

Examining the Phenomenon of *Wasei Eigo*:  
English Pseudo-Loanwords in Japanese

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this research will be “wasei eigo,” or English-based terms created in Japan. The premise is that wasei eigo exemplifies Japan’s relation with foreign things and concepts, especially Western ones. It takes them in and then transforms them into something different, yet better suited and more accessible, to Japan and its people. It is an example and paradigm for many kinds of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contacts and borrowing—of words and grammar, food, holidays, music, and more. The paper gives an overview of the history of Japan’s contact with foreign language, as well as explanations of several types of wasei eigo, then discusses reasons for its existence and use, and puts it in a broader context with comparisons to modified cultural traditions as well as to other forms of linguistic borrowing.

## **Chapter One: Origin and Background of Wasei Eigo**

Japan has a long history of importing foreign words. In fact, of its three writing systems—*hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*—one of them, *kanji*, was imported wholesale from China during the Han dynasty. The other two writing systems are based on parts of *kanji*, so one may say that Japan derives its entire writing system from Chinese. Thus, it is not terribly surprising that loanwords derived from other languages make up a considerable portion of modern Japanese.

The phenomenon of *wasei eigo*, while very common among Japanese speakers nowadays, is baffling to native English speakers who may encounter it. Many native Japanese speakers can agree that everyone in Japan uses the more common terms, regardless of age, social status, gender, and other categorizations. The words and phrases described in this paper are commonplace and natural to the Japanese, but can seem confusing and even laughable to foreigners who speak English. They are what are known as “pseudo-anglicisms,” defined as “a word in a language other than English that appears to be English, but in fact is not” (Wiktionary 2012). An actual anglicism is a “word or other feature originating in the English language that has been borrowed by another language.” The Japanese language is indeed a major user of pseudo-anglicisms, which occur frequently in everyday conversation.

Below are several definitions of *wasei eigo* provided by primary sources, native speakers of Japanese, who responded to a series of questions regarding their thoughts about *wasei eigo*. Some responses were originally in English, and some are

translated from Japanese to English. As a non-native speaker of Japanese, I found it was quite useful to obtain directly from insiders such knowledge and opinions of this aspect of the Japanese language and how it is used practically in daily life. The answers also add a more human component to this research, supplementing hard-to-find published sources like wasei eigo glossaries. Through these responses, we are able to see deeper than just the words themselves and what they mean. We see what they mean *to the people who use them*, as well as when, how, and why they use them—in short, we see the pragmatics of wasei eigo.

*“To me, “wasei eigo” means nothing but “English made in Japan,” according its literal sense.”* (Fumio Ano, Professor Emeritus, Tohoku University)

*“It is Japanese that is like English, but in fact is not used in the English language.”* (Mutsumi Yokota, student)

These two definitions are probably the most universal and to the point, and should not be up for much debate or scrutiny. They are matter-of-fact, and a quick and easy way to describe wasei eigo to confused outsiders.

Overall, it seems that there is some consensus among the definitions. However, wasei eigo can mean different things to different people, and some aspects are more important to certain people, as illustrated below in other definitions.

Wasei eigo means...

*...“Various English words that Japanese have created independently, influenced by actual imported English katakanago (words). However, since they are words that*

*the Japanese have made arbitrarily, they only make sense to Japanese speakers.”*

(Hiroki Yamano, student)

*...“Katakana vocabulary arbitrarily created by the Japanese. There are many ones that Japanese people think are English, and don’t know that they are not actually English. The origins of many of them are unknown even to the Japanese.”* (Aya

Tomotaki, student)

*...“Words in katakana that Japanese people often think are actual English, but were actually made by the Japanese.”* (Kohei Tsuji, student)

These definitions are all related to Japan creating the terms for its own exclusive use, and the fact that they only make sense to the Japanese, and often have unclear origins—which may explain why many of them are thought to be English.

*...“English-sounding words that were coined in Japan. Their meaning is not usually understood by the native speakers of English.”* (Rei Inouye, instructor, Northeastern University)

*...“Words that are in fact made from combining various foreign languages or from abbreviations and pretending they are words from English.”* (Yuuki Shizuoka, student)

*...“Words/phrases that are created, often by combining multiple words and shortening them, but are not used by and does not make sense to native English speakers. Some of them such as カラオケ (karaoke) are used in English, though.”*

(Yuki Yamamoto, student)

These definitions converge on the fact that these terms are often made by combining or abbreviating foreign words, to be used and understood in Japan, but not by native English speakers or other foreigners—except in the rare cases like the one mentioned above.

Finally, we have a deeper look from an insider. The following definition in particular is unique in that it touches upon a possible motive or background for the formation of *wasei eigo* terms, which will be discussed later. It also imposes a value judgment onto *wasei eigo* words that are very distant in meaning and sound from their Western counterparts.

*“I think it expresses the feeling of wanting to be, or being, versed in foreign languages and cultures (especially Anglophone ones). That being said, words where the pronunciation and/or original meaning has been completely altered are interesting and funny.”* (Kiyoko Morita, instructor, Tufts University)

Often, people *do* find these interesting and funny, especially non-native Japanese speakers encountering such terms for the first time while learning about the Japanese language.

There is an important distinction that must be made between what is simply imported English put into the Japanese *katakana* writing system, typically referred to as “*gairaigo*” (foreign loanwords) or “*katakanago*” (words in the phonetic *katakana* system), and the pseudo-loanwords that are inspired by the actual borrowed English. The latter is what we refer to as “*wasei eigo*” (literally, “Japan-

made English”). A native Japanese speaker, Yuki Yamamoto, summarizes the difference quite accurately: “Katakanago English is more holistic, including correct English words that are just pronounced in [a] Japanese way ... The difference is whether the word makes sense to native English speakers when pronounced correctly. [A] Katakana-go English word does make sense, while [a] wasei eigo word does not.” By “holistic,” he means that katakanago is a more inclusive term than wasei eigo—that is, wasei eigo is one instance of the category of Japanese words written in katakana.

Let us look at a somewhat extreme example. In a standard Western church wedding, the long stretch along which the wedding party walks is called the “wedding aisle” or just the “aisle” in context. However, in a Western-style wedding in Japan, the same aisle is referred to as the “virgin road” (*baajin roodo* or *vaajin roodo*). This is a term that has come into use specifically for weddings in Japan. This may be tied in to the style of Japan’s unique “Western weddings” that are in fact analogous to wasei eigo itself—this comparison will be discussed later. The point is that if a Japanese speaker tried to refer to a wedding aisle as a “virgin road” to an English speaker who had not heard this wasei eigo term, much confusion would ensue.

In fact, such confusion often does ensue when a Japanese speaker thinks that a wasei eigo term is actually used in English. One student, Hiroki Yamano, recalls, “While studying abroad in America, I have accidentally called an outlet a “konsento” (concent). I didn’t realize it until my American friends pointed it out to me, as I had assumed it was just a foreign word from English.” He also stated it was one of the

terms he found the funniest or most interesting: “I am curious since I don’t understand why ‘outlet’ became ‘konsento’.”

Indeed, the etymologies of many *wasei eigo* terms are unknown or difficult to find. Some are more apparent than others, and some make much more sense to English speakers than others. In this case, it is unclear whether *konsento* or “concent” comes from the Dutch word for concentric, or if it is an abbreviation of the English *concentric*, but either way, according to dictionaries it is related to “concentric plug” (Denshi Jisho; Wiktionary).

English and English-sounding words certainly make up a sizeable portion of the contemporary Japanese language. According to Stanlaw, “up to 10 percent of the daily vocabulary in Japanese is English-based,” which is far more than the loanwords from any other foreign language (4). In addition, about four percent of the vocabulary in newspapers is *gairaigo*: foreign loanwords in general. The incredible thing is that the Japanese National Language Research Institute gathered this data in *the early 1970s* (Stanlaw, 12-13). Since then, countless additional English-based words have undeniably flooded into the Japanese language, both from outside and inside the country. The percentage could be even greater by now.

However, the prevalence of English-based vocabulary cannot compare to the words that are rooted in Chinese. In the same study, while around 54 percent of the total words in the newspaper sample were *wago* or words of Japanese origin, a whopping 41 percent were *kango* or words of Chinese origin. This refers to *kanji* compounds that use the *on’yomi* (“Chinese reading,” or the Japanese approximation of how the word sounded in Chinese at that time ) for each character in the word,

such as *hakutou* (白桃) for “white peach,” as opposed to the individual Japanese words *shiroi* (白い) and *momo* (桃). This is the case with a considerable portion of the Japanese language because it has been built upon Chinese in a similar way to how the romance languages were built upon Latin.

Japanese has always taken in elements of foreign languages, ever since adopting Chinese as a writing system during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.). The word for these Chinese characters, *kanji* (漢字), very closely resembles the modern-day Chinese word for their writing system, *hanzi* (汉字), because they were once the same word, but the Chinese version has since become simplified. And so, Chinese gave Japanese its first writing system, as well as a scholarly tradition that continues to this day...for centuries the official language of government and the court was Chinese (Stanlaw 45). After that, the Japanese created their two phonetic *kana* systems, hiragana and katakana, based on kanji characters. Specifically, hiragana came from *man'yōgana*, which were Chinese characters used phonetically in Heian Japan, and its appearance was derived from Chinese calligraphy in cursive. Katakana characters also represent parts of kanji (Simon Ager).

Chinese has also had a profound impact on the Korean language and writing system, with Chinese characters called *hanja* as the primary form of writing until the phonetic *hangul* system was actively promoted in the early 1900s and eventually became dominant after World War II (Fischer 193). Thus, the development of Korean writing has some close parallels to that of Japanese writing, and these ties will come up later when exploring the Korean version of *wasei eigo*.

After China, the next languages to have a considerable impact of Japanese were Portuguese and Dutch. Portugal and then the Netherlands were two of the first countries outside of Asia to deal closely with Japan. Some of the loanwords adapted from these languages are, in fact, still used in Japanese today. When Portuguese Jesuit priests came to Japan around 1542 during the Muromachi period, they brought not only science and Christianity, but also a plethora of new words, such as *botan* (“button,” from *botão*), *igirisu* (“England,” from *ingles*), *pan* (“bread,” from *pão*), and *buranko* (“swing,” from *balanço*).

Then came the Dutch East India Company Traders in 1609, who were later only allowed onto the manmade island of Dejima in Nagasaki from circa 1640 to 1854, but continued to have a scholarly exchange with the Japanese. Though only around 160 Dutch loanwords are being used now, at one point in the mid-1700s as many as 3,000 loanwords may have been “employed in technical and scientific terminology” (Leo Loveday 55). Dutch brought such common words as *gomu* (“rubber,” from *gom/gum*), *kōhī* (“coffee,” from *koffie*), *morumotto* (“guinea pig,” from *marmot*), and *randoseru* (“standard-issue school backpack”, from *ransel*).

The intrusion of Dutch into Japanese aided the later spread of English, and studying Dutch became the foundation for Western scholarship (Stanlaw 47). For a long time, Dutch was the primary language used as a conduit for Western learning—those who could translate it into Japanese were valued very highly. Translating from Dutch into Japanese may have in fact had some impacts on Japanese grammar—for example, an increased use of pronouns such as this and that or he and she is “due to

direct translations from Dutch sentences, although Japanese is supposedly comparatively free of pronouns (Tsujiura, 1996)” (qtd. in Stanlaw 48).

The situation changed completely when Commodore Matthew Perry, an American, brought his black ships to Japan’s ports in 1853 and effectively ended Japan’s long period of *sakoku* (“closed country”). This was not in fact the first time the English language had made contact with Japan, but it was a highly consequential landmark. The U.S. secured open-port treaties with Japan and got preferential treatment in trading, and thus easy access to its ports like Yokohama and Nagasaki. With Americans and other Westerners flooding in, the Institute for Translation and Foreign Studies started strongly supporting English, and the government opened more foreign language schools. Resources for studying Dutch soon switched over to English as it rapidly became the dominant foreign language. Japan realized that to keep up with the times they must “meet the West head-on and modernize the country, and for that enterprise, knowledge of Western customs and science was necessary (Stanlaw 54).

With the influx of foreigners while English training was not yet adequate or widespread enough, some interesting vocabulary was created from misheard vernacular English. Both Atkinson and Diosy cite the term for a British or American sailor as *dam your eye sto* or *damuraisu h'to*, from the English phrase ‘Damn your eyes!’ plus the Japanese word for person, *hito* (qtd. in Stanlaw 59). Indeed, there were many varieties of pidgin English in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as “nurse talk” and “merchant talk.” And since English had attained a level of prestige in the Meiji era’s rush to catch up to the West, mixing borrowed English into regular

conversation became popular amongst students and *haikara* (“high-collar”) people who aimed for Western-style sophistication (Stanlaw 60). Examples of this mixed English-Japanese speech can be found in lines from an 1875 novel, cited in Stanlaw 61: “*Webster no daijiten – jitsu-ni kore wa yuusufaru ja.*” (“This ‘**Webster’s** Comprehensive Dictionary’ is really **useful.**”) “*Jitsu-ni nihonjin no anpankucharu niwa osore iru.*” (“I’m sick of these Japanese being so **unpunctual.**”) This mixed language sounds remarkably like the modern-day situation of *wasei eigo* in Japanese. The motives are especially similar: many of my contacts have stated that using loanwords and *wasei eigo* sounds “fashionable” (Mutsumi Yokota).

And thus, the years passed, with most contact with Americans occurring in English, as both sides had determined that it was near impossible for the Americans to learn Japanese—it was even deemed “barbarous” to the ear by Lt. George Preble in 1854 (qtd. in Stanlaw 63). Eventually, there came a time of increased contact and borrowing between Japanese and English during the Taisho Period (1912-1926). While there has been more borrowing after World War II statistically-speaking, the Taisho period “established patterns for taking, modifying, and creating English vocabulary items and English-language concepts and cognitive schemas which continue to this day” (Stanlaw 68). Therefore, modern-day *wasei eigo* and loanword usage tend to be thanks to Taisho-era borrowing. Many common terms such as *takushii* (“taxi”), *rajio* (“radio”), and the *wasei eigo sarariiman* (“salaried-man”, or male white-collar office worker) were introduced in the 1920s (ibid).

During World War II, the Japanese government tried to sweep the English language under the rug as much as possible, for obvious reasons—it was associated

with their English-speaking enemies, the Americans, and, indirectly, the British. Sonoda observed that only war-related terms such as *reedaa* (“radar”) entered the Japanese language (qtd. in Stanlaw 69). While English may have gone underground, it far from died out—English exploded in popularity once more in Japan after World War II. During the Occupation, Japan was full of American soldiers. With these soldiers came glimpses of foreign food (as will be discussed later) and of course, the English language. Pidgin varieties of Japanglish arose once again between the occupying soldiers and the locals with whom they interacted.

And from that point on, English was inexorably woven into the Japanese language, and became a mandatory part of public education. The bulk of *wasei eigo* terms have come into use since World War II.

## **Chapter Two: The How and Why of Wasei Eigo**

In this chapter, we shall discuss some iconic examples of wasei eigo from various categories, to give a better picture of what really constitutes the set of words known as wasei eigo. Then we will examine what makes it “tick”—its prevalence and usage, as well as reasons for making or using wasei eigo.

I have come up with several categories I would like to distinguish. They are inclusive of all English-style katakanago, a larger group which wasei eigo falls under. There are the ones that come directly from English and mean exactly the same thing. From here on, these directly copied terms will be called Category 1. There are words that look or sound the same as something in English, but the meaning is either entirely different or has a different nuance. These words will be Category 2, which *is* considered wasei eigo. There are the set phrases that are made from two or more English words put together in ways that do not occur in standard English, and these unique Japan-only combinations will be called Category 3. There are new portmanteaus or abbreviations that English speakers never use, which are Category 4. And then there are entirely new and original words and phrases that do not appear in English at all, such as “skinship,” and these will be Category 5. There is also a separate category of antiquated wasei eigo that I would like to include, for the purpose of tracking the ebb and flow of such words and phrases. This is called Category 0 for “out-of-style,” “obsolete,” or “outdated.”

Category 1 terms should not be viewed as wasei eigo, as they are simply foreign loanwords lifted verbatim from English. One common example of this would

be *keeki*, which is literally just “cake.” However, if one were to say *dekoreeshon keeki* (“decoration cake,” a cake with fancy icing and other accoutrements), that would be a Category 3 term, since it is a unique Japanese combination of two English words.

The terms *sutairu*, “style,” and *kuuru*, “cool” are used in informal speech about as regularly as they are in English. They also have native Japanese counterparts, *kakkou* or *fuukaku* for “style” and *kakkoii* for “cool.” Still, people will opt for these *katakanago* loanwords fairly often, despite there being Japanese versions. Perhaps the notion that “cool” sounds “cooler” in English is one of the reasons behind this.

Although there is a native word for “machine,” (*kikai*), the loanword *mashin* or *mashiin* is commonly used as well. The slightly different-sounding *mishin* indicates a “sewing machine.” Andrew Gordon writes that while in the 1860s, the word was both translated into Japanese characters and written as the phonetic approximation “*shuu-ingu ma-shee-nay*,” over the next decade the “sewing” part was dropped and the “machine” part was “distilled into just two syllables: *mishin*” (19). Meanwhile, there is no native Japanese word for *robotto*, or “robot.” This may seem ironic as Japan is known worldwide for excelling in robotics, but the concept of “robots” just happens to have been introduced to Japan through the West.

Along with Western culture came the practice of bust, waist, and hip measurements to fit clothing. Matsuo and others wrote in 1965 that these were directly translated as *mune-mawari* (lit., “chest circumference”), *dou-mawari* (lit.,

“body circumference”), and *shiri-mawari* (lit., “bottom circumference”).<sup>1</sup> However, people eventually found these too “direct and crude” and substituted English loanwords instead: *basuto* (“bust”), *uesuto* (“waist”), and *hippu* (“hip”) (qtd. in Miura 24-25).

A similar situation is the almost ubiquitous use of *toire* (“toilet”) to mean “restroom” or “bathroom.” Since it is more foreign-sounding, it is less direct and more euphemistic than the original Japanese term *benjo*. However, it is worth noting that the Japanese euphemism *o-tearai* (lit., “hand-wash” with respectful “o-” prefix), which is closer to saying “the washroom” in English, is also widely used.

Some terms related to romance have been completely overtaken by katakanago versions. “Kiss” is always *kisu* (a word with the verb *suru*, “to do,” added at the end)—it has come to the point where the original Japanese term, *seppun*, has grown so old-fashioned that it would only be used by a classical poet long ago. *Seppun* did start to be overshadowed by the Japanese *kuchizuke* after early Showa, but *kisu* is nonetheless a very popular way of saying “kiss” today. *Sekkusu* (+ *suru*) is also used to refer to the act of sex nowadays instead of the Japanese *seikou* (“sexual intercourse”)—the latter would perhaps be found in an official or medical document. It is intriguing that the natural act of sex is now referred to by a foreign name, making it sound less like a native occurrence and more of an immodest, hip thing that Westerners do.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that *shiri-mawari* sounds unnatural according to some native speakers—in fact, it does not have an entry in the online dictionary Jisho.org. The proper term would be *koshi-mawari* (lit., “hip circumference”).

## Category 2

Category 2 terms, whose meanings have been changed, expanded, or narrowed down from their English roots, are a very interesting category, as they have the potential to lead to a good number of misunderstandings. Take *handoru* (lit., “handle,” i.e., “steering wheel”), for example: handle is certainly a valid word in English, but no one would ever say “keep both hands on the handle” when talking about driving. Also, “designated driver” is *handoru kiipaa* (“handle keeper”) in wasei eigo. Unsurprisingly, it is not the only wasei eigo word related to cars or driving. *Kurakushon*, lit., “klaxon/claxon,” means “car horn,” and it either comes from old-fashioned English (back when actual claxons were in use), or from French or Dutch. *Uinkaa* (lit., “winker”) means “turn signal,” also known as “blinkers,” and the windshield is called *furonto garasu* (lit., “front glass”).

What must a foreigner think of when he or she hears *baikingu*, (lit., “Viking”) in Japanese for the first time? A buffet or smorgasbord is probably not what comes to mind. The first smorgasbord restaurant in Japan opened at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in 1962, and was named *Baikingu*, i.e., Viking—appropriate since both concepts are from Northern Europe, and of course, *baikingu* is much easier to pronounce than *sumoogasuboodo* would be. As Umegaki wrote in 1973, *baikingu* soon widely came to mean “restaurant food served buffet style for which one pays a specified price regardless of the amount one eats.” This leads to the birth of bizarre-sounding combinations like *Chuuka-Baikingu* (lit., “Chinese Viking”) and *Sekai-Baikingu* (lit., “World Viking”) (qtd. in Miura 22).

*Bosu* used to be more limited in meaning than English *boss*. If one refers to their superior as “my boss” while in Japan, the implication may be more derogatory than intended. This is because *bosu* tends to mean “person who has gained control of his organization, especially political or criminal, with coercion.” Miura noted in 1979 that some Japanese had begun using *bosu* to refer to their supervisors (32), and now it is commonly translated in dictionaries and example sentences as “boss” or “supervisor” in English. Thus, it has come to evolve somewhat out of the *wasei* category.

The meaning of *chaamingu* is narrower than the English “charming”: it only refers to physical charm, i.e., physical attractiveness or appeal. The compound *chaamu-pointo* (lit., “charm point”) means one’s “most attractive physical feature, i.e., eyes, mouth, legs, etc.” Miura makes the important distinction that a pleasant party host is “not likely to be called *chaamingu*, especially if he is not a handsome young man” (Miura 35-36).

*Dorai* in Japanese does not mean “moisture-free” but is the opposite of *uetto* (lit., “wet” i.e., “sentimental”). Thus, *dorai* can be used to describe a detached, businesslike person or attitude (48). While *naiibu* can share the same meaning as its English source “naïve,” according to the dictionary Jisho.org, it can also mean emotionally sensitive, uncomplicated or unpretentious. In contrast to the broader definition of naïve, *sensu* (“sense”) is much narrower than its English counterpart: the online Jisho.org defines it as “good taste (for music, style, tact, etc.),” as in, “*Kanojo wa oshare na ko da ne. Sensu ga ii yo ne*” (“She’s a fashionable girl, don’t you think? She has a good **sense of style**”). *Muudi* (“moody”) does not mean “emotional

or prone to mood swings” in Japanese—rather, it was once commonly used to mean “full of romantic atmosphere” (Fumio Ano).

*Doraibu* is a noun in Japanese, rather than a noun or verb, and refers to a “short pleasure trip by car,” and would be used as follows: *Kyou wa otenki ga ii kara inaka e doraibu ni ikimashou* (“Since it’s a beautiful day today, let’s go for a ride in the country”) (Miura 48). One would not use *doraibu* when asking whether someone knows how to drive, for example.

A handout or flyer is instead called *purinto* (“print”) in Japanese. This makes some sense, as these things are usually printed, but it is hard to imagine why it is not just called *handauto* or *furaiyaa*. *Purinto* may be easier or faster to say, but the real etymology, as with many of these terms, is not entirely clear.

### **Category 3**

Category 3 terms have taken separate English words and used them as if they were Legos or building blocks to create something uniquely Japanese. *Appu* (“up”) is used in several wasei compounds, such as *imeeji-appu* (lit., “image up”), which means “improvement in appearance or reputation.” *Beesu-appu* (lit., “base up”) means “increase in basic pay,” which Japanese labor unions fight for annually. *Kosuto-appu* (lit., “cost up”) is an “increase in production cost.” *Raifu-appu* (lit., “life up”) means “change for the better in one’s mode of living.” The antonym *daun* (“down”) can be combined with many of these same words to form compounds with the opposite meaning. Miura noted in 1979 that *appu* and *daun* were some of the most commonly used components of loanwords at the time (20). The word *chenji*

(“change”) can also be used in combinations like *menbaa-chenji* (lit., “member change,” i.e., “sending substitutions into a game of baseball or other sports”) and *imeeji-chenji* (lit., “image change,” i.e., “changing one’s appearance in order to present a completely different impression”) (ibid, 38).

*Bebii* (“baby”) is another compound-only word, appearing in loanwords such as *bebii-uea* (“baby wear”). It is part of various wasei eigo compounds like *bebii-kaa* (lit., “baby car,” i.e., “stroller”), and *bebii-saakuru* (lit., “baby circle,” i.e., “playpen”). *Bebii* can also be used as “small” in some wasei terms; for example, *bebii-gorufu* (lit., “baby golf,” i.e., “miniature golf”) (Miura 25). These compounds are more examples of wasei eigo terms that are logical-sounding after some consideration, but are just bewildering at first because they are never heard in English.

*Goruden* (“golden”), like *bebii*, exists only in compounds. The most common examples are the wasei *goruden-awaa* (lit. “golden hour”) and *goruden-uiiku* (lit., “golden week”). “Golden hour” means prime time, the evening hours with the highest television viewership. “Golden week” is the week from April 29 to May 5 with several Japanese holidays, a vacation period for most of the workforce (Miura 60).

*Atto-hoomu* (“at home”) is an adjective in Japanese, not a prepositional phrase, and it does not mean “in one’s home.” It carries the connotation of “cozy and homelike.” An example would be *Kono heya wa atto-hoomu na kanji desu nee* (“This room is nice and homelike, isn’t it?”) (Miura 21). This may also be considered Category 2, since it is taking a phrase that could be found in English and altering its

meaning. Compare *mai peesu* (“my pace”), which means “doing things at one’s own pace.”

The compound *besuto-ten* (lit., “best ten”), as in *Sakunen-do no Nihon-eiga no besuto-ten ga erabareta* (“Last year’s ten best Japanese films have been selected”), is amusing because it is a reversal of the English “ten best” (Miura 26-27).

*Bijinesu-gaaru* (lit., “business girl”), or *BG* for short, was originally the term used to describe a female office worker. It was fairly common until the 1960s, when “someone suggested it carried a negative connotation in English,” and the newer term *OL*, from “o(ffice) l(ady)” (Miura 28-29). An *OL* is little more than a glorified secretary; she is there to smile and bring cheer to the office, prepare tea and coffee for the men, and do clerical work. She is usually young, and almost always leaves the position upon getting married or having a child. *BGs* and *OLs* are a distinctly Japanese trend, as it has not always been the most progressive country in regards to gender equality.

The term *burezaa-kooto* is rather redundant: we do not say “blazer coat” in English, but Japanese *burezaa* is usually followed by *kooto* (“coat”). Redundant *wasei eigo* are not rare: another example is *toosuto-pan*, lit., “toast bread” (from English *toast* and Portuguese *pão* for “bread”), interchangeable with the simple *toosuto* (“toast”) (Miura 34).

The *dainingu-kitchin* is just what it sounds like: a dining room combined with a kitchen. Miura wrote in 1979 that these had become very popular in the past two decades as apartment buildings sprang up. As is the case today “since land is scarce,

space has to be utilized to the utmost.” It can be abbreviated to DK in apartment listings (41).

*Doa* (“door”) has been taken from English and placed into a couple of wasei compounds, namely *doa-boo*i (lit., “door boy”) and *doa-gaaru* (lit., “door girl”). The former indicates a young doorman at the entrance to a hotel, a nightclub, a bar, et cetera. The latter is more of a Japan-only phenomenon: it refers to “a young female employee greeting incoming customers” at a department store (Miura 47).

#### **Category 4**

Several of these abbreviated Category 4 terms involve relatively recent developments in technology. *Waapuro* (lit., “wor-pro”) means “word processor,” and *pasokon* (lit., “perso-com”) means “personal computer,” and alternative to the usual English abbreviation “PC.” However, *pasokon* does not distinguish between PC and Mac computers as the English version implies; it is more of a synonym for *konpyuutaa* (“computer”). *Rimokon* (lit., “remo-con”) is short for remote control, and *geesen* (lit., “ga-cen”) is short for game center.

The word *hoomu* (lit., “form”) is short for “platform” (which would be said in katakana as *purattofoomu*). Phonetically, though, this can be confusing to a Western learner, as the word sounds similar to “home.” *Daiya* is short for *diagram* and refers to a railroad timetable, as in *Taifuu no tame ressha no daiya ga midarete-iru* (“Because of the typhoon, trains are running off schedule”). In this sense, the use of the full form, *daiyaguramu*, is, while not incorrect, very uncommon. A book of

railroad timetables is called *jikanhyou*, a non-loan..." (Miura 41). Note that the word *daiyamondo* ("diamond") can also be shortened to *daiya*.

The word *depaato* does not mean "depart," although it sounds like it—in fact, it is short for department store. Similarly, *suupaa* ("super") is short for supermarket. Because of their role in daily life, these are two extremely prevalent examples of Category 4 terms and of wasei eigo. Despite their ubiquity, a couple of the interviewees were unclear as to whether they thought the word "supermarket" was wasei eigo or not (Kohei Tsuji, Rei Inouye).

Other common examples include *ketto* ("ket"), short for blanket; *apo* ("appo"), short for appointment, and *zemi*, which is actually abbreviated from the German pronunciation of "seminar."

## **Category 5**

One of the more surprising and amusing wasei eigo examples can be found in the completely made-up word *sukinshippu* ("skinship"), a combination of "skin" with the suffix "-ship," which refers to closeness or bonding through physical contact, such as a hug or a pat. The Denshi Jisho online dictionary describes it as "child-rearing with frequent physical contact," or "close relationship (esp. physical)." The reason why such a word has come into use in Japan, but not in Anglophone countries, may have to do with Japan's general lack of physical contact. Hugs and other physical expressions of affection, at least in public, are far less common there than in countries like America. Perhaps such a word was never needed in English because the notion comes so naturally to Americans that it goes without saying, but

was more of a novel concept to the Japanese. It has become so ingrained in the language that, like many other wasei eigo, some Japanese do not realize that it is not actual English.

The modern slang term *homodachi* can mean “a gay friend” or refer to when two same-sex friends are so close as to appear romantically involved (eije.weblio.jp). It is made from combining the root *homo*, short for “homosexual,” which is commonly used in Japan, and *tomodachi*, which means “friend.” An episode of the American cartoon *South Park*, “Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Boat Ride,” was called “*Aiken Supaakii no O-homodachi*” (“The Beloved Dog Sparky’s Gay Friend”) in Japanese (ja.wikipedia.org). Another slang term, *cheriibooi* (lit., “cherryboy”), means “male virgin.” Presumably this is a reference to the English slang phrase “to pop someone’s cherry,” meaning to take his or her virginity. However, that phrase is more associated with female virginity, so seeing the genders reversed is both confusing and entertaining.

Finally, there is the term *orudokamaa* (“oldcomer”), used in contrast with the standard English *nyuukamaa* (“newcomer”). In a Japanese article about the evolution of immigrants’ rights in Japan, the two terms are used to mean, respectively, descendants of immigrants whose families have been in the country for a while, and more recent immigrants (Kondou). It is interesting that within the realm of wasei eigo, there are opposites created for English words that originally had no opposite.

## The Evolution of and Reasons for Wasei Eigo

After understanding the nature of *wasei eigo*, one must wonder: what are the Japanese trying to accomplish with it? Might they be seeking a certain effect or sound in their speech and writing? Are they using it to try to sound “cool” or “sophisticated”? Do people use it to describe things they have never seen before, such as non-Japanese sports and foods?

The truth is, any or all of these may be true, depending on the person, the phrase and the situation. According to student Mutsumi Yokota, it is more *oshare* (hip, in style) in Japan to use *katakana* words and *wasei eigo* when speaking or writing. This may indicate that it is more common or customary among the younger generations. But does that mean that the elderly use it less often? Not necessarily—many of the interviewees responded that it is used by all sorts of people in all sorts of situations. However, the young may make heavier use of certain *wasei eigo* terms that are tied into today’s pop culture than the old do (according to Fumio Ano, age 81).

For example, the word *purikura* refers to photo booths all over malls and other fun places in Japan, which young girls (and occasionally boys) will enter in pairs or groups, take a series of glamour shots, and then edit and decorate them with a digital pen before printing them out as stickers. It is not immediately clear that *purikura* is a *wasei eigo* term, but it is in fact short for *purinto kurabu* – “print club.” Younger people almost certainly use this term more often than older people do, since it is a teenage pastime that has only become widespread in approximately the past decade or so.

Use of the term *meido kafe* or “maid café” is in a similar situation. This refers to a café that caters to men, especially lonely bachelors, by fulfilling their fantasies of being waited on by a cute, docile girl in a maid costume. There may occasionally be another theme added in to the venue, such as cat or rabbit maid girls. Thus, like *purikura* booths, this is also a modern-day pastime with an English-sounding name that the young surely mention more often than the old.

In contrast with these super-recent wasei eigo, there are also many other wasei eigo terms from times gone by that have fallen out of use and grown archaic. This is where Category O terms come in. Some terms that came about during the postwar period have since become irrelevant, such as *chiiku-dansu* (lit., “cheek dance”). During the Occupation and its influx of soldiers, the Japanese were “suddenly exposed to the sight of Americans dancing cheek-to-cheek,” which made “such an impression on them that they coined a new term, *chiiku-dansu*” (Miura 38). The term *haikara* (“high collar”), mentioned earlier, became 1920s slang for people who emulated Western fashion and could also just mean “stylish” or “fashionable.”

The term *bosuton baggu*, or “Boston bag,” refers to a zippered traveling bag or overnight bag, as in English. However, Miura noted that it was not heard as often as *baggu* or *kaban* (words for bag), and predicted it was on its way out (32). Its usage seems to have dwindled both in Japanese *and* in English since then, though—I have never seen or heard it before in English, and the katakana version does not show up in any Japanese sources online other than shopping websites.

The slang terms *nice middy/midi* and *nice middle*, meaning “attractive middle-aged woman & man,” respectively, are listed in a 1995 katakanago

dictionary (Ikushima, Takemura and Fukunaga 130). However, this term is rarely if at all used in current slang and appears to have grown rarer.

In the 1990s, high school girls and other youths used to make up words like *choberigu* and *choberiba* (“very good” and “very bad” with the prefix *chou-*, meaning “super-”). This has died out, but doubtless plenty of other slang *wasei eigo* made of mixed Japanese and English pieces have cropped up since. One famous example is *karaoke*, made up of *kara* (“empty”) and *ookesutora* (“orchestra”).

There are other potential reasons for the rise of *wasei eigo*. Ikushima et al. say that the *wasei eigo* used on an everyday basis is convenient and useful. Rather than expressing new ideas in Japanese, a single phrase from Japan-made katakana gets widespread enough that it can easily be conveyed to another person—it eventually comes to be used more actively than the original actual English (page i, translated). Indeed, convenience, and thus, abbreviation, is hugely involved in the birth of certain *wasei eigo* as well as more modern, shortened versions of Japanese words. The Japanese tendency to shorten longer words may be at play in the creation of *wasei eigo*, since English words “can be long at times” (Kohei Tsuji). The length of the words in English is not the only inconvenience: Hiroki Yamano agrees that words and ideas can become *wasei eigo* if they are too hard to explain or too long and difficult to say in Japanese. Yuki Yamamoto finds that abbreviated *wasei eigo* (Category 4) exists simply because it's often shorter and easier to say when abbreviated. He does enjoy when it is used for convenience or shortening words, but not when the user is trying to seem different and superior to others.

Such a desire to seem more worldly and learned is another likely cause—again, to some people, it is simply more “stylish” to use words in katakana. Indeed, Japanese teacher Kiyoko Morita compares the wasei eigo *beddotaun* (“bed town”) to the native *jutakumachi* (“residential area”) and says the former sounds and feels nicer and classier. The katakana *basuruumu* (direct from “bathroom”) sounds newer than the Japanese word for the bath area, and also includes a shower.

Professor emeritus Fumio Ano thinks that they exist simply because they can—because Japanese is equipped with the katakana system for writing and expressing foreign loanwords, such as words from post-Han dynasty Chinese. Many others feel that it exists to express and refer to foreign concepts that are hard (or embarrassing, such as sex or bathrooms) to express in commonly used Japanese words (Mutsumi Yokota, Yuki Yamamoto). Kiyoko Morita explains this is especially true for introducing new ideas like “skinship” (closeness through physical contact), *sekuhara* (“sexual harassment”), and *uuman ribu* (“women’s lib”). Also, a katakana word could replace an existing Japanese word if it gives it a new feel and/or reflects a new cultural trend (Rei Inouye).

Many native Japanese speakers have some negative opinions of wasei eigo. Fumio Ano, an older citizen, dislikes some wasei eigo and prefers expressing as much as possible in actual Japanese. Makoto Yamamoto feels similarly—he views wasei eigo as a sign of Japanese laziness, as if people have given up translating outside words into Japanese. Not all Japanese people know every wasei eigo term—Yuki Yamamoto is confused when confronted by unfamiliar wasei eigo. It is, of course, also befuddling to non-native speakers learning Japanese. This is why Hiroki

Yamano, despite accepting wasei eigo's domestic use, finds it becomes an "obstacle in communication" if used outside Japan with English speakers. Many native speakers, as well as foreigners like myself, have experienced awkward encounters caused by wasei eigo, or unknowingly used them as English (seven respondents mentioned this: Hiroki Yamano, Mutsumi Yokota, Kentaro Okazaki, Yuuki Shizuoka, Kohei Tsuji, Yuki Yamamoto, Rei Inouye). Some Japanese, like Aya Tomotaki, will often learn that something is wasei eigo for the first time when it doesn't make sense to a native English speaker. Hiroki Yamano and Kohei Tsuji had embarrassing experiences while studying abroad because they used words like *konsento* and *salaryman*.

Rei Inouye hints at some possible sources of wasei eigo. Understandably, those in Western-influenced industries (TV, advertising, music, computer, sports like baseball, etc.) use it more. It is most likely created by people who are "not usually fluent in English so they just coin what they think is correct." Inouye proposes that wasei eigo arises from "the gap between the Western image or concept surrounding us, and the actual knowledge of the language." Judging from the childlike simplicity of many terms ("baby car," "front glass," the reversal of "ten best" to "best ten"), it certainly seems like poor proficiency in English is one of the factors at work. The English education system in Japan has had trouble bringing students up to a desirable level of fluency compared to other advanced nations. It has even been said that "English education in Japan has not advanced much since the Meiji era," and in 1999, Japan had the lowest average TOEFL score of 25 Asian countries (Noriguchi). The following year, it ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of 21, but was still

behind China and South Korea. South Korea's English education has also been criticized (to be discussed later), but at least their performance is better than Japan's. Some of the problem comes from the vast underlying differences between English and Japanese, as well as the fact that Japanese is Japan's only official language, and that English education "has been slanted mainly towards grammar and translation" with not much attention toward anything else (ibid). Indeed, many young people I spoke to in Japan were terrified of speaking in English since they had had minimal conversation practice. To pull Japan up to speed, Noriguchi suggests upgrading middle school English textbooks and adding more challenging material, and increasing the ratio of native English speaking teachers to Japanese English teachers. This sounds like a workable solution, and if it were to succeed and raise overall English fluency in Japan, perhaps less wasei eigo-related misunderstandings would occur.

However, this is not to say that wasei eigo is an inherently negative thing. It shows the ingenuity and creativity of a society, and has the potential for endless amusement. Moreover, English itself is a language that welcomes foreign words, and is rooted in several dissimilar languages, so it would be hypocritical to suggest that it is wrong for Japanese to continue basically doing what English has always done. I do not think that wasei eigo should stop being made—just that more Japanese people could be aware of the mismatches between wasei eigo and actual, "proper" English terms. After all, if people are trying to seem more worldly or sophisticated by using wasei eigo, doesn't it defeat the purpose whenever someone makes a linguistic and social blunder by accidentally using a wasei eigo term among native

English speakers who no clue what it means? In short, language comprehension, awareness, and sensitivity to appropriate audiences and situations are key to preventing language gaps and uncomfortable misunderstandings—wasei eigo-related or otherwise.

### Chapter Three: Cultural and Linguistic Parallels

Taking things out of their original context and modifying them from what they used to be in order to fit the receiving culture or language is not, in fact, unique to *wasei eigo*. A one-panel comic by David Namisato in “Life After the B.O.E.” pokes fun at this: it takes place at the fictional Japanese Ministry of Reinterpreting Foreign Festivals and Holidays (2009). Indeed, when asked to name some examples of phenomena that are similar to *wasei eigo* other than language, like cultural borrowings from the West, the most common thing my Japanese correspondents responded with was commercially-driven holidays, a major example of “*wasei seiyō bunka*”—or Western culture made-in-Japan. One holiday that came up especially frequently was Christmas. Fumio Ano says the Japanese version of it may be the best example. He says that just as it is taken out of its original religious context in Christian countries, Christmas Day has nothing to do with religion to most Japanese.

How exactly does the Japanese Christmas differ, though? What makes it almost Western, but not quite...just like *wasei eigo*? Rei Inouye lists ice cream cakes being a common style of “Christmas cake” as well as KFC chicken for dinner on Christmas Eve. Kiyoko Morita brings a possible reason to light: “We have the impression that on Christmas, people eat decorated cakes and roasted chicken, so those sell very well in Japan when the season comes around.”

Kohei Tsuji elaborates on some other Japanese-Western differences: “Originally in Europe and the U.S., people spend it with their families, but here it’s become just an event we spend with lovers. I have also heard that the custom of

eating cake is a strategy of the Japanese confectionery company Fujiya. On top of that, Japanese people often think that Santa is Finnish.” (It is true that Santa Claus is originally based on a European persona, St. Nicholas, but according to common lore, he lives not in Finland but at the North Pole.)

Another major example is White Day. In Japan, on Valentine's Day, girls give chocolate to any romantic interests (as well as “obligatory chocolate” to classmates, bosses, etc.), and then a month later on March 14th, or White Day, the boys return the favor to the girls. Yuki Yamamoto and Kiyoko Morita consider this as an example of wasei eigo-like culture “because this is not common in Western countries” as far as Yamamoto knows. Morita affirms that it is “completely confined to places like Japan, Taiwan, and Korea.”

Halloween also comes to mind—in Japan it is mostly just “cosplay” (short for “costume play,” or dressing up in costumes) with some Halloween-esque decorations here and there. In American culture, the costumes are but one part of the Halloween culture of trick-or-treating, carving pumpkins, hayrides and the like. While these customs are also an adaptation and re-imagining of the original “All Hallow’s Eve” themselves, Japan’s version reduces and simplifies it further, picking and choosing only select elements from it. Such a mentality may also be behind making boys and girls do American folk dances at school cultural festivals (*bunkasai*). Rei Inouye, who experienced this growing up, says that it is “almost the only time that boys and girls dance holding hands,” which is quite embarrassing, and that they do not “learn anything cultural about these dances but just are expected to participate.” This kind of importation of culture without any context does not do

much for the people participating...it merely gives them a glimpse into something that is not being explained to them, and is thus not educational or enriching at all.

To Yuki Yamamoto, church weddings and Western holidays are “more like katakana-go English” rather than wasei eigo. He says what’s more similar to wasei eigo is when people wear a wedding dress for a wedding at a Shinto shrine, or when they start a tradition of eating sushi on Christmas. Mutsumi Yokota brings up another interesting example involving Japanese bedding: sometimes people lay a futon on top of a bed. It is this sort of hybridization, an unprecedented and unconventional mixing of the Japanese and Western customs and contexts, which Yamamoto finds to be the cultural version of wasei eigo. I agree with him and his apt examples, but also find that the ones given earlier—Japanese Christmas, White Day, and such—fit into the same category as wasei eigo as well. They are very similar to actual Western cultural events and customs, and have grown out of them, but are ultimately not the same thing. They are made in Japan, for the Japanese palate, and if shown to a Westerner, can often lead to confusion and amusement. After coming into Japan, these things have evolved and formed into their own version independent of the original—the “wasei version.”

Comparisons can also be drawn between food and wasei eigo. For example, Yuki Yamamoto mentions that “Japanese curry is obviously influenced by Indian food, but has been changed so that it tastes better for Japanese.” Rei Inouye also observes that many Western food items are modified after being imported to Japan, like rice burgers (with buns made of rice patties), teriyaki burgers, and pizzas with

toppings such as squid, mayonnaise and corn. In addition to the aforementioned burgers, the McDonald's restaurants in Japan have also added a variety of *ebi furai sando* (lit., "shrimp fry sand," i.e. "fried shrimp sandwich") to their menu, commercially known as the "Ebi Filet-O." Its existence in Japan and absence overseas may be due in part to Japanese cuisine's longtime reliance on fish, influencing the society's tastes to be more inclined toward seafood than the average American's tastes.

Makiko Itoh notes that food is one of many examples of how Japanese culture has always "freely incorporated ideas and aspects of other cultures" and adapted them to the extent that they somehow become uniquely Japanese. For example, common Japanese dishes like onigiri (rice balls) and miso soup were actually adopted from Chinese cuisine, *chuuka-ryouri* (ibid).

Meanwhile, *youshoku*—which literally means "Western food"—is "not the same as imported cuisines that have been kept true to their origins." It is in fact Western Europe-influenced cuisine that was introduced mostly during the Showa period (1926-1989) and most of its well-known dishes "would be totally foreign in any other country." Some *youshoku* dishes are "so well entrenched in Japanese food culture that they straddle the line between *washoku* (Japanese) and *youshoku* (Western)" (ibid).

Nowadays, *youshoku* is more of a nostalgic style of comfort food than a worldly-seeming, hip new cuisine, but it is still enjoyed by many Japanese. Examples include *omuraisu*, short for "omelette rice," which is a thin egg omelette wrapped around ketchup-flavored rice, *korokke* or "croquettes" (commonly made of meat and

potatoes or crab and cream), *hanbaagu* or “hamburg” (similar to meatloaf or Salisbury steak), *hayashi raisu* or “hash rice” (hashed beef stew with rice), *doria* (a rice gratin), Japanese Scotch egg, and more.

The Japonicization of Italian food is in a whole category of its own. Italian is said to be one of the most widespread “foreign” cuisines in Japan other than Chinese, but what this mostly means is that there are a great deal of *wasei* Italian dishes, in the same way the U.S. has “Americanized” versions of Italian food such as deep-dish pizza and macaroni and cheese. *Wafuu pasuta* refers to Japanese-style pasta, and such dishes are generally created by experimenting with throwing Japanese flavors or seasonings usually served with rice onto pasta instead. There are recipes with *tarako* (salted pollock roe) and ponzu, *hijiki* (a type of seaweed) and dried shiitake mushrooms, *mentaiko* (spicy Pollock roe) with butter and seaweed shreds, and more. Then there is the classic “spaghetti Naporitan” (named after Naples, with onions, bell peppers, button mushrooms, garlic, sausage, bacon, and a tomato-based sauce, usually with ketchup—inspired by the American troops’ rations of spaghetti with ketchup). According to Norimitsu Onishi of *The New York Times*, this Naporitan dish was the only pasta dish known to many Japanese “before expressions like “pasta” and “al dente” became known in Japan” around the time of the economic boom in the 1970s and 80s because “ingredients to make authentic French or Italian dishes were simply unavailable.” Nowadays, of course, there is a greater variety of authentic Italian food as well as *wafuu pasuta*, and various

homegrown interpretations may also be improvised—my host father in Japan would often include oil, shimeji mushrooms and pieces of squid or octopus in his recipes.<sup>2</sup>

There are also other types of food that developed similarly to *youshoku* but are not the same (because they came along earlier, or for other reasons). Tempura is one of the more famous examples—it was actually introduced in the sixteenth century by Spanish and Portuguese Jesuit missionaries in Nagasaki (Moriwada). Other foods that Japan owes to the foreign influence in Nagasaki include the ever-popular *tonkatsu* (battered pork cutlets) as well as Nagasaki’s signature dessert, *kasutera* (a sponge cake named after the Portuguese *pão de castela*, or “bread from Castile”). The word *konpeito*, tiny spiky sugar candies in various colors, comes from the Portuguese *confeito* (“sugar candy”), as the Portuguese introduced it in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Hosking 84).

Japan is not the only country that has taken in foreign foods and modified them to become something new. America is often referred to as a “melting pot” of different people, but this can be said of its food as well. The pizza served in America, except for the kind at traditional Italian restaurants, tends to be different than the original Italian pizza, usually with thicker dough and more evenly distributed cheese. Chicago even has its own signature “deep dish” pizza, the shape of which is more pie-like than pizza-like. Such “Italian” staples as spaghetti and meatballs and macaroni and cheese are really more American than anything. American Chinese food is also hugely popular across the country. Restaurants here serve heavily modified versions of actual dishes from China, or completely made-up ones like

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<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned host father, Keita Ohashi, hosted me when I studied in Kyoto, Japan, from September 2011 to April 2012.

chow mein or the tempura-like sweet-and-sour shrimp or chicken accompanied with a bright pink syrupy sauce. This is probably a wise move, as some authentic dishes like chicken feet, horsemeat, and brains would perhaps confuse or disgust some Americans. Just as with the Japanese modification of foreign dishes, sometimes cooking must be tweaked to appeal to the local palate if it is to be at all marketable. The American fondness for sushi, for example, sparked waves of creativity at sushi restaurants around the country, yielding creations like the California roll and the cream cheese-filled Philadelphia roll, which would never have been seen in Japan. In short, America did to sushi what Japan did to pasta.

I would argue that Japanese pop and rock music—or anything outside of traditional Japanese music, really—is a part of the “wasei” category as well. These kinds of music did not organically exist in Japan before Western influence brought them there. After being introduced to Western classical music, and later jazz, rockabilly, rock and eventually contemporary pop, Japanese artists started to make their own music in these genres. Some of them completely imitated it, singing in Japanese or even in English...but in many types of Japanese music, a distinctive undercurrent of Japanese uniqueness can be heard. It is not often clearly expressible, but some of the musical flavor may come from Japan’s musical origins in the pentatonic scale. Certain chord progressions and melodic clichés help something to be more easily identified as Japanese pop or rock, whether or not lyrics are involved. The sounds of archetypal J-pop supergroups like Arashi and AKB48, or solo songstresses like Ayumi Hamasaki, are immediately distinguishable

from comparable Western pop artists like The Backstreet Boys, Justin Bieber, Katy Perry or Lady Gaga—though such artists are also well-loved in Japan and have likely had an influence on the abovementioned Japanese artists.

Meanwhile, the J-rock subgenre known as “visual kei” is perhaps the *wasei eigo* to glam rock’s standard English. Inspired by KISS and other avant-garde glam rockers, bands in the 1980s such as international hit X JAPAN formed their own visually shocking performance styles complete with Kabuki-like makeup and flamboyant hair (Strauss). The style then grew to prominence in the 1990s, yet was not contained in one musical style, instead spanning a wide range of genres such as punk rock, heavy metal (and its various subgenres), electronica, and pop rock.

More linguistic comparisons to *wasei eigo* can be made with several different languages and cultures—bringing one to wonder just how uniquely Japanese this phenomenon is. There are pseudo-loanwords in several other languages as well. In Danish, *butterfly* means “bowtie;” a male model in German is *dressman* and a talk show host is a *showmaster* (Linguistlist.org). In French, sneakers or tennis shoes are called *baskets* (from “basketball shoes”), and in English we re-appropriate the German prefix “*über-*” to mean “super-.” German actually has its own word for “pseudo-loanwords”: *scheinentlehnungen* or *pseudoentlehnungen*. But the prime analogy with Japanese *wasei eigo* is found in Korea.

Korean pseudo-English seems to be quite common. Many terms have actually been transferred over from Japanese *wasei eigo*, almost like a bizarre game of “Telephone.” Among the countless examples found in databases such as Matthew

Smith's "Ultimate Konglish List" are the terms *seukinsip* (from the previously mentioned Japanese *sukinshippu*, "skinship"), *waishyeochu* ("dress shirt," supposed to sound like "white shirt(s)," from Japanese *waishatsu*), *apateu* ("apartment," from previously mentioned Japanese *apāto*), *mishing* ("sewing machine," from Japanese *mishin*), *keoning* ("cheating," originally from English "cunning" via Japanese *kanningu*—a related wasei eigo term is *kanningu peepaa*, lit. "cunning paper," meaning a crib sheet or cheat sheet), *rimokeon* ("remote control," likely from the Japanese abbreviated *rimokon*), *eeokeon* ("air conditioning," also likely from the Japanese abbreviated *eakon*), *otobai* ("motorbike" or "motorcycle," from Japanese *ootobai*, "auto bicycle"), *ero* ("erotic," identical to the Japanese *ero*), *hojikiseu* ("stapler," from Japanese *hocchikisu*, "Hotchkiss"), *aidol* ("idol" or "pop star," from Japanese *aidoru*), *noteu* ("notebook," from the Japanese abbreviated *nooto*), and finally *bolpen* ("ballpoint pen," from the Japanese abbreviated *boorupen*, "ball-pen").

There are also terms that seem related to Japanese but are not quite the same. In Korean, *jeon-ja range* means "microwave oven," while in English, a "range" is a stove for cooking that is either gas or electric. This parallels the Japanese word for microwave oven: *denshi renji*, or *denshi range*, literally "electric range"—but it does not refer to an electric stove at all. In Korean, *dika* is shortened from "digital camera," but the Japanese have abbreviated it as *dejikame* (long form: *dejitaru kamera*).

Naturally there are several homegrown pseudo-English terms in Korea that do not appear to have a Japanese counterpart. A cell phone is called *hendeupon*

(from “hand + phone”), while Japanese uses the native word *keitai denwa* (lit., “handheld phone,” i.e. mobile phone). *Wonroom* means “studio apartment” (from English “one room,” as in “one-room apartment”). *Hwaiting* or *paiting* (from English “fighting”)...is a sort of national cheer, used to cheer a sports team, or encourage someone in difficult times. *Saida* refers to a lemon-lime soda such as Sprite or 7-Up and comes from English “cider,” and *geulleimeo* (from “glamour”) actually refers to a buxom or curvy woman. *Penshi* means stationery and comes from English “fancy”—a bit of a stretch, but stationery is, after all, fancy paper. *Selca*, abbreviated from “self-camera,” refers to a photographic self-portrait, known as a “selfie” in contemporary English slang, and “eye shopping” is the equivalent of English “window shopping.” *Babarikoteu* means a trench coat (from “Burberry coat”), which is a logical connection considering that Burberry claims to have invented the trench coat for use by soldiers in World War I—hence “trench” (Streeter), but there are of course countless trench coats not made by Burberry. This genericized phrase could be considered similar to Japan and Korea’s use of “Hotchkiss” to refer to all staplers, or how the Kleenex brand has become genericized in the US to refer to any facial tissues.

And finally, “live English” refers to colloquial English or “real-life English,” presumably in contrast with Konglish. The reality is that Konglish and “real” or “correct” English are rather different languages. But what is correct English? Often this refers to standard American or British English, but there are native speakers of English in many parts of the world—and these dialects are all “correct.” What makes Konglish, as well as Japanese English, different is that it is being picked up as a

second language. As blogger Raphael Adid puts it, “Konglish may not be a correct form of English but it certainly is a correct form of Konglish.” The same applies to Japanese English...it is simply in a separate category from English. There have been complaints about Korea’s English education and calls to improve it (Jeremy Garlick; John Huer; Mee-joung Song; Tom Stockwell). The issues sound similar to those of Japan’s English education: too much focus on passing exams, not enough teacher training or fluency, too little conversation practice. These problems may be leading to the prevalence of Konglish over standard English in Korea—and broken English and wasei eigo in Japan. Ultimately, the goal is not to get less people speaking native offshoots of English such as Konglish, but more people speaking proper English as well—which can be spoken on top of Konglish or wasei eigo. The former is useless without the latter: what is the point of speaking a form of English unique to your country that no native English speaker can understand? Having only Korean and Konglish in the country is problematic; having Korean and English is better, and Konglish *alongside* proper English is fine.

The same applies to Japan. The use of wasei eigo domestically is not a real problem, except for the foreigners in Japan whom it may confuse; however, if that is the level of English one knows, then one will never be able to communicate fully and effectively with the Anglophone world. These relatives of English may be spoken freely, but they should be used wisely and with total knowledge of what they are—of what is standard English and what is not—if we are to break down the language barrier.

And so, through these various parallels, it becomes apparent that wasei eigo is not a single isolated phenomenon or bizarre quirk. It is an ingenious shorthand used for new ideas and foreign concepts, for long words or uncomfortable or unfamiliar customs, but it is not just that. It is part of a web of something larger than Japanese or English or the countries in which they are spoken. It is a metaphor for culture and creativity; it explains how they work. The template is that some cultural concept or artifact comes in to another society, nation, or culture, and if it seems to be of some use and interest, it gets modified, or in this case, “Japanified.” Be it foreign vocabulary or food, holidays, musical styles, clothing, or just about anything—Japan will look at it, reinvent or alter it for its own purposes, and absorb it into the culture. But this cultural give and take, this borrowing, this linguistic osmosis, is not unique to Japan. Languages are constantly borrowing from one another, filling gaps in our ability to express. Wasei eigo is the child of many, many instances of cross-cultural contact, and as long as Japan is around, the list of pseudo-loans will continue to grow. This is not a bad thing, nor a good thing; it is an intriguing thing, and in the end, it is part of life and linguistics and global exchange.

## Appendix:

### List of Questions Sent to Interviewees

1. What would you say is the meaning or definition of wasei eigo?

あなたにとって、「和製英語」はどのような意味ですか？

2. Do you have any wasei eigo terms that you use a lot? What about ones that you hear or see a lot?

あなたはよく使う和製英語がありますか？よく聞く／見る和製英語は？

3. Do you sometimes use wasei eigo without realizing or thinking about it? Or were you ever surprised to find out that an “English” word/phrase was in fact wasei eigo?

たまたま無意識に／考えずに和製英語を使いますか？きちんとした英語の外来語だと思った言葉が実際に和製英語だと知った／気づいたことがありますか？

4. Who do you observe using it, and where?

自分の経験では、誰がどこで和製英語を使っているところを観測しますか？

5. Which wasei eigo terms seem to have been around longer? What about newer ones?

どの和製英語の言葉がずっと存在していたそうですか？もっと新しいのは？

6. When do you think wasei eigo first start being made/used?

和製英語はいつ頃から生まれた／使われ始めたと思いますか？

7. Why do you think wasei eigo happens/comes to be? And in what cases does it exist in place of “real/original” Japanese words/phrases? (“kiss”-> kisu instead of seppun, for example)

和製英語はなぜ生じる／起こるのでしょうか？どんな場合で本当の日本語の言葉の変わりにあると思いますか？

8. How does it compare to regular katakana-go English words in Japanese? Do you notice a difference?

普通の英語外来語・カタカナ語との比較は？何かの違いを意識していますか？

9. Can you think of any examples of phenomena that are similar to wasei eigo other than language, like cultural things from the West? (for example, church weddings, Christmas, or Valentine's Day becoming different from the Western versions)

言語以外の和製英語のような現象が頭に浮かびますか？（例えば、西洋式の結婚式、クリスマス、バレンタインズ・デーみたいに、他の国に輸出されてからオリジナルから変わった文化的なこと）

10. How do you feel about wasei eigo? (Do you like it, dislike it, are you indifferent, confused by it?) Please describe.

和製英語に関する気持ち／感情がありますか？（好き、好きじゃない、どうでもいい、よく分からないなどの想いを教えてください）

11. Do you have a favorite wasei eigo or one that you think is funny or interesting? Please describe.

一番好きな和製英語がありますか？またはおかしいか面白いと思う和製英語がありますか？教えてください。

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