〔Article〕

Japanese loanwords in English: A corpus-based study

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Abstract

This study examines a sample of Japanese loanwords currently used in English with the aim of describing patterns of usage over time and identifying genres in which loanwords are most commonly used. The study is based on investigation of loanwords in two large corpora: The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Findings indicate that, with few exceptions, Japanese loanwords are not very frequent in English, though there is a tendency for their frequency to increase over time.

Keywords: Japanese Loanwords, Corpus Studies, COHA, COCA

英語における日本語借用語：コーパスに基づく研究

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1.0 Introduction

For at least 400 years there has been contact between Japan and English-speaking countries, and since the Meiji Era it has been more or less constant. One linguistic result of this has been large-scale borrowing of English words in Japanese; Japanese dictionaries of loanwords include vast numbers of entries for loanwords from English (e.g., Kamiya 1994). However, the borrowing has not been in one direction only. Although borrowing from Japanese has been on a much smaller scale, hundreds of loanwords from Japanese have found their way into English and some of them have become household terms.

While the spread and use of English loanwords in Japanese has been extensively described and analyzed, Japanese loanwords in English have received much less attention. There are now dictionaries of Japanese loanwords in English which, along with definitions, provide phonetic, grammatical and historical information. However, there has not been much research on the spread and use of Japanese loanwords in English. The existence of large corpora of English makes it possible to investigate in some depth the use of individual lexical items including loanwords. From corpora we can gain information about the frequency of a loanword's use in various time periods, its frequency in various genres, and we can also examine instances of usage in authentic texts.

The purpose of this study is to examine a sample of Japanese loanwords that are currently used in English with the aim of describing patterns of usage over time and identifying the genres in which they are most commonly used.

2.0 Previous studies

There has been some research on loanwords related to compiling dictionaries of Japanese loanwords in English. In 1996, Garland Cannon published a volume entitled, *The Japanese Contributions to the English Language: An Historical Dictionary*. This dictionary contains 1,425 entries for Japanese loanwords which were identified from a survey of major general dictionaries of English, including the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language* and others. For each entry various information is provided including the first recorded entry date of the word into English, its Japanese meaning(s), its English meaning(s), and notes about grammar and sources. The dictionary also contains a lengthy essay on the semantic fields of the loanwords, and another on their phonological and grammatical features. They provide considerable information about the historical circumstances related to the borrowing of individual loanwords. Individual entries also include a rating for the item's "degree of naturalization" which is related the frequency of a word in modern usage. However, these ratings were based mostly on the dictionary sources, "... as there was no access to the attitudinal and other massive data needed

to make refined judgements." (1996: 20)

A similar volume is *A Dictionary of Japanese Loanwords* by Toshie M. Evans (1997). This dictionary sets out to provide an index of English terms borrowed from Japanese. The entries come not only from standard English dictionaries, but also publications that analyze new words (1997: ix). Thus, it includes not only loanwords that have long been part of English, but recent borrowings as well. Entries include one or two authentic example sentences to illustrate how each word is used.

Apart from the dictionaries, there has also been research on loanwords by Schun Doi, who published articles about Japanese loanwords in English (2010, 2014) based on a master's thesis (2006) and doctoral dissertation (2013) at Nagoya University. Doi (2010) investigates the kinds of Japanese loanwords in English, basing the study on the loanwords in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Doi's research also has a historical dimension as it examines in particular the words that came into English from the English version of Kæmpfer's *The History of Japan,* which was published in 1727, reissued in 1728, and was "the greatest single contributor of Japanese loanwords found in the OED ..." (Doi 2010: 85). An exhaustive list of some 1,500 Japanese words contained in the book was made from a digitalized version of the book (Doi 2010: 91).

The dictionaries by Cannon (1996) and Evans (1997), and the publications by Doi (2010, 2014) provide significant linguistic and historical information about the borrowing of loanwords from Japanese. They do not, however, provide much information about the spread and use of Japanese loanwords after they have been introduced. For this purpose, data from large corpora of English are valuable. The following sections describe how corpus data can be used to gather information about the spread and use of loanwords in English.

3.0 Data

The present study is concerned with Japanese loanwords that have currency among ordinary speakers of American English. Therefore, in selecting loanwords to study, I have generally avoided technical terms and items which were used at one time but have since fallen out of use, or are very infrequently used. Moreover, as this is a small-scale study, the number of items had to be limited. I attempted to include a range of loanwords by including items from a variety of semantic fields, and by including items that have long been part of English as well as items that have been introduced relatively recently. The English version of Wikipedia contains a "List of English words of Japanese origin" with about 150 items. Some of them could be considered household words that would certainly be familiar to almost every speaker of American English, for example, *haiku, karate, sushi, tsunami* or *tycoon*. Others would be familiar to Americans who have some experience of or interest in Japanese culture, for example, *aikido, futon, kabuki, manga*, or *shogun*. And then there are items which may be less well-known, but are widely-used by those with an interest in, for example,

Japanese cuisine, martial arts or religion. These include, for example, *miso, wasabi, dojo, kendo, koan* and *torii*. As I wished to use items that were part of current English, I limited items to those included in the online edition of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary of the English Language. The online edition contains 60,000 of the most common words in the English language. Less common loanwords can be found in the unabridged edition of the dictionary.

By limiting items in this way, I narrowed the scope of the study to 85 items drawn from a range of semantic fields, including items with meanings related to cuisine, business, art, fashion, politics, martial arts, religion and other aspects of Japanese life and culture. I did not attempt to balance the numbers of items from different fields. It is clear that there are many more loanwords from some fields (e.g., cuisine) than others (e.g., religion), and consequently, the items investigated here come more from some fields than others. Cannon (1996: 35) has noted that loanwords are more frequent in certain fields. He classified his dictionary's 1425 entries into 40 semantic fields. Among them, there were seven with 50 or more loanwords: botany (280), martial arts (85), food (80), politics (58), Buddhism (57), industry (56), and fish (50) (Cannon 1996: 35). In the present study, items from all of these fields were included.

4.0 Methodology

The use of corpora makes it feasible to investigate the spread and use of loanwords on a much broader scale than would otherwise be possible. Two corpora were used for this study: the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Both are very large: COHA contains about 400 million words from the 1810s to the 2000s, and COCA has more than one billion words (20 million words for each year 1990–2019). COHA is balanced by genre and decade. COCA is organized into five categories of equal size: Spoken, Fiction, Popular Magazines, Newspapers and Academic journals. There is further balancing within these categories: Newspapers, for example, includes texts from various sections. COCA texts are also grouped in five-year periods.

Using these large corpora enables a researcher to get a picture of how frequent a particular loanword is, the genres in which it is used, and patterns of usage over the time period covered by the corpora. However, it is not an exact picture. In order to see from a corpus how a word is used in the language over time, the corpus needs to be a representative sample of the language. It needs to include texts from many different genres and time periods. Very large corpora such as COHA and COCA are designed to provide a representative sample, but even in such corpora, some of the texts that comprise them might have a particularly high or low frequency of a given word making it appear that that word is more or less frequent than it actually is in the language overall. Nevertheless, corpora can provide us with a good indication of how frequently, in what genres, with which collocates,

and in which syntactic patterns a particular word is used. This is especially true for common words with relatively high frequency.

Because of differences in size and structure, we cannot make exact comparisons between findings from COHA and COCA, but by using both corpora we can get a clearer picture of the patterns of usage of individual loanwords in the past and at the present.

5.0 Results and discussion

This section presents findings and related discussion about frequencies of loanwords and genres they occur in, and considers some general characteristics of Japanese loanwords.

5.1 Frequencies of loanwords

Table 1 presents frequency information about Japanese loanwords in COHA. Each item is followed by a year in parentheses: the year of the item's first attested use in English, as reported in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. The third column shows the number of tokens (occurrences) of each item in COHA. Texts in COHA are classified according to the decade in which they were published. The fourth column indicates the decade of the earliest occurrence of the item in the texts that make up the corpus. The fifth column shows the decade for which there are the most tokens. This number is given only for items with 10 or more tokens in the corpus. The items in Table 1 are not listed alphabetically, but grouped by semantic field.

It was necessary to adjust some of the token numbers because some items were used not only as loanwords, but had some other use(s), often as proper names. For instance, an automatic search of COCA returned 238 tokens of *torii*, but examination of individual concordance lines showed that in the majority of these, *torii* was used as a proper noun (the name of a famous baseball player). These instances were eliminated manually leaving only 12 cases in which *torii* was used as a loanword. In order to deal with such cases, I examined the first 100 concordance lines for each item to verify that the item was being used as a loanword. Instances in which the item was used with a different meaning—often cases in which a word was used as a proper name—were deducted from the frequency count produced automatically by the corpus search. A few words of high frequency were eliminated because they were used almost entirely in a sense unrelated to their loanword meaning (e.g., *sake* was hardly ever used to refer to the alcoholic beverage).

An initial observation on the data in Table 1 is that a majority of these current loanwords were first used in English more than century ago. Most date from the 19th century, but there are a few from the 18th century (*ginkgo, shoyu, daimyo, satori, Shinto, torii, koi*). There are also two items from the 17th century, *inro* and *soy*, and one from the 16th, *bonze*.

As for the decades in which individual loanwords had the highest frequencies, there were three

Table 1. Loanword data from COHA

	Loanword	First Recorded Appearance	Tokens in COHA	Decade of First Corpus Appearance	Decade of Highest Token Frequency (Token No.)
1	*bokeh*	2000	0		
2	*bonsai*	1899	87	1960	1960 (44)
3	*bunraku*	1920	3	1980	
4	*haiku*	1902	70	1950	2000 (20)
5	*ikebana*	1901	10	1980	1990 (6)
6	*kabuki*	1899	62	1940	1950 (19)
7	*kakemono*	1889	11	1883	1900 (5)
8	*karaoke*	1977	85	1970	2000 (29)
9	*koto*	1795	10	1880	1980 & 1990 (3)
10	*makimono*	1880	4	1910	
11	*manga*	c. 1951	33	1990	2000 (20)
12	*netsuke*	1876	76	1880	2000 (70)
13	*origami*	1948	50	1970	2000 (27)
14	*shamisen*	1864	3	1990	
15	*ukiyo-e*	1879	2	1990	
16	*kanban*	1977	8	1980	
17	*keiretsu*	1975	5	1980	
18	*tycoon*	1857	510	1860	1920 (91)
19	*zaibatsu*	1947	42	1940	1990 (21)
20	*inro*	1617	3	2000	
21	*kimono*	1886	526	1890	1950 (95)
22	*zori*	1823	24	1950	1950 (23)
23	*bento*	1895	3	1980	
24	*daikon*	1873	21	1980	1990 (10)
25	*dashi*	1955	5	2000	
26	*edamame*	1951	9	2000	
27	*fugu*	1909	9	1980	
28	*ginkgo*	1773	114	1910	1990 (50)
29	*hibachi*	1863	27	1890	1890/1990/2000 (5)
30	*kombu*	1884	5	1990	
31	*matsutake*	1883	3	1990	
32	*mirin*	1874	6	2000	
33	*miso*	1615	96	1970	2000 (73)
34	*mizuna*	1976	2	1990	
35	*mochi*	1970	7	2000	
36	*nori*	1892	3	1990	
37	*ramen*	1962	26	1990	1990/2000 (13)
38	*sashimi*	1879	38	1955	2000 (17)
39	*satsuma*	1882	4	2000	
40	*shiitake*	1877	47	1980	1990 (24)

41	*shoyu*	1727	3	1980	
42	*soba*	1896	22	1990	2000（13）
43	*soy*	1679	845	1820	2000（359）
44	*sukiyaki*	1919	17	1940	1950（7）
45	*surimi*	1973	5	1980	
46	*sushi*	1893	218	1970	2000（116）
47	*tempura*	1920	27	1940	1990（7）
48	*teriyaki*	1901	30	1970	2000（14）
49	*tofu*	1771	254	1970	2000（125）
50	*udon*	1902	4	1990	
51	*umami*	1963	2	2000	
52	*wakame*	1950	3	2000	
53	*wasabi*	1891	34	1980	2000（27）
54	*yakitori*	1962	1	1990	
55	*daimyo*	1727	10	1900	1900（4）
56	*genro*	1876	11	1910	1930（6）
57	*mikado*	1727	178	1840	1900（46）
58	*shogun*	1727	98	1880	2000（35）
59	*aikido*	1954	10	1980	2000（5）
60	*dojo*	1942	14	1960	2000（6）
61	*judo*	1889	179	1840	1960（66）
62	*karate*	1926	243	1950	2000（61）
63	*kendo*	1921	39	1960	2000（36）
64	*bonze*	1577	18	1860	1900/1960（4）
65	*koan*	1945	11	1980	1980/1990/2000（4）
66	*satori*	1727	8	1970	
67	*shinto*	1727	113	1890	1950（26）
68	*torii*	1727	6	1950	
69	*emoji*	1997	0		
70	*futon*	1876	129	1980	1990（70）
71	*geisha*	1881	160	1900	1950（42）
72	*honcho*	1945	47	1970	1990（17）
73	*kamikaze*	1945	116	1940	2000（24）
74	*koi*	1727	34	1980	2000（23）
75	*kudzu*	1876	199	1940	2000（140）
76	*ninja*	1964	97	1980	2000（49）
77	*rickshaw*	1879	148	1890	1990（30）
78	*sayonara*	1872	148	1890	1990（30）
79	*samurai*	1727	282	1880	2000（75）
80	*sensei*	1874	10	1950	2000（4）
81	*shiatsu*	1967	6	1980	
82	*skosh*	1952	0		
83	*sudoku*	2000	12	2000	2000（12）
84	*tsunami*	1896	167	1940	2000（143）
85	*urushiol*	1908	17	1950	1990（15）

Table 2. Loanwords with frequency higher than 1.0 per million words in COHA and COCA

COHA		COCA	
Item	Frequency	Item	Frequency
tycoon	1.26	*karaoke*	1.65
kimono	1.30	*soy*	6.60
soy	2.09	*sushi*	3.21
		tofu	2.95
		karate	1.83
		ninja	3.67
		samurai	1.95
		tsunami	4.09

decades in which five or more loanwords were most frequent: 1950s, 1990s and 2000s. For each of the other decades, beginning with 1810, there were fewer than five words that were most frequent. The last two decades in the nearly 200 years covered by COHA were the ones in which the largest number of loanwords occurred most frequently. 15 loanwords occurred most frequently in the 1990s, and 29 in the 2000s. In general, this points to a tendency for loanwords to be more frequent more recently. Further evidence of this tendency can be seen in Table 3 based on findings from COCA.

Table 2 shows the items that had overall frequencies of 1.0 per million words or higher in the two corpora, and Table 3 provides information about the frequency of loanwords in COCA and the genres in which frequently used loanwords appeared. Table 3 also shows genres in which an item had a frequency greater than 1.0 per million words. In some cases, loanwords with a frequency of less than 1.0 per million words overall had frequencies higher than 1.0 in particular genres.

Table 2 shows that there are three items with an overall frequency higher than 1.0 per million words in COHA, and seven items in COCA. One of the items, *soy*, is frequent overall in both corpora.

We can make a rough comparison of loanword frequency in COHA and COCA by taking account of their relative sizes. COHA contains slightly over 400 million words and COCA slightly over a billion. Thus, COCA is about 2.5 times as large as COHA, and a frequency of 20 tokens in COHA would be comparable to a frequency of 50 tokens in COCA. If we adjust the COHA figures (multiply by 2.5) to compare them with the figures for COCA, we find that 71 of 85 loanwords are more frequently used in the time period covered by COCA (1990–2019) than that covered by COHA (1810–2000). Among the 14 loanwords that were not used more frequently in COCA, there were five that were borrowed in 1727 or earlier, and there were only three that were borrowed after 1900. This could suggest a tendency for earlier loanwords to be less frequent, though there is not enough data to draw a clear conclusion on this point. Furthermore, it is not clear exactly how much the use of Japanese loanwords in English has increased overall based on this data because the sample size is relatively small and may not be representative of all Japanese loanwords, even though the loanwords were selected from

Table 3. Loanword data from COCA

	Loanword	Tokens in COCA	Genres with High Frequencies of Loanwords (tokens per million words)
1	*bokeh*	179	
2	*bonsai*	418	
3	*bunraku*	19	
4	*haiku*	554	
5	*ikebana*	57	
6	*kabuki*	499	News（1.35）
7	*kakemono*	1	
8	*karaoke*	1,810	TV/M 3.63, News 2.66, Mag 1.82, Spok 1.63, Web 1.42, Blog 1.34, Fic 1.30
9	*koto*	36	
10	*makimono*	12	
11	*manga*	1,405	Web 5.75, Blog 2.25, Acad 1.44
12	*netsuke*	87	
13	*origami*	711	Fic 1.43, Web 1.18
14	*shamisen*	19	
15	*ukiyo-e*	21	
16	*kanban*	79	
17	*keiretsu*	116	
18	*tycoon*	1,081	News 2.15, Mag 2.05, Fic 1.1
19	*zaibatsu*	52	
20	*inro*	4	
21	*kimono*	937	Fic 3.15, Acad 1.44
22	*zori*	5	
23	*bento*	301	
24	*daikon*	197	
25	*dashi*	74	
26	*edamame*	378	Mag 2.13
27	*fugu*	79	
28	*ginkgo*	474	Mag 1.98
29	*hibachi*	110	
30	*kombu*	43	
31	*matsutake*	22	
32	*mirin*	159	
33	*miso*	697	Mag 2.72, News 1.34
34	*mizuna*	87	
35	*mochi*	87	
36	*nori*	203	
37	*ramen*	746	Web 1.19, News 1.13, Blog 1.07
38	*sashimi*	311	
39	*satsuma*	67	
40	*shiitake*	482	Mag 2.13
41	*shoyu*	33	
42	*soba*	216	

43	soy	7,337	Mag 26.73, News 8.11, Web 7.49, Blog 4.92, TV/M 3.65, Fic 2.96, Acad 2.82
44	sukiyaki	34	
45	surimi	153	Acad 1.1
46	sushi	3,679	News 6.78, TV/M 5.63, Web 4.60, Mag 4.08, Blog 3.16, Spok 1.36
47	tempura	193	
48	teriyaki	348	
49	tofu	3,167	Mag 13.16, News 4.14, Blog 1.97, TV/M 1.87, Web 1.63, Fic 1.45
50	udon	90	
51	umami	154	
52	wakame	38	
53	wasabi	497	Mag 1.36, News 1.23
54	yakitori	34	
55	daimyo	19	
56	genro	3	
57	mikado	128	
58	shogun	368	Fic 1.14
59	aikido	177	
60	dojo	333	
61	judo	822	News 2.51
62	karate	1,979	TV/M 5.30, Fic 2.47, Mag 2.06, News 1.98, Blog 1.35, Web 1.26, Spok 1.09
63	kendo	113	
64	bonze	6	
65	koan	179	
66	satori	136	
67	shinto	316	
68	torii	12	
69	emoji	384	Mag 1.32
70	futon	672	Fic 3.36
71	geisha	630	Fic 1.25
72	honcho	414	
73	kamikaze	573	
74	koi	428	
75	kudzu	658	Mag 2.21, News 1.08, Fic 1.01
76	ninja	4,177	TV/M 17.85, Web 4.73, Blog 3.65, Mag 2.61, Fic 1.83, News 1.51
77	rickshaw	436	Fic 1.81
78	sayonara	318	TV/M 1.33
79	samurai	2,185	TV/M 5.15, Fic 3.90, Web 2.45, News 1.55, Blog 1.52
80	sensei	883	TV/M 3.58, Fic 1.85
81	shiatsu	168	
82	skosh	54	
83	sudoku	209	
84	tsunami	4,827	Spok 10.10, Web 7.15, Mag 6.01, News 5.44, Blog 4.49, Acad 2.16, TV/M 1.71, Fic 1.34
85	urushiol	38	

a variety of fields. Nevertheless, these findings strongly suggest that the use of Japanese loanwords has become more frequent since 2000. This is consistent with the trend noted earlier in COHA for frequent loanwords to be used with highest frequency in the last decades (1990s & 2000s) included in that corpus.

5.2 Genres of loanwords

As for genre, it is difficult to discern any clear overall patterns. For example, if we look at the six items with an overall frequency higher than 1.0 per million (see Table 2), we find that *soy* and *tofu* occurred with the highest frequency in the genre of Magazine, while *karate* and *ninja* occurred mostly in the TV/Movie genre, *sushi* occurred most frequently in the News genre, and *tsunami* in the Spoken genre. Table 4 shows the number of loanwords with a frequency higher than 1.0 per million in each genre. Fiction, Magazine and News genres have relatively high numbers, while Spoken and Academic have lower ones.

Table 4. Number of loanwords with frequency above 1.0 per million words by genre

	Genre	Frequency
1	Fiction	16
2	Magazine	16
3	News	15
4	Web	11
5	TV/Movie	10
6	Blog	10
7	Academic	5
8	Spoken	4

Although there were not clear patterns of usage by genre for the loanwords as a whole, within the semantic field of food, there was a tendency for frequent loanwords to be used in the Magazine genre. Eight of the ten food-related loanwords which had frequencies higher than 1.0 per million in a particular genre were frequent in the Magazine genre.

5.3 Characteristics of loanwords

All of the loanwords in this study were nouns or had nominal forms. Nouns are the most common type of loanword. Perhaps this is natural since loanwords are typically for new things or concepts that have been borrowed from another culture and for which there were no names or terms in the borrowing language. In other words, they are borrowed in order to fill a lexical gap. This is not always case, but it is very often so.

In English, noun plural forms are usually marked morphologically by the addition of an *-s* or *-es*

suffix. This contrasts with Japanese in which nouns are not marked for plurality. Most Japanese loanword nouns do not take the plural suffix when they become part of English. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary only 18 of the 85 loanwords in this study take the suffix. However, it is possible that a larger proportion of Japanese loanword nouns will be used with the plural suffix over time as they become more fully assimilated in English. For example, I have heard American native English speakers say *kimonos*, though the Merriam-Webster dictionary does not include *kimono* as a form which takes the plural suffix.

There are also a few cases in which loanwords take other suffixes. The following forms are included in Merriam-Webster and are attested in COCA: *kimonoed, Shintoism, Shintoist, shogunal* and *shogunate*. Merriam-Webster also includes *Shintoistic* and *karateist*, but these forms were not attested in COCA. The use of suffixes makes it possible for a loanword to be used as a part of speech other than noun. The extent to which a loanword can be used with English affixes could be considered one indication of the extent to which the form has been assimilated in English, or has penetrated American culture. We cannot generalize based on these limited examples, but the use of English morphological affixes with Japanese loanwords is a research issue to be pursued with a larger number of loanwords.

In the examples above, an English affix was added to a loanword, but there is at least one case in which borrowing resulted in a truncated form. This is the case of *skosh* 'a small amount', from the Japanese *sukoshi*, 'a bit' or 'a few'.

6.0　Conclusion

This study illustrates how large corpora can be useful in researching the spread and use of loanwords in a language. Corpora can provide frequency data which is useful in at least two important ways. First, it enables researchers to track the spread of an individual lexical item over time and to identify the genres in which it is frequently used. Second, if we look at frequency data about a large number of loanwords we can identify general trends related to the use of loanwords in the language over time.

In the present study we could see that although many Japanese loanwords are familiar, very few of them are highly frequent in English. Among the 85 loanwords surveyed in this study, only seven had frequencies higher than 1.0 per million words in COCA overall. However, it was shown that some of these items did have much higher frequencies in certain genres. Furthermore, comparison of loanword frequencies in the two corpora indicated that Japanese loanwords have come to be more frequently used over time. It would be very useful to pursue this line of research with a larger sample.

It could also be fruitful to examine other aspects of Japanese loanwords in order to see more

clearly the extent to which they have assimilated to English, and how much they taken on new meanings or uses. For instance, there has been some semantic shift for *hibachi*. In Japanese it refers to a traditional heating device used in cooking, but in its English usage, it refers to a portable grill heated by charcoal, and usually used for barbecues. To take another example, *kamikaze* originally referred to a member of the Japanese air attack forces who made suicidal crashes on a target, or to an airplane used for such attacks, but now *kamikaze* is also used as an adjective with the meaning, "having or showing reckless disregard for safety or personal welfare." (Merriam-Webster online) Such cases of semantic shift or expansion could be investigated by detailed study of concordance lines for items in a corpus. Thus, there remains ample scope for further studies of the spread and use of Japanese loanwords in English.

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