	leader, top	My sister is the honcho of her church group.
	<b>HIBACHI</b>	
B4	Grill for cooking food.	Did you get the charcoal for the Hibachi?
E2	small grill	We grilled shrimp on the Hibachi.
	<b>KARAOKE</b>	
D1	Sing-along	After this, let's go enjoy ourselves with some karaoke!
C9	singing songs from a machine with lyrics on them.	For New Years, We all sang Karaoke.
	<b>MANGA</b>	
A5	some sort of art form	Our teacher showed us some Manga art she made.
D14	A Japanese type of comic book, with Japanese characters	On Saturday I read the latest Manga for Naruto.
	<b>ANIME</b>	
A3	Animation	The Japanese cartoons are called Anime.
C8	animated medium form from Japan	Rurouni Kenshin is an anime that has been translated to English.
D15	Animation, esp. from Japan	Anime has become popular outside of Japan.
	<b>OTAKU</b>	
C8	fan (slightly obsessive)	He's an anime otaku; he's always watching.
C11	a fan of Japanese medium	That guy isn't a nerd, he's an otaku.
	<b>EDAMAME</b>	
B2	A snack of cold, salted soy beans	I like to eat edamame with a glass of wine.
C2	Soybeans	We added edamames to our salad.
E3	soy beans	I prepared Edamame with Asian vegetables.
	<b>SUDOKU</b>	
A12	Name of puzzle?	I got my sudoku puzzles on moderate difficulty down to seven minutes each.
C9	games with numbers	I love playing soduku, it makes me smart.
D12	Number Game	Sudoku is good for brain concentration.