

INTRODUCTION

As Ilan Stavans said, *languages do not exist in a vacuum*¹ and their development is often dictated by language contact. Whenever different civilisations and cultures meet, they exchange concepts and ideas, as well as words to express them. For millennia, language contact has played a fundamental role in the shaping of cultures.

Starting with the emergence of the British Empire during colonisation era, the English language assumed the role of the new lingua franca of trade and administration, linking people of different cultures and mother tongues². Prestige associated with foreign language fluency led to the emergence of English-speaking elites in colonised countries. After the Second World War, it was the United States who took up the baton of spreading the English language – first through trade, business and science, and in modern times – through the soft power of popular culture, music and television.

The dawn of the digital era brought about an unprecedented kind of civilisation clash. Since the last decades of the 20th century, English has dominated another space – the Internet. This medium of globalised communication provided a new territory for language contact to take place.

Netizens, the first recipients of this contact, became authorities and experts in the new vernacular. They set into motion the process of loanword naturalisation, similarly to English-speaking elites in societies affected by language contact. Gradually, Internet-derived slang based on borrowings and calques gained an increasingly wide global audience, and even started seeping into offline day-to-day interactions.

The question of English as a global language in the Internet space is an interesting area for sociolinguistic research. Particularly deserving of attention are similarities and contrasts between borrowing processes in Internet slangs and conventional (offline) slangs and cants.

On one hand, online linguistic practices are not disconnected from conventional languages. They are mostly governed by the same principles of traditional linguistics, and they are subject to analogous sophisticated transformation processes. However, Internet slang is autonomous from conventional slang in many ways due to inherent differences in the mediums of diffusion. As Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is primarily based on text rather than speech, speakers of *Internetese* face various challenges, such as a restricted possibility of conveying emotion. For this reason, Internet language relies

¹ Stavans, I. (2010). *A critic's journey*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 1.

² Kubota, R. and McKay, S. (2009). Globalization and Language Learning in Rural Japan: The Role of English in the Local Linguistic Ecology. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(4), p. 595.

heavily on the visual representation of language – such as the choice of script, emoticons, and word play – to communicate emotive expression.

New lects and cants that emerge as a result of these compulsory innovations possess the power to gather communities around the notion of identity stemming from the mutual understanding of vernacular³.

Internet Linguistics is an innovative and still relatively recent area of study. Indeed, the discourse analysis of CMC only gained momentum around 2006, and it was not until ten years later when the first textbook was published on the topic of Englishes in the digital era (by P. Friedrich and E.H. Diniz de Figueiredo)⁴. Furthermore, not a lot of research exists concerning the use of non-Latin scripts in Internetese.

A substantial amount of studies has been conducted on the topic of language contact between Japanese and English. The resulting transformation of Japanese has been prominent since Meiji reforms (1868), but it gained momentum particularly in the globalisation era. The fast pace of development and impermanence of online slangs cause existing knowledge to quickly become irrelevant, creating a perpetual research gap.

Language plays a central role in *nihonjinron* (日本人論) – the self-orientalist⁵ discourse on the uniqueness of the Japanese nation in regard to Western nations. Ever since the modern era of Japan, heavy saturation of the language with English loanwords has been called contaminating and problematic, especially by some prescriptivist linguists and conservative citizens.

However, according to researchers specialising in Internet linguistics, anglicisms in the Internet serve many important functions which should not be overlooked. This thesis investigates the occurrences of Internet slang in the Japanese language, with a particular focus on anglicisms.

Due to the small number of studies on the discussed topic, the core of this dissertation is based on the author's own conclusions and systematisations of Internet sources. All examples of slang words presented in this work are taken from the author's own collection of posts from Japanese and English social media sites, primarily Twitter, 2channeru and Yahoo.jp.

³ Barford, V. (2009). *Mind your slanguage*. [online] BBC News. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8388545.stm [Accessed 26 May 2019].

⁴ Mair, C. (2017). World Englishes in Cyberspace. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305626506_Christian_Mair_World_Englishes_in_cyberspace_In_Daniel_Schreier_Marianne_Hundt_Edgar_Schneider_eds_Cambridge_Handbook_of_World_Englishes_Cambridge_CUP_to_appear_in_2018 [Accessed 18 Mar. 2019]. p. 4.

⁵ McKenzie, R. (2008). The complex and rapidly changing sociolinguistic position of the English language in Japan: a summary of English language contact and use. *Japan Forum*, 20(2). p. 280.