

## A Note on the Borrowing of the English Article *the* into Japanese\*

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### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this note is to explore notional underpinnings of the borrowing of the English definite article *the* into Japanese. It is far from rare to observe *the* in the Japanese language today; it is found in advertising media, social network services, or day-to-day conversations, although it is less likely to be found in some text types, such as, legal documents or academic writings. The borrowed *the* is usually pronounced as /za/ and is written either in *katakana* or *hiragana*, both of which are phonographic writing systems of Japanese, or in Roman characters as in English.

The borrowing of *the* into Japanese is worth highlighting, and for some, it could be seen as somewhat puzzling. This is because articles or determiners, which are usually classified into functional categories, being equated to Chomsky's (1970, 1986) notion of "non-lexical categories," tend to be regarded as less easily borrowed from other languages (cf. Winford (2003)). The question of which linguistic elements are more easily borrowed than the others has long attracted the interests of linguists. Weinreich's dissertation of 1951, which is compiled in Weinreich (2011), for instance, describes the linguistic situation in Switzerland at that time, and notes that morphemes that are more integral in the system of language resist borrowing. Moravcsik (1978), who expatiates on borrowing constraints, offers several proposals, one of which takes the borrowing of lexical items as a prerequisite to the non-lexical language properties to be borrowed. Based on Spanish borrowings in Bolivian Quechua, van Hout and Muysken (1994) specify which categories appear to be borrowed more easily. They arrive at a list shown in (1).

- (1) word classes from easy to difficult to be borrowed
  - a. noun, [proper] name
  - b. adverb, complementizer, conjunction, exclamative, negation, preposition
  - c. adjective, auxiliary, copula, verb

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- d. numeral, quantifier, wh-word
  - e. demonstrative, determiner, preposition+determiner, possessive, pronoun, personal pronoun, pronominal clitic
- (van Hout and Muysken (1994:60) with modifications)

The word class categories in (1a) are the easiest to be borrowed among the all listed word class categories in (1), followed by those in (1b), (1c), (1d), and (1e) in the order corresponding to the degree of borrowability. Notice that determiner can be found in (1e), the group that are more difficult to be borrowed than the others. Van Hout and Muysken (1994) are cautious about directly expanding this hierarchical ordering of word class categories in (1) to other language pairs, where they suggest that other factors may come out to be operant. Matras (2007), in his thorough study on borrowability of a variety of categories across different languages in the literature, distinguishes the borrowing of functional categories from the other borrowings. He finds the need to take a discreet view, similar to that of van Hout and Muysken (1994), on the borrowing of functional categories. That is, Matras (2007:68) notes that “different borrowing motivations apply to different functional categories.” Given that the difference in the degree of borrowability across word class categories has not been fully explained, more empirical evidence, in particular, that of the borrowing of functional elements is needed. In this regard, the mechanism of the borrowing of the English determiner *the* into Japanese deserves considering.

The fact that *the* is actually widespread and creatively used at least in certain registers in Japanese today does not accord with the presumed possibility, if not expectation, that determiners such as *the* are less-likely to be borrowed. Wakamatsu (2018) proposes that this discordance is in part solved by interpreting *the* as a content word, being synonymous with ‘genuine’ or ‘typical.’ She also points out that some of the phenomena in which *the* is used in Japanese are the result of the borrowing of English phrases containing *the*, not the result of the borrowing of a single-word determiner. While Wakamatsu (2018) is with many attested data and suggestive of the ways in which *the* is borrowed into Japanese, it narrowly focuses on empirical phenomena and lacks notional buttress. This note aims to advance the findings of Wakamatsu (2018) by taking theoretical implications into consideration.

The organization of this note is as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of Wakamatsu (2018), in which, based on a corpus survey, three types of the usage of *the* in Japanese is presented. Section 3 introduces the process of *insertion*, proposed by Muysken (2000), on the ground that this notion is employed to the borrowing of English *the* into Japanese. A particular focus is placed on the

insertion of nouns for its high relevance. Section 4 considers how the attested data in Wakamatsu (2018) fit into the pattern of insertion. We consider *relexification* as well as *pattern borrowing* and *matter borrowing* to provide the mechanisms behind the borrowing of *the* into Japanese. Section 5 presents brief concluding remarks.

## 2. Classification of *the* Used in Japanese

This section provides the gist of Wakamatsu (2018) in which the borrowing of the English determiner *the* in Japanese is classified into three types: 1) *the* is used as a Japanese content word denoting ‘genuine’ or ‘typical’; 2) *the* is used as the English functional word, and often appears in the sequence of NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub>; and 3) *the* is used without substantial meaning.

Wakamatsu (2018) examines expressions containing *the* extracted from a dataset jointly provided by Cookpad Inc. and the National Institute of Informatics, Japan. The dataset consists of text data from the website Cookpad.<sup>1</sup> The website provides a platform where its visitors can post their own created recipes with pictures and instructions as well as searching for their recipes and leaving their comments on the recipes with pictures. The site is the biggest of this kind in Japan, compiling 2.85 million recipes at the time of survey. The dataset is thus useful as a corpus of ordinary Japanese speakers’ utterance, reflecting their creative linguistic knowledge. The dataset contained 539 *the* expressions. They were checked against the original data on the website in order to find out the exact intentions of those who posted their recipes or comments and in what contexts the expressions were used. These expressions with *the* were classified into the following three types.

A first type is the case where *the* is interpreted as a content word to mean something like ‘genuine,’ ‘typical,’ ‘true,’ ‘indeed,’ or a fusion of these senses. The attested examples shown in (2) are recipe titles named by contributors in the website. They are transliterated by me.

- (2) a.    za   gyouza  !!  
           the  dumpling  
           ‘Typical dumpling!’
- b.    za   butadon  
           the  pork-bowl  
           ‘True pork-bowl’

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<sup>1</sup> This website is accessed at <https://cookpad.com/>.



- b.    sinpuru   izu    besto    moyashi namuru  
       simple    is    best    bean-sprout namul  
       ‘Simple is the best: Bean sprout namul’
- (5) a.    choko       on    za shokupan  
       chocolate on    the sliced-bread  
       ‘Sliced bread with chocolate’
- b.    natto no       sukuranburu eggu on shokupan  
       nattou GEN scrambled egg on sliced-bread  
       ‘Sliced bread with scrambled eggs containing natto’
- (Wakamatsu (2008))

The examples in (4) and (5) are also recipe titles named by different contributors. The examples indicate that *the* can be used without conveying semantic contents. Given the photos and comments by the contributors, the implication of *za besuto* ‘the best’ in (4a) does not differ from *besto* ‘best’ in (4b) at all. The same holds for the pair of (5a) and (5b). The recipe title in (5a) contains *on za shokupan*, ‘sliced bread,’ and that in (5b) contains *on shokupan*. They reveal that *za* between *on* and *shokupan* can be omitted without changing the intended meaning. This suggests that this type of *the* lacks its content, and only its phonological form is borrowed into Japanese.

While these three types of the borrowing of *the* into Japanese are addressed in Wakamatsu (2018), the last type, namely, the case where only the phonological form is borrowed without substantive meanings, is beyond the scope of this present note. This type is frequently observed when adjacent constituents are English loanwords, such as *izu* and *besuto* in (4a), and *on* in (5a). It seems to be natural to find that the phonological information of these English loanwords is responsible for inviting *the* to appear. If this prediction is correct, phonological factors may play the key role rather than grammatical factors.

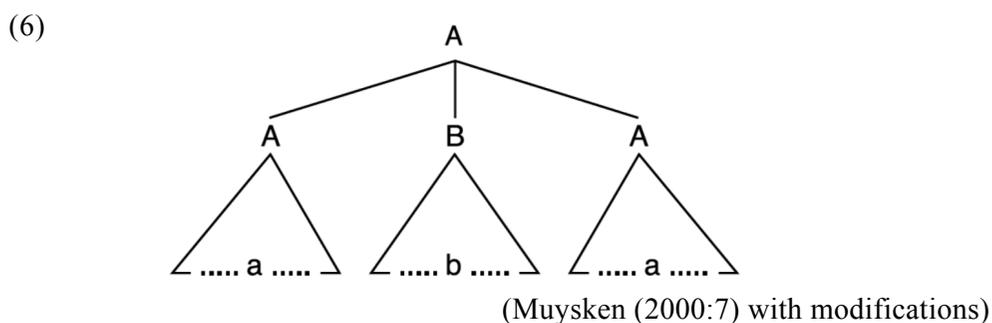
In this section we have observed the three types of the usage of *the* in Japanese. Later Section 4 reconsiders the first type, where *the* is equivalent with some Japanese lexical meaning, and the second type, where *the* is used in the phrase of NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub>, in view of a theoretical framework of language contact.

### 3. Muysken’s (2000) Insertion

This section introduces Muysken’s (2000) framework. First, *insertion* is explained. Second, I review his analysis of DP insertion. He mainly claims that the fact that DP consists of several layers can trigger a variety of ways in which articles are inserted, or not inserted, into recipient languages.

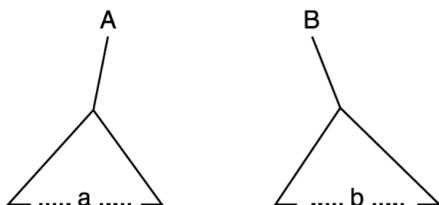
### 3.1. What is Insertion?

This subsection gives an explanatory overview of insertion, which is one of the tripartite divisions of code-mixing processes proposed by Muysken (2000). The term code-mixing refers to “all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence” (Muysken (2000:1)). In code-mixing throughout the world, Muysken (2000) identifies three patterns: insertion, *alternation* and *congruent lexicalization*.<sup>3</sup> Insertion refers to “insertion of material (lexical items or entire constituents) from one language into a structure from the other language” (Muysken (2000:3)). The diagram in (6) shows the process of insertion.

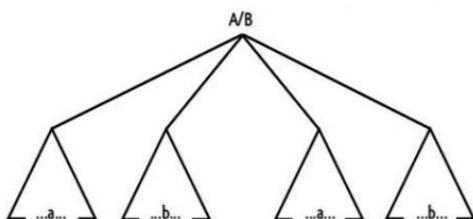


<sup>3</sup> Alternation, shown in (i), indicates the situation where “a constituent from language *A* (with words from the same language) is followed by a constituent from language *B* (with words from that language). The language of constituent dominating *A* and *B* is unspecified” (Muysken (2000:7-8)). Congruent lexicalization, shown in (ii), signifies the situation where “the grammatical structure is shared by language *A* and *B*, and words from both language *a* and *b* are inserted more or less randomly” (Muysken (2000:8)).

(i) Alternation (Muysken (2000:7))



(ii) Congruent lexicalization (Muysken (2000:8))



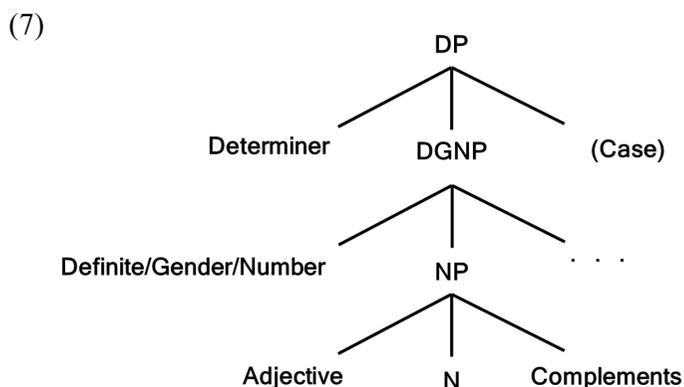
Non-terminal nodes are marked by language labels *A* and *B*. Terminals, which indicate that the words are chosen from a particular language, are marked by *a* and *b*. The situation depicted by (6) signifies that “a single constituent *B* (with words *b* from the same language) is inserted into a structure defined by language *A*, with words *a* from that language” (Muysken (2000:7)).

Insertion as depicted in this way is taken as an umbrella notion which subsumes the phenomena known as borrowings. In insertion, inserted materials vary in size; a verb stem, a phrase, or a longer fragment, etc. Borrowings, on the other hand, are likely to deal with nouns, adjectives, or set phrases such as greetings. In this regard, insertion and borrowing are used interchangeably hereafter in this note. Borrowing, i.e., insertion necessitates a matrix or a base language to be present, as it receives inserted materials from a donor language. Our data of the English definite article borrowed into Japanese fits this condition in that *the* is inserted into a structure defined by the Japanese language. We therefore safely advance an analysis taking the English article *the* into Japanese as a case of insertion.

Before moving on to the analysis, however, let us first explore the cases of DP insertion, by which decomposition of D in some languages is exhibited.

### 3.2. Several Levels of DP and Their Insertion

Muysken (2000) points out that there are several types in the insertion of nominal constituents: N insertion (only nouns); NP insertion (adjective + noun; noun + complement); DGNP insertion (noun phrases marked for definiteness, gender, numbers); and DP insertion (full determiner phrases). Based on these types, a four-level nominal complex is illustrated as in (7).<sup>4</sup>



(Muysken (2000:61) with modifications)

<sup>4</sup> It is not that the view that DP consists of plural functional layers is monopolized by Muysken. The studies that share this view include Heycock and Zamparelli (2005) and Alexiadou (2014), among others.



French and Dutch differ from each other, and lists different properties between the articles in these two languages: (i) French articles *le/la* roughly resemble Arabic article *l* in terms of gender and number marking, while Dutch *de/het* do not; (ii) the French *le/la* are proclitic, while Dutch *de/het* are not; and (iii) French *le/la* are obligatory in the noun phrase, while Dutch *de/het* are not. Muysken (2000:86) explains that French and Dutch articles are D in French and Dutch, but for various reasons, French articles with nouns are interpreted as DGN in Moroccan Arabic. This is why French articles are needed, when Moroccan Arabic determiners corresponding to such elements as *wah.ed* ‘one’ and *dak* ‘that’ are attached to NPs, as shown in (10). Dutch articles are, however, different. Muysken (2000:86) notes as follows:

Moroccan Arabic prepositions select an appropriate DP, which cannot be the Dutch one (for instance because the Dutch definite articles *de* and *het* are marked for [ $\pm$  neutral], while *wah.ed* and *dak/dik* are marked for [ $\pm$  feminine], if anything), but it can be one in which the D remains empty, a possibility in Moroccan Arabic as well. French article + noun combinations are interpreted as DNG-Ps and for Dutch an integration strategy is developed, in which null counts as a DNG.

What is assumed here is that the forms of definite articles in a donor language do not necessarily correspond to their functions when inserted into a recipient language.

What we have seen in this subsection is that there can occur mismatches in the process of nominal insertions, as inserted DP is differently received by recipient languages. When mismatches occur in the process of insertion, the greater role is played by recipient, that is, matrix languages rather than by donor languages, as the former shape room for items to be inserted. In other words, matrix language determines to which layers DP is inserted.

#### **4. Analyzing Insertion of the English Determiner into Japanese**

This section reconsiders the two types of Japanese expressions containing *the* exhibited in Section 2, aiming to explain the mechanism behind the ways in which *the* is inserted. The first type of the insertion of *the* is the case where *the* is not taken as an English definite article, but rather as a Japanese content word. The second type is the case where *the* appears as a part of the NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence. By referring to what is known as relexification and pattern borrowing, I argue that different mechanisms lie in each of the types of *the* insertion into Japanese.

##### *4.1. Type 1: The Is Used as a Japanese Content Word*



categories (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions and adverbs) by linking new phonological forms with syntactic and semantic information that is already established in the lexicon of his native language.

In this regard, the sentence in *Media Lengua*, spoken in a town in Cotopaxi province of Ecuador, shown in (14) is the result of relexification. The sentence largely preserves syntactic structure of Quechua, the native language of the Andean region, but lexicons are derived from Spanish.<sup>5</sup>

- |      |                |                                     |              |                 |
|------|----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| (14) | (Quechua)      | yalli-da                            | tamia-pi-ga, | mana ri-sha-chu |
|      | (Media Lingua) | dimas-ta                            | llubi-pi-ga, | no i-sha-chu    |
|      |                | too much                            | rain-SUB-TO, | not go-1FU-NEG  |
|      | (Spanish)      | si llueve                           | demás,       | no voy a ir.    |
|      |                | ‘If it rains too much, I won’t go.’ |              |                 |
|      |                | (Muysken (1981:53))                 |              |                 |

We find that the inserted Spanish elements in (14) parallel *the* in Japanese, as both of the foreign phonological forms are linked with the lexicons of their native languages. It can be stated, therefore, that the English determiner *the* is relexified as a Japanese modifier.

#### 4.2. Type 2: The *Appears in the Sequence of NP<sub>1</sub> the NP<sub>2</sub>*

The second type is the case where *the* in the NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> constellation is concerned. This type is different from what I have discussed in the previous subsection, because this type of the insertion of *the* involves both the grammatical function of the English determiner and its phonological form. Let us observe the following examples. The recipe title in (3) is repeated in (15). A title of a TV program and that of a DVD are shown in (16) and (17) respectively.

- |      |                                     |                 |                    |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| (15) | satsuma-age                         | za              | rimeiku            |
|      | deep-fried fish paste               | the             | remake             |
|      | ‘Deep-fried fish paste: the remake’ |                 |                    |
|      | (Wakamatsu (2008))                  |                 |                    |
|      |                                     |                 |                    |
| (16) | cho-nyumon                          | rakugo          | Za MOVIE           |
|      | super introduction                  | comic monologue | ‘rakugo’ the movie |
|      | ‘Rakugo from scratch: the movie’    |                 |                    |

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<sup>5</sup> The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: FU = future tense, NEG = negation marker, SUB = adverbial subordinator, TO = topic, 1 = first person.

(<http://www4.nhk.or.jp/rakumov/> , Wakamatsu (2008))

- (17) *gafirudo za mubi*  
 Garfield the movie (Wakamatsu (2008))

As noted earlier, this type takes the form of NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence in which NP<sub>1</sub> is specified by NP<sub>2</sub>. For instance, (16) is the title of TV program in which some stories of *rakugo*, a Japanese comic monologue performed by a story teller who sits on stage, are played by several actors like a movie. It is therefore a movie version of *rakugo*. Garfield in (17) is the title of a comic, but the entire phrase of “Garfield the movie” indicates that this is a film shown in a movie theater. The title in (17) indicates that it is not a comic book of Garfield, but is a movie of Garfield. It is worth noticing that the title in (16) shows a creative use of the formulaic *the* in NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub>, for NP<sub>1</sub>, ‘*rakugo*,’ is a Japanese word. This is contrasted with the expression in (17) which exemplifies a phrasal insertion from English into Japanese, because it is transliterated from the title of the DVD, “Garfield the movie,” which is a proper noun.

What makes NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> diverge from *the* as a Japanese modifier is the fact that the former involves pattern replication of the donor language in the recipient language, together with matter replication. Matter and pattern replication, or borrowing, is explained in Matras and Sakel (2007:829-830) as follows:

Contact-induced language change can lead to direct replication of morphemes and phonological shapes from a source language; we shall refer to this [...] as replication of linguistic *matter*... Language contact can also lead to re-shaping of language-internal structures. In the latter process, the formal substance or matter is not imported but is taken from the inherited stock of forms of the recipient or replica language [...] Rather, it is the patterns of distribution, of grammatical and semantic meaning, and of formal-syntactic arrangement at various level (discourse, clause, phrase, or word) that are modelled on an external source. We call this *pattern replication*...

The empirical example of pattern borrowing is shown in (18) where a marker of a pluperfect, or a remote past, that is, an auxiliary ‘was’ is borrowed into Khuzistani Arabic from Persian together with its position.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: DEF = definite, M = masculine, SG = singular.

## (18) a. (Khuzistani Arabic)

mən rəh-ət lə-l-bīet, huwwa mā-rāyəh čān  
 when went-1SG to DEF-home he NEG-going.SG.M was.3SG.M

## b. (Persian)

vahyti raft-am xūme, ūn na-rafte būd  
 when went-1SG home he NEG-gone was.3SG.M

‘When I went home, he had not [yet] gone away’

(Matras and Shabibi (2007:143) with a slight modification)

I argue that such pattern borrowing is palpable in the case of *the* in NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> in Japanese. The difference between (18) and *the* in NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence, however, is that the former is the outcome of pattern borrowing only. Note that expressions like ‘John the Baptist,’ or ‘Alexander the Great,’ in which NP<sub>2</sub> specifies NP<sub>1</sub>. The case for the latter involves both pattern and matter borrowing, in that the formal structure of the string of NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> and the phonological shape of the English definite article is inserted into Japanese.

The section has argued that there are at least two distinct mechanisms for the borrowing of *the* into Japanese, resulting in two different types of interpretations that *the* in Japanese conveys. Would it be possible for inserted elements to have multiple interpretations? The answer is affirmative. Muysken (2014) gives a favorable example in which Haitian *pou*, coming from French preposition *pour* ‘for’, functions as a preposition, complementizer, and mood maker. The reason behind this is suggested by his statement that “the lexical entry is underspecified with respect to distinctions the syntax makes (2014:124).” The same seems to be applicable for the case of the insertion of English determiner *the* into Japanese, in that the lexical entry of *the* is underspecified, allowing *the* to function as a Japanese adjective, and an element constituting the NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This note has considered the borrowing of the English determiner *the* in the contemporary Japanese by relocating the findings of Wakamatsu (2018) to Muysken’s (2000) insertion type of language contact. We have seen that there are at least two types of *the* in Japanese, each of which has distinct underlying mechanisms for the borrowings. The first type involves relexification, thereby reinterpreting *the* as a Japanese modifier that intensifies the following nouns. In other words, *the* is used as a content word. The other type involves both pattern and matter borrowings (Matras and Sakel (2007)). This type of *the* is found in the NP<sub>1</sub>

*the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence, in which the syntactic environment of *the*, together with its phonological shape is inserted into Japanese.

While I have presented the types of *the* available in Japanese, I should point out the type of *the* which cannot be found in Japanese. That is, an anaphoric use of *the* is not attested so far. This seems to give interesting implications for borrowability, which is touched upon in the introduction section. A detailed consideration into this is, however, my future work.

There are two other remaining issues which could not be dealt with in this note. One concerns with the reason why the Japanese language allows the English determiner *the* to be used in Japanese. It seems that the finding that Japanese as taken as a morphology-preferring language vis-à-vis English as a syntax-preferring language (Nishimaki (2016)) may be helpful in explaining why this is so, but I like to put forward this issue for the future research. The other issue concerns with the possibility of considering construction borrowing (cf. Zenner, Heylen and Van de Velde (2018)), which may be applicable for the NP<sub>1</sub> *the* NP<sub>2</sub> sequence. Till I obtain enough attested data, however, I also like to put forward this topic for the future study.

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