

Unconscious *Gairaigo* Bias in EFL:

A Case Study of Japanese Teachers of English

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1. Introduction

‘Japanese and English speakers find each other’s languages hard to learn’ (Swan and Smith, 2001: 296). This is probably due in no small part to the many linguistic differences between the seemingly unrelated languages. Huge levels of word borrowing, though, have led to an abundance of loanwords in the current Japanese lexicon, many originating from English. These are known locally in Japan as *gairaigo*. Indeed, around half of the three thousand most common words in English and around a quarter of those on The Academic Word List (see Coxhead, 2000) correspond in some form to *gairaigo* (Daulton: 2008: 86). Thus, to some degree we can say that the two languages are ‘lexically wed’ (ibid: 40). With increasing recognition among researchers of the positive role that the first language plays in the learning of a second, and a growing number of empirical studies indicating *gairaigo* knowledge can facilitate English acquisition, there have been calls to exploit these loanwords for the benefit of Japanese learners of English. But despite research supporting a role for them in learning English, it is said that ‘many or most Japanese teachers of English avoid using *gairaigo* in the classroom’ (Daulton: 2011: 8) due to a ‘*gairaigo* bias’ (ibid.). This may stem from unfavourable social attitudes towards loanwords themselves in the Japanese language, and pedagogical concerns over their negative influences on learning. Should this be true, it would represent a position incongruous with the idea of exploiting cross-linguistic lexical similarities.

To redress a lack of research into the perspectives of Japanese teachers of English (hereafter JTE), the author conducted semi-structured interviews with a small sample of them and analysed the data to help ascertain if such a *gairaigo* bias exists.

Results indicated that JTE views on teaching are more multi-layered and pragmatic than portrayed in the literature. Participants are not opposed in principle to loanwords in the Japanese language, or to their use in pedagogy, remaining open to any potential benefits. However, in practical terms, the JTE in the study had typically not given much consideration to the topic of *gairaigo* and were unaware of how cross-linguistic similarities could be systematically exploited. Errors that ensue from the influence of loanwords, particularly in regards to language form, are more numerous and apparent to them than advantages. Thus, in general, JTE do seem to have negative perceptions of trying to relate *gairaigo* to English.

Without evidence of much thought concerning *gairaigo*, pedagogical avoidance or use of *gairaigo* for the JTE in this study appears to operate at an instinctual level rather than a conscious one. Such instincts are probably informed substantially by their theoretical awareness, or lack thereof, and their personal approaches to teaching. Traditional teaching styles that do not fully consider a role for the first language in English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) and which give negative emphasis to errors, especially of form, do not lend themselves to compatibility with loanwords. Therefore, the JTE participants in this study, who seem to adhere to such teaching styles, are predisposed towards avoidance of *gairaigo*, regardless of whether or not they have reasoned concerns about its efficacy. In other words, JTE negativity towards loanwords suggests an unconscious *gairaigo* bias, which is largely a consequence of their teaching approaches and lack of awareness of theoretical alternatives. In this paper, we first look at what *gairaigo* is, and why it may be useful or unfavoured in teaching, before moving on to describe a qualitative study of JTE and then discuss its findings in relation to this thesis.

2. What are *gairaigo*?

Many centuries of borrowing from China has seen recent estimates of close to half of all Japanese words as derived from Chinese (Tomoda, 1999: 232). The Japanese also borrowed from the Chinese writing system. Japanese basically uses three Chinese-derived scripts: *kanji* (漢字), *hiragana* (ひらがな) and *katakana* (カタカナ). *Kanji* are meaning-based logographs whereas *hiragana* is sound-based and represents the moras (similar to syllables) of Japanese. *Katakana* is akin to *hiragana*, but is now

mainly used for Western loanwords. The centrality of Chinese to the Japanese language has meant words have been fully adopted and are no longer seen as foreign.

Recent concepts of foreign loanwords refer particularly to words of European and American origin. Two major influxes of new vocabulary stand out. The start of the Meiji Era in 1868 signalled a period of modernization and adoption of Western culture in Japan and with it many new words were introduced ‘mainly from German, French and English’ (Kay, 1995: 68). Japanese scholars carefully translated these words and transliterated them into *kanji* and also *katakana*. A second influx occurred post-World War II. As Honna (1995) describes, under the influence of American Occupation Forces who wanted to replace *kanji* with a phonological system, new loanwords came to be rendered directly into *katakana*. This effectively opened the gates to a flood of mostly English-based words that could be used immediately without the full semantic understanding and cultural adoption associated with *kanji*, and is a trend that continues today. These loanwords are known in Japan as *gairaigo* (literally meaning ‘language coming from the outside’) and despite making up around ten percent of standard dictionary entries (Tomoda, 1999: 234), almost all of them remain distinct from perceptions of original Japanese, due in part to their *katakana* script.

3. Why are *gairaigo* useful?

Explicit vocabulary instruction can help accelerate initial familiarity with meaning and form (Nation, 2001: 34), but to the extent that languages are similar, familiarity can also be sourced from a learner’s first language. Teachers can thus lighten the learning burden of words by ‘pointing out connections between the second language and the first’ (ibid: 24). Many researchers advocate deliberate awareness-raising (Olah, 2007), noticing and exploring (Nation, 2003), and strengthening of links (Uchida, 2007) between L1 and second language (hereafter L2) loanwords in order to benefit fully from them. Some others argue that students can be assumed to have enough knowledge of loanwords to use them in fluency-based activities or to simply prioritize the learning of essential vocabulary items that are not loanwords (Daulton, 2005).

The prominent linguist Hakan Ringbom believes that even ‘partially correct perceptions or assumptions of cross-linguistic similarity’ (2007: 3) can be positive steps towards language acquisition. Vocabulary, as items, should be learnt for comprehension

to provide a base for subsequent production and the learning of language as a system. At initial stages of learning, loanwords can facilitate in the building of a sufficiently large receptive base needed for production and the development of an L2 mental lexicon. Errors resulting from oversimplification can be gradually corrected as a learner develops a greater knowledge of the language system (Ringbom and Jarvis, 2009: 113). Thus, errors should not be seen negatively, but as signs of development towards a deeper understanding of the L2.

Following Ringbom’s logic, Frank Daulton sees enormous potential in Japan for positive cross-linguistic transfer from *gairaigo* due to ‘virtually unparalleled’ (2008: 1) amounts of borrowing from English. He has identified many (high-frequency) cognates that he feels are accessible and helpful for Japanese learners of English. Despite the fact that practically all cognates must be considered as imperfect matches, learners can be advised which ones are more reliable (i.e., have more meaning overlap) over less reliable ones (Franzten, 1998). Uchida (2001a) provides six categories of specifically English-Japanese cognates based on semantic similarity/difference (Figure 3.1), and classification for their comparative difficulty levels (Table 3.1). Daulton drew on such research to help him identify what he calls ‘Japan’s Built-in Lexicon’ (2008).

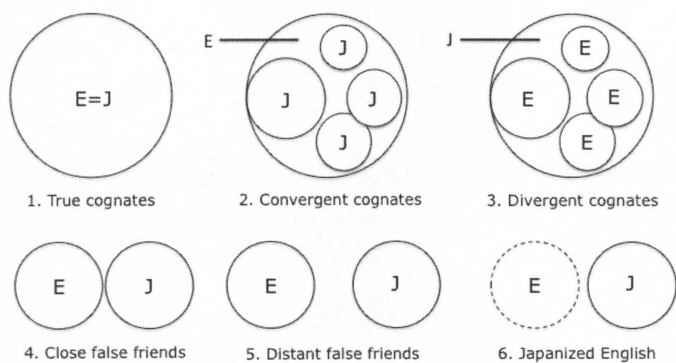


Figure 3.1 Types of English-Japanese cognates (adapted from Uchida, 2001a)

Table 3.1. Types of English-Japanese cognates spectrum of difficulty with greater shading equaling greater difficulty) (adapted from Uchida, 2001a)

True/helpful cognates	Convergent cognates	Divergent cognates	Distant false friends	Japanized English	Close false friends
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Just how the positive effect of loanwords can best be taken advantage of is still far from clear. It appears, however, that at least in principle, there is accumulating evidence for cognate recognition and positive effects of *gairaigo* for English language acquisition in Japan. Empirical studies indicate advantages found in listening for meaning (Brown and Williams, 1985); vocabulary retention (Kimura, 1989); spelling (Hashimoto, 1993); and writing production (Daulton, 2007). Studies also seem to indicate that knowing *gairaigo* can help with cognate recognition (Hashimoto, 1992; Uchida 2007).

Despite endorsements from researchers and supporting evidence from studies, it is important to remember that any similarities are ultimately subjective in the mind of an individual, and that ‘such subjectivity is related to background factors such as age, motivation, literacy, and social class’ (Odlin, 1989 cited in Odlin, 2003: 4). Activating a similarity and taking advantage of it are not the same things. Both must take place for positive transfer from cognates to occur. The extent to which positive transfer occurs depends greatly on learners recognizing similarities and having the confidence to exploit them. With this in mind, attention is turned to some of the linguistic and social factors in Japan that might discourage positive transfer and encourage a *gairaigo* bias.

4. Why is there a *gairaigo* bias?

Negative JTE attitudes towards *gairaigo* are generally assumed to be based on a pedagogical ‘mistrust of cognates’ (Daulton, 2008: 53). In classrooms where JTE are typically thought to take an unfavourable view towards errors, differences in form and meaning between many cognates are just too numerous to control for. Form and meaning can become obscured from the original English word as a result of transforming it into Japanese, particularly from its transliteration into *katakana*. With a combination of direct borrowing and a distinctive script, it would be easy to assume that *gairaigo* clearly stand out. However, loanwords are subject to transformation to both form and meaning when they are adapted to the Japanese language and are in effect Japanized. Such changes, to varying extents, result in increased levels of obscurity and differences from their original English counterparts. Transliteration produces not only a totally different orthography from the original word, but also results in phonological

sound approximations. Additionally, loanwords can undergo differing degrees of morphological and semantic changes. For example, the word *pasokon* (パソコン) is an abbreviated form of ‘personal computer’, and *anaunsaa* (アナウンサー) is a restricted-use or convergent cognate, derived from ‘announcer’ but denoting only a ‘newscaster’. Loanwords are also modified to slot into the Japanese syntactic system. Verbs can be formed simply by adding the word *suru* (する) to a noun. For instance, *choisu suru* (チョイスする), which means ‘choose’, is created by directly verbalising the word ‘choice’. Words from English can even be combined to create novel words which do not exist in English. Your *charmupointo* (チャームポイント) is your most charming or attractive feature (charm point). These transformations make even recognising (or activating) a word as a cognate all the more difficult, not least because a loanword may not necessarily originate from English.

Additionally, there is a common perception among many Japanese people in general society that huge influxes of *gairaigo* represent a threat to the Japanese language (e.g., Otake, 2007) and could lead to a loss of cultural identity (Sheperd, 1996). Tomoda (1999: 237-239) informs that a survey conducted in 1992 by the Prime Minister’s Office in Japan reported seventy percent of the Japanese public thought there were too many *gairaigo*. She feels that this may not necessarily betray a universal dislike for loanwords, but may instead reflect concerns about increased borrowing levels and the type of words that are borrowed. Where many everyday loanwords, especially concrete nouns, have become integral to Japanese life, there is growing confusion from ‘an increase in difficult-to-understand *gairaigo*’ (ibid: 238). The media, advertising companies, and elites are among those who rapidly adopt new unfamiliar words because they offer the semantic fluidity to promote their desired image. Much of the Japanese public, though, do not have a firm grasp on these words. Therefore, a lack of even L1 *gairaigo* knowledge is an issue that JTE may face in class.

With social fears and an increased potential for classroom errors taken together, it might seem natural that a *gairaigo* bias would exist. However, Daulton (2011: 11) reports from his survey that Japanese university students ‘generally do not suffer from a *gairaigo* bias.’ Moreover, Champ (2014: 119) discovered from interviews that ‘teachers (of Japanese) hold a range of views on the efficacy of *gairaigo* and take a strategic contextually-based approach to its use.’ Studies like these hint that JTE may also have more nuanced views of cognates than previously assumed. Actually, there is

stark lack of evidence for how JTE view the issue. This absence of research is what prompted a qualitative study by the author into JTE perspectives concerning the use of *gairaigo* in EFL, which we will now turn to.

5. A Qualitative Study of JTE Views – Methodology

5.1 Research Question

The main purpose of this study was to find how Japanese teachers of English (JTE) approach English-based loanwords in EFL.

5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the method to collect information directly from a small sample of participants in a flexible format. Each participant took part individually in two separate interviews, both approximately thirty minutes in length. The aim was to give as much voice as possible to the participants themselves, allow them to reflect and elaborate on what they thought was salient in order to enrich and deepen understanding of the research topic, and to minimize the inevitable effects of researcher bias. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed to enable detailed analysis. Participants signed an informed consent form prior to interviewing, and were aware that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time for any or no reason without consequence. Identities and data were kept confidential.

5.3 Interview Guides

The interview guide for first interviews included four main interview questions, which corresponded to four pre-identified areas of interest that were considered appropriate to the study's research question: *examples of classroom usage*, *teaching preferences*, *pedagogical considerations*, and *perceptions of students' views*. These questions allowed the interviewer the flexibility to react to and explore content arising during the interview whilst still retaining the overall purpose behind the questioning. Several additional follow-up questions were also written on the interview guide to be drawn

upon if necessary during an interview. The concluding question was an open request for any additional comments to ‘permit(s) the interviewee to have the final say’ (Dornyei, 2007: 138). Data from interviews were used to help inform the analysis of subsequent interviews in an iterative process.

A second interview guide was created for each participant based on her initial data. The transcript from a participant’s first interview was analyzed line-by-line for general impressions, which aided in identifying areas already covered, areas in need of further clarification or discussion, and potential areas of interest yet to be addressed. Participants received a transcript of their first interview approximately one week before their second interview to read in their own time. This was an opportunity for them to check the data was representative of their views and to prepare for the second interview.

5.4 Participants and Sampling

Table 5.1. *Participants*

Participant	Nationality	First language	Gender	Age	Teaching experience (years)	Types of classes taught
A	Japanese	Japanese	F	54	2	Children, TOEIC
B	Japanese	Japanese	F	41	2	University
C	Japanese	Japanese	F	72	38	University, Junior high, High school
D	Japanese	Japanese	F	60	30	University, Elementary, Junior high, High school

The initial estimate for sample size was five to six participants, consistent with Dornyei’s recommendation for an interview study not employing computer-aided data analysis (2007: 127). However, the eventual sample size was revised down due to time considerations. Four people participated in the study, one in a pilot study and three as main participants. Identities were coded to preserve anonymity and known only to the researcher. Participant A was selected using convenience sampling to pilot collection and data analysis techniques in order to increase researcher familiarity with them and to test for unforeseen difficulties. She was a willing participant who worked in a private English language school in Japan teaching adults and children. As the participant profile and data collection method for the pilot study did not significantly differ from the main

study, her data was included. The three participants for the main study were selected using homogeneous sampling, in which people all share some relevant experiences (ibid). The sample was drawn from a pool of JTE at a public university in Japan. Each predominantly designed and taught courses for eighteen- to twenty-year-old Japanese native students in class sizes of twenty to forty students. All four participants were women aged above forty. They were EFL teachers of varying experience and were all Japanese natives who spoke Japanese as a first language. The homogeneity of the sample can be questioned with some variations in age, teaching experience and types of classes taught. The current study presents an interpretation of the perspectives of the small sample interviewed, and cannot make definite claims about how representative they are of a wider population.

5.5 Data Analysis

The interview audio-recordings were transcribed using a simplified version of Gail Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions, a technique often used in Conversational Analysis as it allows speech to be represented closely to its original oral form in both what was said and how it was said. The data was analyzed to 'produce a core description' (Polkinghorne, 2005: 138) of the participants' accounts through a process of coding, category development, and the identification of themes.

In Vivo coding, which uses words or phrases from the transcript verbatim, was employed for the first cycle of coding in order to limit researcher misinterpretation and 'prioritize and honor the participant's voice' (Saldana, 2009: 74). Pre-coding steps were taken to gain a more thorough familiarity with the transcripts to help build up a sense of what was most salient in the data. Initial researcher thoughts were noted immediately after the interview and interview summaries were produced from line-by-line transcript analysis. From here, some early patterns could be speculated upon and used to inform coding choices. Even so, it was impossible to know which data were relevant prior to coding cycles and therefore nearly every line of participants' speech was given a code.

In a second cycle, codes were grouped together and assigned category headings, which were still based where possible on a participant's actual words. Categories were in turn grouped under headings (some of which eventually

became themes). Once both of a participant's two interviews had been coded and categorized, segments of text surrounding each code were assembled together by category and re-analyzed to produce a single summary of that participant's data. Each of the eight interviews was analyzed separately in its entirety before formal comparisons were made between them. This was in order to maintain a focus on letting the data speak for itself, and minimize any structure imposed upon it.

A third of level of data refinement was a thematic analysis. By comparing coding summaries, core patterns between participants' accounts were identified in order to gain perspective on the overall experience under research. Four themes emerged.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Theme 1: *Perceptions of gairaigo as Japanese*

Despite drawing distinctions between traditional Japanese and nativised Japanese words, all the JTE participants consider *gairaigo* to be a part of Japanese, not foreign. However, the dichotomy of *gairaigo* in general as being perceived as Japanese or not appears to be a false one. The Japanese language is evolving and expanding, and seemingly with it JTE assessments of how assimilated individual loanwords have become. Tomoda (1999: 238) speculates that surveys showing public dissatisfaction with *gairaigo* may reflect opinion about the increasing amounts of new and difficult loanwords in society, not those used in everyday life. That is, some loanwords are probably more accepted than others. At one end of the continuum are words that have become a normal and unavoidable part of Japanese. At the other end are newer loanwords that are often abstract and less well understood. Even so, over time a number of these are being pushed towards the more established end of the spectrum. This is a view not adequately reflected in the literature, which usually focuses on some of the Japanese public's concerns about lesser-assimilated words to make broad judgements about *gairaigo* as a whole.

Daulton (2011: 8) writes that part of the reason there is a bias against *gairaigo* in Japan EFL is that 'social angst regarding foreignisms has likely entered the language classroom.' While this possibility may not be unlikely in many cases, the *current study* indicates a general acceptance from the JTE participants of many *gairaigo* words as

integral to Japanese, regardless of whether they lack affinity for them or not. Such refined awareness might signify that any classroom bias is more likely to be pedagogical in nature rather than social.

6.2 Theme 2: *Perceptions of the efficacy of gairaigo in EFL pedagogy*

Although the JTE participants sometimes use *gairaigo* when speaking Japanese in class, none of them had given significant thought as to how cross-linguistic similarities could be systematically exploited. Upon reflection, they were able to give examples of opportunistic and ad hoc teaching usages (see section 6.3), suggesting JTE are not in principle opposed to using it, and that their views may be more multi-faceted than portrayed in the literature. Despite this, they were largely negative about *gairaigo* in EFL. Overall, the participants lacked awareness and knowledge of the potential benefits, which could indicate neglect of *gairaigo* at a theoretical level in Japan EFL rather than simple opposition in the classroom.

In simplistic terms, many language teachers in Japan are said to favour more traditional teaching methods (e.g., Gorsuch, 2001). This is often exemplified by the *yakudoku* technique, which relies on translation for language practice and meaning comprehension, and ‘is a deeply rooted sociolinguistic tradition in Japan’ (Hino, 1988). Whilst it is unknown if the participants in this study solely adhere to such teaching principles, we may speculate from their profiles and their probable lack of pre-service and in-service teacher training (Gorsuch, 2001: 4-5) that they lean toward older approaches to teaching. Matsuura et al. report that ‘most (Japanese) students...expect their teachers to use grammar translation pedagogy’ (2001: 85). It is likely that they are guided in part by how they themselves were taught. All were educated themselves when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT) was placing emphasis on either listening and speaking accuracy (1950s), or grammar-based syllabuses (1960s-1980s) (Tahira, 2012). Major influences on these policy decisions came from the teaching methods of Audiolingualism and Grammar-Translation respectively. Both sharply differentiate the L1 from the L2. Participants A (aged 54), C (72) and D (60) all strongly prefer to teach English as English and through English, though in reality this is not always possible and all participants also rely on their L1 for explaining, translating, encouraging, and so on.

However, by seeing the two languages as separate, advantages of cross-linguistic similarities are largely overlooked, while interference between the two languages from loanwords is liable to be more noticeable and viewed negatively.

6.3 Theme 3: *Teacher uses of gairaigo*

JTE uses of *gairaigo* in the EFL classroom can basically be described as either communicating with it, or explaining about it. Communicating with *gairaigo* mostly involves using it unconsciously as a normal part of speaking Japanese. This includes encouraging students, giving teacher instructions, and so on. At other times, it is used as metalanguage to facilitate language study by explaining and/or translating points that are deemed too difficult to address in English, such as abstract grammar. The second main use, explaining about *gairaigo*, involves explicitly making learners aware of how cognates relate to each other. Participant A uses *gairaigo* to exemplify affixes and derivatives. Participant B says that *gairaigo* can be broken down and explained in terms of logical meanings. Participant C tries to use explicit explanations and examples to increase knowledge of a cognate in both languages with knowledge from each helping to inform the other. Participant D feels that she can tell students about particular cases, but that does not equate to acquired knowledge that can be applied generally.

Raising consciousness about cognate similarities and differences echoes the prevailing opinion among researchers. They talk of ‘deliberately exploring L1 and L2 relationships’ (Nation, 2003: 5) and ‘strengthening the link between L1 and L2 loanwords in learners’ mental lexicons’ (Uchida, 2007: 21). To accomplish this, however, many recommend a ‘deliberate and systematic’ (ibid) approach or the provision of a ‘systematic guide’ (Ringbom, 2007: 4). The participants in this study did not appear to pre-plan to raise awareness of how loanwords relate to each other in ways that promote learner autonomy. On the contrary, their attempts seem opportunistic and ad hoc. When an opportunity does present itself, there is often a great deal of teacher control and effort to explain or translate the words, and to limit the possibility of negative transfer. Such thinking is not consistent with Ringbom (2007: 5), who suggests that learners be given advice to help with their own attempts at facilitation. It is more consistent with highly controlled teacher-fronted classes, heavily focused on maintaining accuracy, ‘perfectly justifiable’ (Gorsuch, 2001: 15) in large classes of

Japanese learners, such as those Participants B, C and D regularly teach.

6.4 Theme 4: *Pedagogical problems in relation to gairaigo*

The participants showed that they are largely familiar with the numerous processes of Japanization that loanwords are subject to, and that these may cause difficulty and confusion for learners. Examples include semantic narrowing, grammatical changes, and so on. Even meaning comprehension in Japanese can be limited for some abstract words. However, for all the participants the main concerns centered on problems arising from the influence of *katakana*. This has negative implications not only for form-related issues, such as accuracy in pronunciation and spelling, but also, very importantly, for cognate recognition. The JTE here feel that although *gairaigo* are based on English words, learners just accept them without perceiving them as cognates, especially in written form. Therefore, learners are unable to address ensuing errors on their own.

Here, again, JTE perceptions seem influenced by traditional teaching approaches. Accuracy of form is highly valued, so Japanized English forms inevitably give a significant impression of negative interference. Also, the L1 and L2 are seen as distinct, so learners are unable to see links between them. JTE views from this study represent a major disjuncture from much of the literature, which, pronunciation aside, claims increased performance, either immediate or in the long-term. Some believe *katakana* not to be a major barrier. Uchida (2007: 19) argues that Japanese EFL learners associate loanwords ‘with both *katakana* and *romaji*, the Roman alphabet used to represent Japanese’, and this allows them to perceive of formal similarities between Japanese and English; the so-called ‘*katakana*-filter’ (Daulton, 2008b). Despite this claim, it is still far from clear how Japanese learners pair cognates. Even greater complexity is added when we consider the impact of individual learner perceptions. For example, those who perceive two languages as similar are more likely to identify or accept the cognates between those languages (Ringbom, 2007). It may be difficult for JTE to promote this view, though, if they perceive English and Japanese as unrelated.

7. Conclusion

A qualitative study was conducted to investigate how a small sample of JTE approach

English-based loanwords in English language teaching. It was found they accept many *gairaigo* words towards the more-assimilated end of a continuum as a natural part of Japanese. In EFL, the Japanese language is basically thought of as separate from English by JTE and can be used for translation, grammar explanations, encouragement, instructions, and so on. Cross-linguistic similarities, on the other hand, are only seldom exploited, and even then only opportunistically and with a high degree of teacher control. The JTE here were more prone to focusing on the negative influences of *gairaigo* affecting accuracy and cognate recognition. Indeed, there appears to be evidence for a JTE bias against *gairaigo* in EFL. A lack of participant consideration and theoretical awareness in this area, though, suggests that it is not a conscious one. Rather, it seems instinctive and informed by their traditional approaches to teaching, which reinforce the idea of the L1 and L2 as separate and unrelated. Should this be the case, it is possible that a shift towards more modern teaching styles will see such a *gairaigo* bias diminish.

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