

# THE MOVEMENT OF GAIRAIGO USAGE : THE CASE OF THE ASAHI NEWSPAPER FROM 1952 TO 1997

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Changing patterns and attitudes towards gairaigo are revealed clearly in newspapers, which can be considered the standard, as it were, for common gairaigo usage in society.

The study of gairaigo encounters difficulties concerning which words are in use and in what kind of media sector (e.g. television, magazines). In many cases, gairaigo first appears in fields of new technology, advertisements, and also by young people where it then diffuses to the rest of society. Gairaigo which is used at the conversational level, for example, among young people, is likely not to be appropriate for examining the bank of 'common' gairaigo used in the wider Japanese society. Also, gairaigo is dependent upon social trends. A gairaigo item appears in an advertisement but may soon disappear from public vocabulary.

In order to delineate the gairaigo of common currency which are somehow recognized and accessible to the majority of Japanese, this research examines the gairaigo appearing in the Asahi newspaper. The Asahi Shimbun (Asahi newspaper) is one of the four major newspapers and has the second largest circulation in Japan.<sup>(1)</sup> Newspapers are usually conservative about using gairaigo because they must be understandable to the public.

Therefore, the amount of gairaigo appearing in newspapers can be assumed to be less than the actual number of gairaigo in use. However, they are gairaigo recognized by the majority of readers.

## **Methodology of Investigation**

In order to collect data as randomly and equally as possible, gairaigo data were gathered from the morning papers on April 1<sup>st</sup> in each of the selected years. Newspapers immediately after WWII did not have a large number of pages because of a shortage of paper. This situation lasted until 1952. In this research, the Asahi morning edition was analyzed on April 1<sup>st</sup> at five year intervals starting from 1952.

The amount of gairaigo used may depend on the topic being reported. Certain topics have many loanwords. From the contents of edited Asahi Shimbun back numbers, sections on economics, society, culture, and sports were selected for analysis. All the articles appearing in each of the fields selected were examined on April 1<sup>st</sup>. The contents for years 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997 were analyzed.

The methodology proceeded as follows. Firstly, all words appearing in selected articles are counted in order to calculate the total words. The total number of words was counted using the following methodology. The numbers of words in several lines of an article were counted. The average number of words in a line was calculated. The average number of words in a line was multiplied by the number of lines which were of the same length. The total number of words was added together for each of the four sections (economics, culture, society, and sports) and for each year.

Secondly, all words that appear in *katakana* written system in the selected articles were listed. The *katakana* words were categorized into three types: non-gairaigo, gairaigo proper nouns, and gairaigo. Non-gairaigo is: onomatopoeia, Japanese words written in *katakana* for impact, names of certain crops, fish, meat, etc. (in certain cases, as in the grocery marketing section, the product names appear in *katakana* instead of *kanji* or *hiragana*). Gairaigo proper nouns are the names of persons, places, companies and so on which have simply been syllabicated in the Japanese phonological system. Gairaigo in this section is that which has been borrowed from foreign languages and Japanized.

Thirdly, these data were subjected to test the frequencies and volume of gairaigo usage, the trend, and changes over the year. According to Honna's study (1995), gairaigo can be categorized into seven patterns: semantic narrowing and shift, Japanese phrasings of English, tail abbreviation, acronyms, abbreviations of compounds, Japanese words combined with English loans, and word play. I have tested Honna's categories by employing gairaigo data from the Asahi Shimbun. My conclusion is that some issues and new findings about gairaigo categories can be found.

Finally, the background of the changes was investigated by newspaper editors and reporters through interviews with them. Their policies regarding the employment of gairaigo had some influence on the appearance of gairaigo in newspapers.

### **The Volume of Gairaigo From 1952 to 1997**

According to the methodology described above, Figures 1 and 2 show the volume of gairaigo in each field and year. Figure 2 shows the trend lines of percentages of gairaigo in economics, culture, society, and sports sections. As is clear from graphs Figure 1 and

2, the volume of gairaigo in sports section has always been the largest from 1952 to 1997. This can be explained because most current sports were introduced from the West and their related words are loans. Gairaigo in the culture section are slowly increasing. After WWII, Japan has been positively adopted western, particularly American culture. The sections of culture and sports are fields where the West has had a large influence and impact, so that the amount of gairaigo tends to be large and increasing.

In the field of economics, the amount of gairaigo remains steady through 1952 to 1997. However, the amount of gairaigo is slightly decreasing in the society section. The society section deals with local Japanese society and has less contact with the international scenes. Therefore, gairaigo used less frequently as in other sections.

If the gairaigo in society section is indicative of words for people to use in their daily communication and the volume is so small, why is it that people feel there is a flood of gairaigo in Japanese society? This is because the gap between the 'gairaigo used in daily life' and 'gairaigo used in particular fields' has become larger. In particular, when only 'gairaigo used in particular fields' increases, in other words, 'not common known gairaigo to ordinary people', people feel that there is flood of gairaigo.

According to this study of gairaigo in Asahi Shimbun, the increase of gairaigo is not as rapid as expected. Then why is there controversy against overuse of gairaigo? Looking at the Figures 1 and 2, there is not a large difference by the year. Therefore, it is not just the number of gairaigo used in newspapers gives such impression. In fact, people do not feel fear if only those gairaigo which people are aware of, are used many times on the newspapers. People feel gairaigo is overused because of two reasons.

One reason is as mentioned, that the larger gap between 'gairaigo used in daily life' and 'gairaigo used in particular fields', which can be seen from the result of Asahi Shimbun study. Another is the gap between 'gairaigo used temporary' and 'gairaigo used in newspapers'.

Asahi Shimbun was studied because it selects and uses gairaigo conservatively. Therefore gairaigo used in advertisement or conversations among youth is not included in this study. However, those gairaigo used temporary in advertisement and conversations among youth are rapidly changing (not necessarily increasing, because new ones are always replacing old ones). The younger generations are much in favor of using gairaigo. This makes the majority and some linguists feel 'there is a flood of gairaigo'. I must add, though, the temporary use of new words by advertisement and youth is not the only situation with gairaigo.

Gairaigo appeared in Asahi Shimbun increased from 2.53% (1952) to 10.11% (1997) in

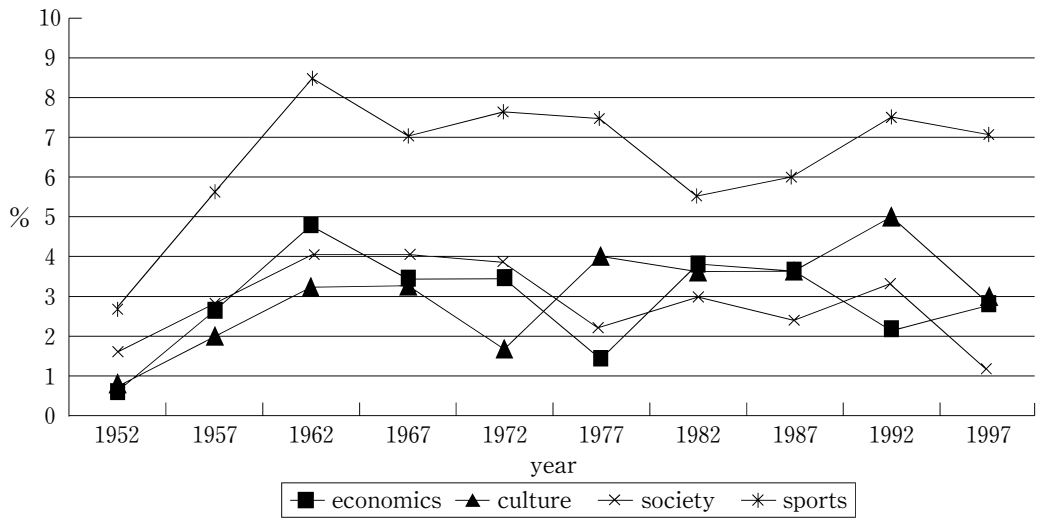


Figure 1 Comparison of percentages of gairaigo in economics, culture, society, and sports

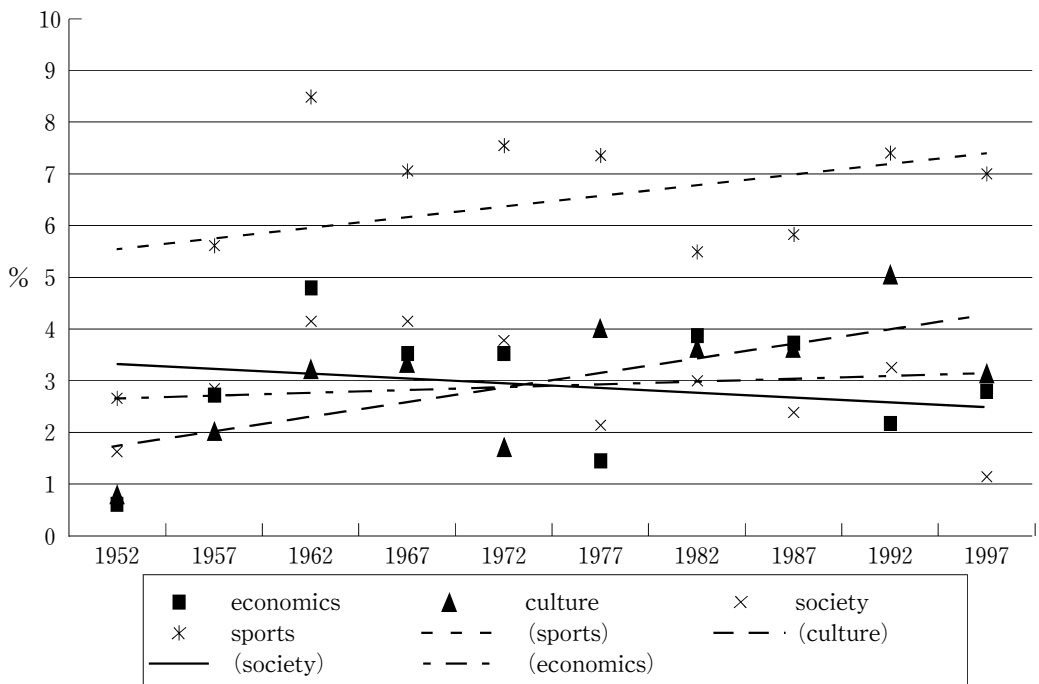


Figure 2 Comparison of linear trend percentages of gairaigo in economics, culture, society, and sports

Japanese during those forty-five years. Considering the historical events and social change of Japan during these years, the increase of gairaigo is not threatening. This study should be continued, and the data of next fifty years will provide another aspect of gairaigo in Japanese language.

#### Gairaigo in the Newspaper: Testing Old Categories

Gairaigo appearing in selected articles in the Asahi Shimbun is listed and studied. In order to examine the sufficiency of Honna's gairaigo patterns, I have tested gairaigo in economics, culture, society, and sports section to categorize in his seven patterns (see page 92). However, several problems arose in the process of categorization by this system. They are homophones, multiple categories, combinations, time lag in definition, and exceptions.

##### 1) Homophones:

There are many homophones in gairaigo and there is no definite difference as long as they are written in *katakana* text form. For example, *kōto* appears in sports section of 1962. However, *kōto* could be coat or court, depends on the concept and how the word is used. In order to investigate the origin of this word, it is necessary to go back to the original newspaper article and find out the concept of the word from context.

Similar cases were found with *rinku* (rink or link), *raitō* (light or right), *korekushon* (collection or correction), *furai* (fry or fly), *hōru* (hole or hall), *besuto* (best or vest), etc. Since both meanings of each gairaigo are used in Japanese, knowledge about the English origins is not necessarily. In fact, without knowledge of English, people do not recognize that the origins of these words are different. In any case, being given a simple gairaigo word alone is not enough to categorize it. These gairaigo cannot be categorized as semantic narrowing and shift, because they rather expand the meaning.

In addition, there are also cases which are the reverse of homophones. An example from the sports section of 1972 is, *fukku* as in hook. In this case, it clearly means a style of punch when a boxer bends his arm and hits the opponent with his elbow. There is another word *hokku*, which has the same origin, hook, but means something to hang things on small metal fasteners for tightens skirts or pants. In this case, *fukku* and *hokku* are examples of semantic narrowing. However, it seems that some meanings of the 'hook' is focused in process of Japanization rather than narrowed.

##### 2) Multiple categories:

In order to categorize gairaigo into the seven patterns proposed by Honna, some words meet the conditions of more than one or two categories. For example, *konbi* which appears in the culture section of 1972 means a pair of friends or partners, and more often a pair of

comedians. This gairaigo, *konbi* is an abbreviation of the English word, combination. Therefore, the word *konbi* can be categorized as a tail abbreviation.

Another similar example of multiple categories is *suto* which is an abbreviation of *sutoraiki* (strike) and it means to refuse to continue working because of conflicts with the employer about working conditions and pay levels. There is another gairaigo of the same origin, *sutoraiku* used in baseball games. However, *sutoraiku* is not used in its abbreviated form. Therefore, the abbreviation form of *sutoraiki*, *suto*, falls into both tail abbreviation and semantic narrowing categories.

A different case is *shō-ene*. The part *shō* means saving, is usually written in *kanji*, the Chinese character followed by *ene* (energy) in *katakana*. A Japanese word *shō* is combined with English loan *enerugi*. And *ene* is a tail abbreviation form of *enerugi* (energy). Therefore this word falls into the two categories of Japanese words combined with English loans and tail abbreviations.

There are few cases where a gairaigo word would fit into three categories. In the sports section of 1997, *purodebyū-suru* appears. One part of this, *puro* is the abbreviated form of professional and *debyū-suru* is a combination of ‘debut’ and the Japanese verb, *suru* (to do). It is a common gairaigo pattern to combine an English word and the Japanese verb *suru* to create a gairaigo verb. It means to debut as a professional sports player instead of an amateur player. This gairaigo *purodebyū-suru* fits into three categories: tail abbreviation, Japanese words combined with English loans, and semantic narrowing and shift.

### 3) Combinations of different foreign words:

There are a number of gairaigo which are combinations of two or even more different foreign words other than English. For example, in the society section of 1972, there are *gomu-bōto* and *rupō-raitā*. They are combinations of other languages and English. The first part of *gomu-bōto* (rubber boat), *gom* comes from Dutch meaning ‘rubber’. The second part is the English word, ‘boat’. This word involves both English and Dutch combined in Japan and becomes a Japanese gairaigo.

The other example of this pattern is *rupō-raitā* (report writer). This is a combination of French *reportage* (report) followed by the English word ‘writer’. This gairaigo also involves the tail abbreviation of *reportage* to *rupō*.

There are number of gairaigo which are combinations of English, other foreign languages, and Japanese. However, these gairaigo cannot be classified in any of Honna’s gairaigo categories.

### 4) Time lags regarding definitions:

In many cases, defining gairaigo is difficult mainly because of a time lag in the process

of semantic narrowing and shifting. For example. The gairaigo *furoa* (floor) appears in the 1967 paper article meaning the flat wooden surface of a room. In 1970, the word *dansu-furoa* (dance floor) was used to label an open public space for activities such as dancing. However, the same word *furoa* expanded in meaning and in the 1997 sample it refers to a level of a building. Furthermore, a similar word *furoaringu* (flooring), meaning the wooden material used to make a floor, also appears in 1997.

If the process of semantic change throughout these years is considered as a process of long term semantic shift, then the meanings of *furoa* was most likely adopted at different times so there is a semantic narrowing process at each time of adoption. This is why people commonly do not realize that the origin of these definitions is the same word, floor.

However, it is not conclusive if the meanings of gairaigo have been narrowed at each time of adoption. Simply because another definition appears later, does not prove that a definition was not used earlier. In order to categorize gairaigo, it is not appropriate to refer to semantic narrowing category. Rather, in my idea, such words have semantically focused at the time of adoption.

#### 5) Exceptions:

There are many gairaigo which cannot be categorized in any of Honna's categorization. Some gairaigo have expanded their meaning instead of narrowing. Some gairaigo are created by Japanese and the structure and meaning are quite different from that of the original English word. Furthermore, combinations of semantic shift and structure shift are much more complex in recent gairaigo trend.

These could have been categorized as 'exceptions' before, however there appear to be enough cases to establish patterns. Further studies should establish a new gairaigo framework which includes all categories of gairaigo patterns (see Oshima, 2002).

From an analysis of gairaigo in Asahi Shimbun from 1952 to 1997, some trends in usage of gairaigo can be identified.

#### 1) More complex combinations in recent years

There were less number of combinations in the early years of adoption. Towards 1980's and 1990's, gairaigo word combined with the Japanese verb *suru* (to do) appear frequently in all sections, economics, culture, sports, and society. Also, more combination gairaigo nouns comprised of English and other foreign languages are observed.

On top of those structural combinations mentioned above, more complex combinations appeared in 1980's and 1990's. In those later years, gairaigo with structural changes and semantic changes became common.

This suggests that Japanese people have become more creative with gairaigo. In other

words, recent Japanese people are able to handle gairaigo as a part of their language and people use gairaigo enough to make changes semantically and structurally.

2) Gairaigo with structural change tend to be found in the culture and society sections

Gairaigo which involves structural changes including abbreviations, combinations of gairaigo, Japanese and other foreign languages, and gairaigo coinage/neologisms, appear more in the culture and society sections than the economics or sports sections.

The main purpose of changing the structure is to meet people's convenience. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, Japanese language favors two to four syllables for a word. Therefore words commonly in use are structurally abbreviated or combined to be shortened and those are the words which appear in the culture and society sections.

Gairaigo is also used more by younger generations and younger people like to abbreviate and combine words. The culture and society sections are usually report topics of recent trends. Therefore these sections include more trend gairaigo with structural changes.

The change of gairaigo usage in Asahi Shimbun over the years, and the difference between each field were observed in articles, however we must also acknowledge the policies and attitudes of newspaper writers involved. In the next section, I have interviewed some writers to investigate their attitudes toward gairaigo, and how they influence the gairaigo usage in newspapers.

#### **Attitudinal Changes Among Editors and Writers**

The use of gairaigo in newspapers depends primarily on the policy of the newspaper and the attitudes of writers and editors. In order to investigate the policy and attitude toward gairaigo usage, I have interviewed a writer and an editor formerly holding positions at Asahi Shimbun.

According to the guidelines of Asahi Shimbun (Asahi Shimbun no Yougo no Tebiki, 1997), writers should, "beware of the abuse of gairaigo and foreign words. In case there is a word that has no appropriate translation such as new concept or professional words, it must have a short explanation in parenthesis under the word, or a note at the end of the article to explain the word" (1997 : 391).

This rulebook determines many detailed rules about gairaigo notations, such as "when the ending of a word is either '-er', '-or', '-ar', or '-y', it should be expressed in stretch sound mark", however there is nothing further on their policy of using gairaigo.

For this study, I interviewed the two people below.

1. Miichi, Hajime

1963-1983 writer in Economics division



1983-1992 associate editor in Economics division

2. Ueda, Bunsei

1965-1974 writer in society division

1974-1985 editor in society division

1985-2001 writer and editor in art, culture, and society division

The questions asked were: Is there any particular policy with Asahi Shimbun in order to use gairaigo? How much gairaigo should be allowed in newspaper? Why do you choose to employ gairaigo? Is there any tendency last 50 years? Are you positive or negative about using gairaigo? Are there different attitudes depending on the different sections (economics, culture, society, sports)? Is there anything special you have noticed about gairaigo usage in the Asahi Shimbun?

First, Miichi described the attitude of Asahi Shimbun as an organization; Asahi Shimbun is known as the standard of Japanese language so that its language should be conservative. The level of language used should be understood by anybody above 15 years old, middle school graduates to senior citizens should be able to read the paper, because the range of readers is wide spread. He says that this attitude applies to gairaigo as well. About gairaigo usage, Miichi says,

“Asahi Shimbun never creates gairaigo, but employs gairaigo that are commonly used. There is a tendency to avoid using gairaigo verbs for three reasons; 1) usually gairaigo verbs cannot be abbreviated, 2) there are usually Japanese verbs which can replace gairaigo verbs, and 3) gairaigo verbs do not have impact so that there is no point using them instead of Japanese. Therefore the Asahi Shimbun does not need to employ gairaigo verbs.”

This writer/editor’s attitude towards gairaigo verb corresponds to the data from Asahi Shimbun. Only a small number of gairaigo verbs appeared in articles throughout the period analyzed.

It seems like making impact in the newspaper is one of the main roles of gairaigo. Miichi also explains that abbreviations of gairaigo is only used for headlines of articles, but never used in the article itself. The reasons for employing abbreviations of gairaigo in the headlines are; 1) there is limited space for the headlines, 2) it has greater impact. In the article itself, the abbreviated gairaigo is mentioned in full with an explanation.

This rule applies overall to the rest of Japanese as well. Using abbreviations — whether the word is sufficiently recognizable by the majority or not — calls attention and heightens the curiosity of the readers.

Gairaigo verbs are an exception, but Miichi says that he would not avoid using gairaigo

nouns, always including the Japanese translation or an explanation. Especially with economics articles, many professional or specialized gairaigo are not commonly known. Miichi explains the situation in this way,

“The writer can create a translation for professional gairaigo, but the readers would not understand such translations anyway. Readers who understand such translations would understand the gairaigo, too. So there is no point translating gairaigo into Japanese. It is not the issue of gairaigo, it is the issue of reader’s interest and profession.”

Miichi mentions gairaigo in the sports section as an extreme example of professional use. He says that there are many gairaigo and even Japanese words he would not understand in the *sumo* or soccer sections, because he is simply not interested in those sports. If the article is about sports that he is interested, he knows all the professional terms.

He also mentioned, that in contrast to economics articles, there is not an explanation for each gairaigo in the sports section. He thinks economic articles must be fair to all readers in this way in order to be understandable to all, but sports articles are written for readers who want to understand.

Miichi says he is not negative about using gairaigo, but the same with other uncommon Japanese terms, he wants to be fair to all readers. He thinks that the newspapers should not create gairaigo or even abbreviate gairaigo to threaten readers, but gairaigo that is frequently used many be used in the newspaper articles.

However, “gairaigo is a good escape from using discriminatory words”, Miichi says. Some particular Japanese words are classified as discriminatory words and cannot appear in the newspaper articles. The writer must explain such terms without using the particular word. If the writer can use gairaigo that is equivalent to the Japanese discriminatory word instead, he/she would rather use such gairaigo. The euphemistic usage of gairaigo seems functioning on the newspapers as well.

Miichi concluded the interview with the following;

“The appropriate amount of gairaigo in newspaper articles is 10 to 20%, but it is probably about 10% right now. The number has been increasing and it will increase more. There is no point criticizing gairaigo, but whenever a writer uses gairaigo, the writer should keep the right attitude — that is to provide understandable information.”

From my interview with Ueda, it was possible to identify slightly different attitudes between two journalists in different fields. Ueda has mainly worked in the society and culture divisions whereas Miichi has been always in economics division.

According to Ueda, as well, there is not particular policy toward use of gairaigo as Asahi Shimbun. Usually the use of gairaigo is dependent on each writer and the rules of gairaigo notations are only the concern of the editor. He uses Japanese translations as much as he can and tries to avoid using gairaigo in his articles.

Ueda gave the example of *konsento* as one of the gairaigo he would use. *Konsento* is derived from ‘concentric plug’, meaning outlet or socket. It is a common word in Japanese daily life and he judges this word is understandable to all readers without explanation. It bothers him, and probably the readers, if he has to look up notes to understand gairaigo and therefore an article. He is basically negative towards using gairaigo in newspaper articles.

He commented that the statements given by Japanese bureaucrats to newspaper include many gairaigo, possibly to avoid directness or to leave the statement ambiguous. Therefore, economics articles tend to have more gairaigo than social articles. In his observation, about 10% of recent Asahi Shimbun articles are gairaigo.

Though he realizes the necessity of gairaigo, at the same time, Ueda explains that Japanese language has been increasing in vocabulary by adding loanwords, so it is the destiny of Japanese to keep on increasing gairaigo. The difference is, loanwords used to be from China (*kango*), and now most are from the West (*katakana* gairaigo). However, Ueda does not believe the influence of gairaigo will destroy the Japanese language. This gairaigo phenomenon is at an acceptable level.

As was seen in Figure 2 (the linear trend of gairaigo in economics, culture, society, and sports), the linear line for economics is increasing slightly and for society is decreasing slightly. The attitudes of the two journalists from there two different divisions seem to correspond to the gairaigo trend for the Asahi Shimbun.

Overall, the amount of gairaigo has been increasing since 1952 along with the social change. Sometimes gairaigo usage is criticized as “the flood of gairaigo is threatening the beauty of Japanese”. However gairaigo is part of sociolinguistic phenomenon and naturally as a result, language changes. The important attitude is to recognize gairaigo as part of Japanese, and just as other Japanese new professional terms, people will learn new professional gairaigo. The study of gairaigo will make contribution to neologism in Japanese. Therefore the further study of changing patterns and attitude toward gairaigo should be continued.

**(Note)**

(1) The average circulation of each newspapers in 2000 was: Yomiuri (10,230,000), Asahi (8,280,000), Mainichi (3,950,000), and Sankei (2,919,000).

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