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## NOTES ON THE JAPANIZATION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY OF QUALITY

**Abstract:** Japanese words have entered the English language: adzuki bean, aikido, arame, banzai, bonsai, bushido, chanoyu, daikon, daimio, dan, dashi, dojo, enokidake, fugu, fusuma, futon, geisha, genro, geta, ginkgo, go, gyoza, haiku, happi coat, harakiri, hibachi, hijiki, hiragana, hokku, honcho, ikebana, inro, issei, jinriksha, judo, jujitsu, kabuki, kakemono, kaki, kamikaze, kana, kanji, karaoke, karate, katakana, kendo, kimono, kirigami, koan, koto, kudzu, makimono, medaka, mikado, mirin, miso, netsuke, ninja, nori, obento, obi, origami, pachinko, rumaki, sake, samisen, samurai, san, sanpaku, sashimi, satori, satsuma, sayonara, sen, sensei, seppuku, shabu-shabu, shiatsu, shiitake, shogi, shogun, shoji, sika, sukiyaki, sumo, surimi, sushi, tabi, tanka, tatami, tempura, teriyaki, tofu, tokonoma, torii, tsunami, tsutsugamushi disease, tycoon, udo, urushiol, wakame, wasabi, yakitori, yakuzo, yen, zaibatsu, zaikai, zazen, and zori, but only two (zaibatsu and zaikai) are specific to Business English. Lately, the English of Quality has also been invaded by numerous Japanese words that are analysed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Japanization, English, Vocabulary of Quality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the **American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language** (2008), the verb *Japanize* means 'to make or become Japanese in form, idiom, style, or character'. The same dictionary also mentions the word *Japanization*, a noun that would, therefore, designate an 'action, process, or result of doing or making [Japanese]'.

There has been **Japanization** in Japan's history during the pre-imperial period (before 1868), during the imperial period (1868-1945), and during the post-imperial period (after 1945). Nowadays, there is on-going **Japanization** of such fields as management and marketing –

including the field of quality – all over the world, with English seeming to be the most Japanized language of all spoken languages.

After World War II, a **quality revolution** followed in Japan: the Japanese began applying the lessons learned in producing military goods produced for export. Quality stalwarts W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran lectured extensively in Japan and, as a result, the Japanese became leaders in quality by the 1970s. Japanese manufacturers began increasing their share in American markets, resulting in widespread economic effects in the United States. The U.S. responded emphasizing not only statistics but also approaches that embraced the entire organization – a movement that

became known as **Total Quality Management**, followed by several other quality initiatives followed. (Chandrupatla, 2009: 3) This is how **Japanisms** got to enter the American English language and, together with the works of management and marketing *gurus*, other cultures and languages as well.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material on which the present paper is based on a corpus of **Japanisms** – a term that we have coined after **Anglicism** and **Americanism** to designate words borrowed from Japanese into another language (in this case, English).

The sources we have used to make up the inventory of **Japanisms** have been the Quality Glossary [Retrieved from: [thequalityportal.com/glossary/s.htm](http://thequalityportal.com/glossary/s.htm)], the Dictionary of TQM Terms [Retrieved from:

<http://www.mazur.net/tqm/tqmterms.htm>], Foster's *FreeQuality.Org Glossary*. [Retrieved from: [http://www.freequality.org/documents/GL\\_OSSARY.pdf](http://www.freequality.org/documents/GL_OSSARY.pdf)], and *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2008). Our sources have been almost exclusively electronic ones because, on one hand, **Japanisms** are not mentioned by English language dictionaries and, on the other hand, electronic sources are more often accessed by managers, marketers, and quality specialists than printed materials.

## 3. RESULTS

Based on our electronic sources of documentation, we have inventoried 39 loanwords of Japanese origin in the **English of Quality**. These loanwords are as follows: **3K** (*kiken* 'dangerous', *kitanai* 'dirty', *kitsui* 'stressful') 'hazards of the conventional work place' [19], → 'dirty,

dangerous and demanding', 'dirty, dangerous and demeaning', 'dirty, dangerous and difficult' [6]; **3M** (*muda* 'waste', *mura* 'irregular, uneven or inconsistent', *muri* 'unreasonable or excessive strain' [19]; **5S** (*seiri* 'sort', *seiton* 'set in order', *seiso* 'shine', *seiketsu* 'standardize', *shitsuke* 'sustain') 'application in manufacturing, in office' [19], 'a workplace organization methodology' [20]; **andon** 'a type of visual control that displays the current state of work (i.e., abnormal conditions, work instructions, job progress info) [and] one of the main tools of [the] Jidoka [quality-control method]' [19], 'a manufacturing term referring to a system to notify management, maintenance, and other workers of a quality or process problem' [1], 'warning lights on an assembly line that light up when a defect occurs' [7]; **atarimae hinshitsu** 'taken for granted quality' [19], meaning that 'things will work as they are supposed to' [2]; **genchi genbutsu** 'go see the problem' [19], 'go and see' [8], meaning that 'practical experience is valued over theoretical knowledge' [8]; **genjitsu** 'the real facts and data' [19]; **hansei event** 'reflecting (on learning)' [19], 'self-reflection', meaning acknowledging your own mistake and pledging improvement [9] (in Japanese companies, it's common practice that a manager expects *hansei* from his subordinates in case of mistakes: the manager takes the blame in public, whereas the department works on solving the problem); **heijunka** 'production levelling / smoothing' is a 'tool used for scheduling production in a pull system' [19], 'a technique for reducing the *muda* [activity that is wasteful and doesn't add value or is unproductive] waste and vital to the development of production efficiency' (the idea is to produce intermediate goods at a constant rate and to allow further processing to be carried out at a constant and predictable rate); **hoshin kanri / planning process** (*hoshin* 'goals' + *kanri*

‘control / management’) ‘a Japanese methodology to ensure that management’s strategic vision is deployed into each and every employee’s daily activities’ [19], ‘a method devised to capture and cement strategic goals as well as flashes of insight about the future and develop the means to bring these into reality’ [10], ‘a policy deployment approach to strategic planning’ [7] meaning addressing business priorities to move the organization to a new level of performance, variable from year-to-year; **Ishikawa diagram** ‘a graphical tool used to explore problems’ [19], ‘a diagram that shows the causes of a certain event’ [11], used in product design, in quality defect prevention, and in the identification of potential factors causing an overall effect; **jidoka** ‘the ability to stop production lines, by man or machine, in the event of problems such as equipment malfunction, quality issues, or late work’ [19], ‘the decision to stop and fix problems as they occur rather than pushing them down the line to be resolved later’ [1] (it helps prevent the passing of defects and identify and correct problem areas using localization and isolation, and makes it possible to ‘build’ quality at the production process); **jishuken** ‘management-driven kaizen activity where management members identify areas in need of continuous improvement and spread information through the organization to stimulate kaizen activity’ [19]; **kaikaku** ‘radical improvement’ [19], ‘is about making fundamental and radical changes to a production system’ [12]; **kaizen** (*kai* ‘change’ + *zen* ‘good’) ‘continuous improvement of all areas of a company, not just quality’ [19], (*kaizen* ‘improvement’, ‘change for better’) ‘philosophy or practices that focus upon continuous improvement of processes in manufacturing, engineering, supporting business processes, and management’ [13]; **kanban** ‘a small sign that is the key control for the just-in-time production’ [19], (*kanban* ‘signboard’, ‘billboard’) ‘a

concept related to lean and just-in-time production’ [14] (it is used in the instruction for production and conveyance, in the visual control tool to check for over production and in the detection of irregular processing speeds); **kankei-kaisha** ‘affiliated supplier plant’ [19]; **Kano model** ‘a [two-dimensional] theory of product development and customer satisfaction’ [15]: ‘1) the degree to which a product or service performs; 2) the degree to which the user is satisfied’ [19]; **Kansei engineering** (*kansei* ‘consumer’s feelings’) ‘a consumer-oriented technology process used to develop products’ [19], ‘method for translating feelings and impressions into product parameters’ [16] based on the Kansei words suitable for the product to be designed; **nemawashi** ‘preliminary work (prepare or plan) to involve other sections / departments in discussions to seek input, information and/or support for a proposal or change (policy, etc.) that would affect them’ [19], ‘an informal process of quietly laying the foundation for some proposed change or project, by talking to the people concerned, gathering support and feedback, and so forth’ [17]; **nou-hau-shu** ‘know-how document’ [19]; **obeya** (*obeya* ‘big room’) ‘nerve centre for team activity’ [19]; **rengi system** ‘formal decision process’ [19]; **sangen shugi** ‘experience it!’ [19]; **seichi** ‘delicate workmanship, attention to detail, fine craftsmanship’ [19]; **seigisei-gaido-risuto** ‘manufacturability guide list’ [19]; **seiketsu** ‘standardization’ [7]; **seiri** ‘organizing and throwing away things you don’t use’ [7]; **seiso** ‘a term that suggests that a highly productive workplace should be clean’ [7]; **seiton** ‘neatness in the workplace’ [7]; **sekkei-tejun-sho** ‘design-procedure document’ [19]; **shitsuke** ‘the discipline required to maintain the changes that have been made in a workplace’ [7]; **Taguchi method** ‘an approach to quality management [providing] a basis for determining the functional relationship

between controllable product or service design factors and the outcomes of a process, a method for adjusting the mean of a process by optimizing controllable variables, and a procedure for examining the relationship between random noise in the process and product or service variability' [7]; *touzen* 'unnecessary *kaizen*' [19]; *yamazumi board* 'cycle time mapping process to identify value-added and non-value added activities' [19]; *yamazumi charts* 'charts that show the planned cycle times for each process' [19], *yokaten* 'across everywhere' meaning plant-related activities and/or countermeasures that are communicated plant wide and with other company affiliates [19], *zaibatsu* 'a powerful family-controlled commercial combine of Japan; a Japanese conglomerate or cartel' [21], *zaikai* 'the commercial and financial community of Japan' [21].

#### 4. DISCUSSION

**Quality Japanisms** are used in fields such as *business (hoshin kanri, kaizen)*, *engineering (kaizen)*, *graphics (Ishikawa diagram, yamazumi board, yamazumi charts)*, *management (andon, hoshin kanri, jishuken, kaizen, and Taguchi method)*, *manufacturing (5S, andon, and kaizen)*, *production (heijunka, jidoka, kaikaku, kanban)*, *quality (andon, atarimae hinshitsu, Ishikawa diagram, jidoka, kaizen, and Taguchi method)*, *technology (Kansei engineering)*, etc.

From the point of view of their structure, there are, among these **Japanisms**, 9 hybrid forms (24%), i.e. phrases containing both Japanese and English words: *hansei event*, *hoshin planning*, *Ishikawa diagram*, *Kano model*, *Kansei engineering*, *nou-hau-shu*, *Taguchi method*, *yamazumi board*, and *yamazumi charts*. This shows that **Japanisms** are still perceived as foreign words and, as such, they need the support of English words. On the other hand, *nou-*

*hau-shu* contains a funny spelling of the English noun *know-how* meant to make it all look like a Japanese word. Four of these terms – *Ishikawa diagram*, *Kano model*, *Kansei engineering*, and *Taguchi method* – contain proper names introduced, in the vocabulary of **quality**, as a tribute to their promoters. To also note the imperative phrases (*genchi genbutsu* 'go see the problem!', 'go and see!' and *sangen shugi* 'experience it!') that dynamise both utterance and process.

From the point of view of their meaning, these **Japanisms** are remarkable for their syncretism due probably to the Japanese system of writing (logographs and syllabaries). Thus, the cases in which a Japanese word can be rendered by a single English word are extremely rare (*seiketsu* 'standardization'), while metaphorical uses are rather frequent (*kaizen* 'improvement', 'change for better' means 'philosophy or practices that focus upon continuous improvement of processes in manufacturing, engineering, supporting business processes, and management'; *kanban* 'signboard', 'billboard' means 'a concept related to lean and just-in-time production'; *obeya* 'big room' means 'nerve centre for team activity'; etc.), not to speak about the already famous **3K** (*kiken* 'dangerous', *kitanai* 'dirty', *kitsui* 'stressful'), **3M** (*muda* 'waste', *mura* 'irregular, uneven or inconsistent', *muri* 'unreasonable or excessive strain', or **5S** (*seiri* 'sort', *seiton* 'set in order', *seiso* 'shine', *seiketsu* 'standardize', *shitsuke* 'sustain').

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The rather large number of **Japanisms** in the **English of Quality** alone (39) – compared to the 109 words of Japanese origin mentioned by English language dictionaries, words inherent to Japanese culture (arts, business, clothing, culinary, government and politics, martial arts, religion, etc.) – point to a process in which

Japanese culture continues to influence other cultures, in general, and the field of **quality**, in particular.

As concepts inherent to Japanese culture, some of them are simple transliterations of

Japanese language words, hence their exoticism; and it is only time that will decide if these **Japanisms** specific to the **English of Quality** will make or not English their home.

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