Common Japanese Loanwords Corresponding to High-frequency and Academic Vocabulary: Are Our Students Ready for Foreign Study?

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▶Key words

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word list
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1. Introduction

Lexically speaking, how ready are Japanese for everyday conversation in English, and how many of those for university study in English speaking countries? Students first need to master the basic lexicon — the *high-frequency vocabulary.* Thereafter, those planning to enter a university in an English-speaking country should additionally master the words most likely to be met in textbooks and lectures — the *academic vocabulary.* First in this paper, the frequency types of English words will be introduced, as well as some important word lists. Second, freshman university students' knowledge of high-frequency and academic vocabulary will be measured. Third, research revealing how English-based loanwords in Japanese help the learning of the original borrowed words will be briefly summarized. Finally, Daulton (2003b) has shown that nearly half of the high-frequency words of English correspond to common loanwords in Japanese; a two-part survey of Coxhead's (1998) *An Academic Word List (AWL)* will show that 27 percent of the academic words also correspond to common loanwords in Japanese.

2. Types of Vocabulary and the Utility of Word Lists

A careful choice of vocabulary can simplify teaching. Richards (1974) explains:

> The goal of vocabulary selection is the drawing up of word lists appropriate for the particular circumstances under which the language is to be taught and used (p. 70).

One way to distinguish words is by their percentage of text coverage (i.e. their frequency) within certain types of texts. Nation (1999 p. 7) has identified four types of vocabulary:

1) high-frequency
2) academic
3) technical
4) low-frequency

2.1 High-frequency Words

High-frequency words are the most frequently used words of English, beginning with the. In order to achieve good comprehension of informal conversation and reading, as well as to have a well-rounded arsenal for production, at least 2000 and preferably 3000 word families (head words plus inflections and common derivations) are required (see Nation, 2001). If one takes proper nouns as a given, this level provides nearly 95 percent coverage of most non-academic texts — a crucial threshold for comfortable reading (Hirsh & Nation, 1992).

For more on high-frequency words appearing in *The Ryukoku Journal of Humanities and Sciences,* see Daulton (2003a).

2.2 Academic and Technical Words

Academic and technical words are quite useful for those in particular circumstances, i.e. university students and those in specific fields of study, respectively. In a sense, academic words (e.g. lecture) and technical words (e.g. interlanguage) are high-frequency words for special purposes. While academic words are shared by several fields of study, technical words typically are used in but one. Moreover, academic words, in contrast to technical words, are not highly salient in academic texts as they are supportive of but not central to the topics (see Coxhead 1998: 214).

2.3 Low-frequency Words

Meanwhile, as the vast number of low-frequency words seldom occur and cover only a small proportion of any text; they are best dealt with individually by guessing or referring to a dictionary.

2.4 High-frequency and Academic Word Lists

In the case of students with a variety of goals for tertiary study in English speaking countries, the most relevant types of vocabulary are the high-frequency and academic.

The first collection of high-frequency English was West's (1953) *A General Service List of English Words (GSL),* which contains about 2000 word families. Added as an appendix to the GSL were 479 words as a "supplementary scientific and technical vocabulary" (West, 1953: 583-588). Sixty are scientific terms like alkali and molecule, 125 are semi-scientific terms like absorb and revolve, and the remainder are non-scientific words (Nation, 1999).

Xue and Nation (1984) created the University Word List (UWL), a list of 800 words beyond the *GSL* likely to be encountered in academic texts. The "academic language" adds at least eight percent to coverage, so that the *GSL* (without the appendix words) and UWL present 2800 words that yield 93 percent coverage of practically any text. The UWL has been widely used by learners, teachers and curriculum designers. However the corpora on which it was based were small and the range of topics narrow and unbalanced.

Although the GSL is highly valid, a newer list of high-frequency English words can be found in the BNC 3000 (Nation, forthcoming). It contains 3000 word families and is derived from the British National Corpus (BNC), a collection of more than 100 million words sampled from a wide range of written and spoken sources. Moreover, the University Word List has since been replaced by the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 1998). The *AWL* contains 570 word families that are not in the *GSL* and that are frequent and of wide range in a wide variety of academic texts. It is based on a corpus with 3,500,000 tokens from the Arts, Sciences, Law, and Commerce (Coxhead, 1998). Both frequency and range were considered, and all word families occurred in all four fields and occurred at least 100 times in the original corpus. The *AWL* was designed to contain important vocabulary for learners to prepare students for tertiary education. According to Nation (1999: 268), the *AWL* appears to provide slightly better coverage of academic text than the UWL even though it contains considerably fewer words.

3. Study One: Student Knowledge of High-frequency and Academic Words

In this study, the high-frequency and academic word knowledge of incoming freshman university students will be measured. The high-frequency word data will indicate how ready students are for everyday English communication, while the academic data will indicate how ready they are for tertiary study in an English-speaking country.

3.1 The Students

There were 21 students in the class at approximately a 4:1 male to female ratio. They were Economics majors enrolled in a required English class. Each had had at least six years of formal English education. The level of motivation among the students varied widely. No TOEIC or

TOEFL information was available.

3.2 The Instruments

Sections from the Vocabulary Levels Test — also known as the "Levels Test" — were used to measure the students' knowledge of high-frequency and academic vocabulary. The Levels Test samples words at given levels and is quick to take, easy to mark and easy to interpret; as a multiple choice test, it gives credit for partial knowledge of a word. The "Revised 2,000 Word Level Test Form A" was used to measure the students' high-frequency lexicons, and "Test A: Academic Vocabulary" was used to measure student knowledge of academic words. Students were given 10 minutes to complete each test.

The original Levels Test was created by Paul Nation (Victoria University of Wellington). It first appeared in 1983 and was later republished in Nation's (1990) book. Since then, various versions have been employed around the world in both assessment and research (e.g. Cobb, 1997; Schmitt and Meara, 1997; Laufer and Paribakht, 1998). Schmitt, et al. (2001) found that the Levels Test provides accurate estimates of the vocabulary size of students at the targeted frequency levels. For a fuller description of the test, see Nation (1990).

In the "Revised 2,000 Word Level Test Form A," target items are given in clusters of three, with six choices (three correct answers and three distractors) for each cluster. In "Test A: Academic Vocabulary," six academic words appear of which three can be matched to single-word or phrasal answers. In contrast to subsequent levels of the Levels Test, the 2000 level contains two levels of words; 1-to-1000-level and 1001-to-2000-level words are sampled at a 1:2 ratio.

3.3 The Data

Students' performance in the two tests is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Student Knowledge of High-frequency and Academic Vocabulary — Average, Median, Low, High Scores by Number Correct and Percentage

	High-frequency: % (# correct out of 27)	Academic: % (# correct out of 30)
Average	84.1% (22.7)	66.7% (20.0)
Median	72.2% (19.5)	60.0% (18)
High	100% (27)	90.0% (27)
Low	44.4% (12)	30.0% (9)

Regarding high-frequency vocabulary, which includes words such as debt, roar and pride, the subjects' average score was 84.1 percent, with the median being 72.2, the high score 100 (four subjects) and the low 44.4. This indicates that most students already have a good command of the basic English vocabulary, albeit this competence may be "passive" rather than

"active." Fluency practice would likely benefit most students.

Regarding academic vocabulary, which includes words such as labour, percent and principle, the subjects' average score was 66.7 percent, with the median being 60, the high score 90 and the low 30. It is remarkable that the average score for academic vocabulary was about 80 percent that of high-frequency words, considering the great difference in vocabulary levels. English-based loanwords in Japanese may explain the comparable performance on these two disparate types of vocabulary.

4. The Positive Effect of Loanwords on the Learning of English Borrowed Words

Loanwords in Japanese (e.g. *takushi*) assist the learning of their related borrowed words (e.g. taxi). Borrowed words are easier for Japanese to discern (Hashimoto, 1992), easier to comprehend (Brown & Williams, 1985; Kimura, 1989; Daulton, 1998), easier to spell (Hashimoto, 1993; Daulton, 1998) and preferred in multiple choice tests (Brown, 1995) as well as in production (Daulton, 2005). Moreover, given their ease of use, it is likely that borrowed words are facilitating production overall. As borrowed words are quite helpful for learners, we must ascertain how many of the important words of English are already in Japanese.

Assuming learners are able to process the inflections and common derivations of English (see Mochizuki & Aizawa, 2000; Schmitt & Meara, 1997), knowledge of even a single word family member (e.g. win) will give them access to its related members (e.g. wins, won, winner, winners, and winning). Thus loanwords can be regarded as a latent vocabulary base, or a "built-in lexicon."

5. Study Two: The Number of Correspondences between Academic English and Japanese

For Japanese learners of English, Daulton (2003b) showed that nearly half of the 3000 most-*common* word families of Nation's (forthcoming) BNC 3000 correspond to common loanwords in Japanese — constituting an easy-to-learn "built-in lexicon" of high-frequency English. The data is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Loanwords Corresponding to the BNC 3000: Words; Families; Percentage of Families

	# of words corresponding to loanwords	# of word families corresponding to loanwords	% of families corresponding to loans
first 1000	803 words	550 families	55.5 percent
second 1000	632 words	493 families	49.3 percent
third 1000	371 words	317 families	31.7 percent
overall	1806 words	1360 families	45.3 percent

Each correspondence resulted when one or more of the following was borrowed from English: a word family headword; an inflected word; or a derived word. For instance, the act word family had correspondences in Japanese with both its headword (*akuto*) and the derived form *action* (*akushon*). Roughly speaking, each word family correspondence involved about 1.5 family members. The list of high-frequency, English vocabulary corresponding to common loanwords in Japanese can be accessed online (see Daulton, 2003c).

Following is an explanation of how correspondences between the academic English and common loanwords were collected.

5.1 Academic Words from the *Academic Word List (AWL)*

The universe of academic words was taken to be Coxhead's (1998) *AWL*. The *AWL* is divided into sublists based on the frequency of occurrence of the words in the academic corpus. Words in Sublist 1 are the most frequently occurring, Sublist 2 the next, and so on with Sublist 10 being the least frequent. The sublists and their properties are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: Coverage of the Sublists of the *AWL* (adapted from Coxhead, 1998 p.4)

***AWL* sublist**	**Coverage of academic corpus**
1 (60 families)	3.6 percent
2 (60 families)	1.8 percent
3 (60 families)	1.2 percent
4 (60 families)	0.9 percent
5 (60 families)	0.8 percent
6 (60 families)	0.6 percent
7 (60 families)	0.5 percent
8 (60 families)	0.3 percent
9 (60 families)	0.2 percent
10 (30 families)	0.1 percent

The coverage of the sublists begins relatively high with Sublist 1 (3.6 percent) and drops quite quickly to Sublist 10 (0.1 percent).

The next step was to search for *AWL* words in the Japanese loanword lexicon.

5.2 Japanese Loanwords from a Dictionary of Common Loanwords

Word family members from the *AWL* were first searched for in a Japanese/English dictionary of "basic" loanwords — Motwani's (1991) *A Dictionary of Loanwords Usage.* This dictionary contains a convenient index that lists the English borrowed words corresponding to the loanwords contained within. There are 3019 headwords in Motwani's dictionary, with many other words embedded under particularly productive headwords. Motwani collected his words from various sources: comprehensive dictionaries; books; newspapers and magazines; research papers on loanwords; the broadcast media; posters and ads, daily conversation; and Japanese informants (p. v). One hundred eighty two *AWL* words were found to correspond to words in the Motwani dictionary.

For a thorough discuss of the Motwani dictionary appearing in *The Ryukoku Journal of Humanities and Sciences,* see Daulton (2002).

5.3 Adding Japanese Loanwords from a Native Informant

To locate further loanwords corresponding to the *AWL* lists, a native informant, a 28-year old female, examined the remaining *AWL* word families for further correspondences. The informant located 82 additional correspondences. The total number of *AWL* words corresponding to loanwords is summarized in Table 4:

Table 4: Summary of loanword correspondences to the *AWL* (pre-verification) by Sublist, Source and Totals

	loanword dictionary	add. native informant	total
Sublist 1	34	19	53
Sublist 2	18	15	33
Sublist 3	21	17	38
Sublist 4	19	8	27
Sublist 5	25	5	30
Sublist 6	17	6	23
Sublist 7	20	5	25
Sublist 8	17	2	19
Sublist 9	9	5	14
Sublist 10	2	0	2
total	182	82	264

Table 5: Summary of loanword correspondences to the *AWL* (pre-verification) : words; families; percentage of families

	# of words corresponding to loanwords	# of word families corresponding to loanwords	% of families corresponding to loanwords
Sublist 1	53 words	29 families	48 percent
Sublist 2	34 words	28 families	47 percent
Sublist 3	38 words	29 families	48 percent
Sublist 4	27 words	24 families	40 percent
Sublist 5	30 words	25 families	42 percent
Sublist 6	23 words	22 families	37 percent
Sublist 7	25 words	23 families	38 percent
Sublist 8	19 words	17 families	28 percent
Sublist 9	14 words	14 families	23 percent
Sublist 10*	2 words	2 families	7 percent
overall	264 words	211 families	44.0 percent

*Thirty families rather than 60 families.

5.4 Preliminary Results

Based on the loanword dictionary and the native-speaker informant, the resulting list of loanwords corresponding to the *AWL* contained 264 words corresponding to 211 word families — 44.0 percent of word families. This information is summarized in Table 5:

The percentage of word families corresponding to Japanese generally decreased with the frequency of academic words, with 48 percent at Sublist 1 to 7 percent at Sublist 10. Each correspondence resulted from a headword correspondence, an inflected- or derived-word correspondence, or some combination. For instance, the word family with create as its headword had correspondences in Japanese with both its headword (*kurieeto*) and with the derivation creative (*kurieetibu*). On average, each word family correspondence involved roughly 1.3 family members.

The next step was to determine how many of the loanwords were, in fact, commonly known.

6. Study Three: The Commoness of the Loanwords Corresponding to the *AWL*

In order to use loanword cognates to learn foreign words, naturally learners need to know the loanword cognates (see Ringbom, 1983). Regarding Japanese loanwords, there are tens of thousands with varying degrees of integration, most clustering at the obscure end of the spectrum. Daulton (2002) had found Motwani's loanwords to be commonly understood by Japanese university students at a rate of 81 percent, perhaps reflecting the aging of the dictionary. Moreover, Japanese loanwords have a high rate of turnover (e.g. Tomoda, 1999: 249). Indeed there exists various data on the lack of comprehension by Japanese of some often used loans (e.g. Loveday, 1996).

6.1 Test Instrument, Procedure and Subjects

Self appraisal was chosen to validate the comprehensibility of the words corresponding to the *AWL*. In a yes/no format, the subjects simply indicate whether or not they know the meaning of a word, or to what degree they know it. Chall & Dale (1950: 200) write:

> This method of testing is economical. It demands no skill in test construction. It requires little time for the subjects to take the test and it is simple to score.

There is evidence that different types of tests that focus on the same aspect of knowledge correlate to a reasonable degree (Nation, 1999: 348). And although there is a potential danger of subjects being unreliable in the yes/no format, Daulton (2003b) verified that his Japanese university students' responses were quite reliable through the inclusion of nonsense words (see Bear and Odbert, 1941; Campion and Elley, 1971) in the test.

The 264 loanwords were distributed among seven test versions. Each of the versions was seen by 10 subjects. The words to be tested were further grouped by the Sublist levels of the *AWL*. The response options are described below in Table 6, with a neutral (?) answer to discourage false positives and only (+) being acceptable.

Table 6: Test choices: symbol, translation, Japanese

+	I know this word. 分かる。
-	I don't know this word. 分からない。
?	I've never seen this word, but I can guess its meaning. 聞いたことなくても何となくわかる。

If a word received three strikes, it was judged "out" and dropped from the list of correspondences. Thus 7 of 10 students would have to recognize a loan for it to remain on the list. This system would allow some flexibility towards false negatives, yet still maintain a reasonably strict standard for inclusion.

The subjects were first-year students at a Japanese university in Kyoto. There were approximately 80 students from two classes. They were law and business majors taking a compulsory English class. No TOEFL information was available.

6.2 Results and Discussion

The result of this procedure was that 87 poorly understood loanwords (33 percent of the original 264) that had corresponded to 58 *AWL* word families were eliminated, including academic (*akademikku*) itself. The remaining correspondences between common loanwords and the *AWL* are summarize in Table 7:

Table 7: Summary of verified loanword correspondences to the *AWL*: words; families; percentage of families

	# of words corresponding to loanwords	# of word families corresponding to loanwords	% of families corresponding to loanwords
Sublist 1	29 words	23 families	38 percent
Sublist 2	23 words	19 families	32 percent
Sublist 3	30 words	22 families	37 percent
Sublist 4	20 words	19 families	32 percent
Sublist 5	19 words	16 families	27 percent
Sublist 6	12 words	12 families	20 percent
Sublist 7	19 words	18 families	30 percent
Sublist 8	14 words	13 families	22 percent
Sublist 9	9 words	9 families	15 percent
Sublist 10*	2 words	2 families	7 percent
overall	177 words	153 families	27.0 percent

One hundred seventy seven words from 153 word families in the *AWL* corresponded to *common* Japanese loanwords — 27 percent of word families. Again we see that at each Sublist of the *AWL*, the percent of correspondences generally decreases with frequency of vocabulary: At Sublist 1, the rate of correspondence is 38 percent and by Sublist 10 it is seven percent

(unchanged). On average, each word family correspondence involved roughly 1.2 family members.

Daulton (2003b) had found that 24 percent of the 2379 loanwords corresponding to high-frequency English vocabulary were not well understood by college students, despite their describing everyday concepts and objects. That 33 percent of academic words were not well understood by Japanese is reasonable as the words involve academic concepts.

This study revealed that about one quarter of the academic words of English is already in the everyday lexicon of Japanese. It is a conservative count. As had Daulton (2003b), it ignores the abundant compound forms and deals only with free-standing loanwords. A more liberal approach would recognize an even greater presence of academic English in everyday Japanese.

7. Summary

Are Japanese suited for academic study in an English-speaking country? If one were to go by TOEFL data alone, the situation would appear bleak, as Japan ranks last in Asia except for North Korea, with average scores well below 500 and about 40 percent lower than European countries. However, by virtue of their native language, Japanese have a considerable built-in lexicon of not only high-frequency English but academic English, which could be further exploited.

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Appendix: The List of AWL Words Corresponding to Common Loanwords

List explanation: Borrowed *AWL* words are represented by Sublist in alphabetical order. In each column, word families are marked by a bullet (・) at the left margin followed by the headword. Words in italics are headwords that do not correspond to loanwords but are given for reference. Word family members (the inflections and common derivations) are indented and appear to the right. The Japanese loanwords appear to the right of borrowed words.

Sublist 1

- approach　アプローチ
- area　エリア
- benefit　ベネフィット
- concept　コンセプト
- contract　コントラクト
- create　クリエート
  - creative　クリエーティブ
  - creator　クリエイター
- data　データ
- economy　エコノミー
  - economic　エコノミック
  - economist　エコノミスト
- factor　ファクター
- *finance*
  - financial　ファイナンシャル
- *identify*
  - identity　アイデンティティー
- income　インカム
- legal　リーガル
- major　メジャー
  - majority　マジョリティー
- method　メソッド
- percent　パーセント
  - percentage　パーセンティージ
- period　ピリオド
- policy　ポリシー
- process　プロセス
- *respond*
  - response　レスポンス
- section　セクション
- source　ソース
- *vary*
  - variation　バリエーション

Sublist 2

- assist　アシスト
  - assistant　アシスタント
- category　カティゴリー
- chapter　チャプター
- community　コミュニティ
- complex　コンプレックス
- *compute*
  - computer　コンピューター
- credit　クレジット
- culture　カルチャー
- design　デザイン
  - designer　デザイナー
- final　ファイナル
- focus　フォーカス
- impact　インパクト
- item　アイテム
- normal　ノーマル
- resource　リソース
- select　セレクト
  - selection　セレクション
- site　サイト
- text　テキスト
- tradition　トラディション
  - traditional　トラディショナル

Sublist 3

- comment　コメント
  - commentator　コメンテーター
- consent　コンセント（electrical）
- coordinate　コーディネート
  - coordinator　コーディネーター
- demonstrate　デモンストレート
  - demonstration　デモンストレーション
  - demonstrator　デモンストレーター
- document　ドキュメント
- illustrate　イラストレート
  - illustration　イラストレーション
- minor　マイナー
  - minority　マイノリティー
- partner　パートナー
- proportion　プロポーション
- publish　パブリッシュ
- *react*
  - reaction　リアクション
- sex　セックス
  - sexual　セクシャル
- shift　シフト
- task　タスク

・initial　イニシャル
・link　リンク
・*locate*
　location　ロケーション
・*maximise*
　max　マックス
　maximum　マキシマム
・technical　テクニカル
・technique　テクニック
・technology　テクノロジー
・volume　ボリューム

Sublist 4

・access　アクセス
・code　コード
・*communicate*
　communication　コミュニケーション
・contrast　コントラスト
・cycle　サイクル
　cycling　サイクリング
・debate　ディベート
・domestic　ドメスティック
・error　エラー
・ethnic　エスニック
・goal　ゴール
・job　ジョブ
・label　レベル
・mechanism　メカニズム
・option　オプション
・professional　プロ；プロフェッショナル
・project　プロジェクト
・*promote*
　promotion　プロモーション
・series　シリーズ
・stress　ストレス

Sublist 5

・challenge　チャレンジ
　challenger　チャレンジャー
・contact　コンタクト
・energy　エネルギー
・generation　ジェネレーション
・image　イメージ
・license　ライセンス
・medical　メディカル
・mental　メンタル
　mentality　メンタリティー
・monitor　モニター
・network　ネットワーク
・*orient*
　orientating　オリエンテーション
・style　スタイル
　stylish　スタイリッシュ
・symbol　シンボル
・target　ターゲット
・trend　トレンド
・version　バージョン

Sublist 6

・cite　サイト
・*cooperate*
　cooperation　コーポレーション
・display　ディスプレー
・domain　ドメイン
・*edit*
　editor　エディター
・expert　エキスパート
・gender　ジェンダー
・input　インプット
・*instruct*
　instructor　インストラクター
・lecture　レクチャー
・*motive*
　motivation　モチベーション
・tape　テープ

Sublist 7

- adult アダルト
- channel チャンネル
- chemical ケミカル
- *classic*
  - classical クラッシック
- couple カップル
- dynamic ダイナミック
- extract エキス
- file ファイル
- *globe*
  - global グローバル
- grade グレード
- media メディア
- mode モード
- release リリース
- reverse リバース
  - reversible リバーシブル
- *survive*
  - survival サバイバル
- topic トピック
- unique ユニーク
- *voluntary*
  - volunteer ボランティア

Sublist 8

- *automate*
  - automatic オートマチック
- chart チャート
- drama ドラマ
  - dramatic ドラマチック
- guideline ガイドライン
- paragraph パラグラフ
- plus プラス
- random ランダム
- schedule スケジュール
- *tense*
  - tension テンション
- *terminate*
  - terminal ターミナル
- theme テーマ
- uniform ユニホーム
- visual ビジュアル

Sublist 9

- manual マニュアル
- medium ミディアム
- relax リラックス
- revolution レボリューション
- route ルート
- scenario シナリオ
- supplement サプリメント
- team チーム
- vision ビジョン

Sublist 10

- panel パネル
- pose ポーズ