# "Shūmatsu not yet": Analyzing the use of English in Japanese popular music

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## Abstract

Evaluative attitudes towards languages and their varieties are often capitalized on in popular media, including music. This practice can provide valuable insights into underlying language ideologies. Attitudes towards the English language seem to be particularly conflicted in Japan. However, previous research on how English is used in Japanese music has failed to provide a reliable empirical overview, and has disregarded crucial factors like type of English and whether a song is associated with Japanese animation.

This paper quantitatively examines the use of English in Japanese popular music (J-pop) across seven years. The results show that, while most hit songs do include English, they usually just include a few words each, and significantly fewer words when they are associated with animation. Words are less likely to be nativized. In addition, men use significantly more English than women, and the use of English has been increasing over the years. I discuss some potential explanations for the findings from phonological theory, literary stylistics, and research on language ideology and cultural identity.

## 1. Introduction

Language choice in popular media has been sparking interest in numerous academic disciplines. Because linguistic markers can index a whole range of socio-cultural attributes and connotations, speakers hold evaluative attitudes towards different languages and their varieties (see, e.g., Bayard et al. 2001; Cargile et al. 1994; Stewart et al. 1985; Giles & Powesland 1975; Shuy & Williams 1973). These attitudes are capitalized on in the media—in theatre, film, videogames, television, and music, as studies on English demonstrate (e.g., Lippi-Green 2012; Coupland 2011; Ensslin 2010; Beal 2009; Morrissey 2008; Dobrow & Gidney 1998; Trudgill 1983). How (the English) language is instrumentalized in popular culture can thus provide valuable insights into the construction and negotiation of cultural identities and the underlying language ideologies.

One country where attitudes towards English seem to be particularly conflicted is Japan (Seargeant 2011: 10). On the one hand, researchers continue to observe the extensive borrowing from English in Japanese vocabulary, the influence of American popular culture, and the country's attempts to appeal to "Western" audiences with pop music, manga, anime, and other cultural products. On the other hand, it has been noticed that there is still a strong sense of linguistic distinctiveness, an "attitude of uniqueness" (Moody 2006: 210; Stanlaw 2004: 257) among Japanese speakers.

Researchers have observed this ambivalence in Japanese popular music (J-pop) in particular. [1] Many songs are characterized by a distinct mixture of Japanese and English, as illustrated in (1), an excerpt from the 2010 song "Go! Go! Maniac" by Ho-kago Tea Time.

(1)

| | |
|---|---|
| やばい止まれない 止まらない | *Yabai tomarenai tomaranai* 'Oh no, I can't stop, I won't stop' |
| 昼に夜に朝に singing so loud | *Hiru ni yoru ni asa ni* singing so loud 'During day, during night, during morning, I'm singing so loud' |
| 好きなことしてる だけだよ girls go maniac | *Suki na koto shiteru dake da yo* girls go maniac 'I'm just doing the things I love, girls go maniac' |
| あんなメロディ こんなリリック 探していきたいんだ もっともっと | *Anna merodi konna ririkku sagashite ikitain da motto motto* 'I want to go search for a melody like that, lyrics like these, more and more' |

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[1] J-pop is an umbrella term for different popular music genres produced in Japan or by Japanese artists, formerly also called 歌謡曲 *kayōkyoku* 'popular song'. See Benson (2013), Asai (2008), and Hosokawa (1999) for definitions.

| | |
|---|---|
| みんな一緒にね chance chance 願いを jump jump 掲げて fun fun 想いを shout shout 伝えよう | *Minna issho ni ne* chance chance *negai o* jump jump *kakagete* fun fun *omoi o* shout shout *tsutaeyou* <br> 'Together with everyone, chance chance, let's show, jump jump, our wishes, fun fun, and say, shout shout, how we feel' |
| […] | […] |
| 授業中も無意識に研究する musician-ship | *Jugyōchū mo muishiki ni kenkyūsuru* musicianship <br> 'Even during class, I unconsciously research musicianship' |
| <u>エア</u>で ok 雰囲気大事不意に刻む<u>リズム</u> | <u>*Ea*</u> *de* ok *funiki daiji fui ni kizamu* <u>*rizumu*</u> <br> 'Doing it in air is okay, the atmosphere is what's important, we suddenly shred out a rhythm' |
| 通じ合っちゃう<u>ビートマインド</u>自由に<u>エンジョイ</u> | *Tsūjiacchau* <u>*bīto*</u> <u>*maindo*</u> *jiyū ni* <u>*enjoi*</u> <br> 'Our beats and minds communicate to each other, and we freely enjoy it' |
| 楽しんだもんが勝ち | *Tanoshinda mon ga kachi* <br> 'We win if we had fun' |

Next to straightforward code-switching to English words, phrases, and sentences (usually written in Roman script and referred to as *Standard English* in this study), we can also observe a different type of English which is phonologically non-standard (underlined expressions, usually written in *katakana* and referred to as *Katakana English* in this study). Words of this second type have been transformed to fit aspects of the Japanese phonological system (e.g., メロディ *merodi*

'melody,' リリック *ririkku* 'lyrics,' エア *ea* 'air,' リズム *rizumu* 'rhythm,' and エンジョイ *enjoi* 'enjoy'). This process of nativization in loanwords is interesting especially in the context of popular music. Morrissey (2008: 209–210) puts forward the hypothesis that more sonorous sounds (e.g., vowels) are more singable and "carry the tune" better than less sonorous sounds. If this is true, nativized words (*Katakana English*) would be better suited for singing than non-nativized words (*Standard English*). This is because the Japanese language features a predominantly open syllable, CV structure, requiring additional vowels to be inserted into closed-syllable English loanwords, as seen in the examples above (e.g., *rhythm* /rɪðm/ → *rizumu* /ɾizɯmɯ/). Japanese artists, then, could favor nativization because it provides more potential for sonority.

But how common is the use of these types of English across the music industry? And which language attitudes may underlie the choice to use English in the first place? Quantitative research on the use of English in J-pop has remained, to this date, rather fragmentary (see, e.g., Takahashi & Calica 2015 and the studies described in Moody 2006). These studies found that most J-pop hit songs in the investigated years (2013 and 2000, respectively), do contain English. However, Moody did not count the amount of actual English words, and neither study categorized different Englishes according to their degree of nativization (Standard vs. Katakana English). Moreover, no attempt has been made to distinguish between different subcategories of J-pop: Frequently, J-pop songs are associated with *anime* (animated TV series or movies). There is reason to believe that the use of English in the context of this important subgenre might differ from regular J-pop (see hypotheses below). Finally, we need to

take into account gender, a variable that has been repeatedly shown to mediate language attitudes and consequently language use (Takahashi & Calica 2015; Coupland & Bishop 2007).

This paper examines the use of English in J-pop. Conducting a quantitative analysis of 120 songs, I investigate how much and what kind of English is used in J-pop—and why. Following previous research, one can formulate the following hypotheses:

$H_1$ *The majority of J-pop songs will include Standard English*. I should be able to replicate this finding by Moody (2006) and Takahashi & Calica (2015).

$H_2$ *J-pop songs will include more Katakana English words than Standard English words.* This is because Japanese speakers rarely use Standard English phrases or clauses in everyday conversations (Moody 2006: 211), whereas nativized loanwords are omnipresent (Yano 2011: 137; Stanlaw 2004: 13; Honna 1995). Additionally, as explained above, insights from phonological theory suggest that more sonorous sounds like vowels, which in Katakana English must be inserted into English loanwords due to the Japanese CV structure, are better suited for singing (Morrissey 2008: 209–210).

$H_3$ *While most songs will include English, they will contain fewer English words than Japanese words.* Some qualitative observations indicate that in J-pop, English is used "decoratively" (Moody & Matsumoto 2011: 166; also see Takahashi & Calica 2015).

$H_4$ *Anime songs will include more English than regular J-pop.* Anime and manga are highly popular global cultural exports and "hybridized fusions of Japanese and Western models and

practices" (McLeod 2013: 310). This cultural hybridity and popularity, as well as economic targeting to "Western" audiences, might encourage more language mixing.

$H_5$ *The amount of English will increase throughout the years.* As the influence of English on Japanese increases, particularly considering borrowings (see above), so should the amount of English in popular music.

$H_6$ *Women should use more English than men.* Previous research has noticed male performers (Takahashi & Calica 2015) but also female performers (Benson 2013; Stanlaw 2004) to use more English. However, the increasing use of English loanwords in Japanese can be seen as language innovation of the "change from below" type, in which women are predicted to be in the lead (Labov 2001, also see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003 for an overview of gendered language use).

## 2. Method

I compiled two corpora of J-pop songs, one corpus consisting of regular J-pop songs not associated with film and animation (henceforth "J-pop corpus" or "JPC"), and one corpus including J-pop songs composed or used for anime series or movies (the "anime corpus" or "AC"). I list the individual songs included in both corpora in the materials at osf.io/4chua.

*Sample and procedure.* I gathered the weekly top one hits of the last decade for each corpus. The JPC charts were based on data from January 2010 to May 2017 collected by Oricon. For the anime corpus, I used the weekly top one hits from

December 2010 to May 2017 as calculated by Billboard Japan.[2] Excluding the double entries yielded a list of 379 and 245 songs for regular J-pop and anime, respectively. Out of these, I chose a random sample of 60 songs for each corpus, amounting to a corpus size of 14,599 (JPC) and 14,652 tokens (AC). In the rare case of foreign artists and international music making it into the Japanese charts, I excluded these songs from the sample and replaced them with different randomly chosen tracks.[3]

  *Coding and variables*. Songs were coded for the predictors SUBGENRE (regular J-pop vs. anime songs), GENDER—coding whether the song is performed[4] by a male or female solo artist, a group of female or male singers, or a mixed group—and YEAR OF PUBLICATION. For the response variable USE OF ENGLISH, I

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[2] This is because Oricon does not provide weekly data in the animation subgenre for this period. For an overview of data collection methods, readers may refer to the websites at oricon.co.jp and billboard-japan.com/common/about. Oricon focuses on physical sales, while Billboard also factors in digital distribution. Since physical records with 73 % still held the largest share on the Japanese market during this time period (RIAJ Yearbook 2017), this should not substantially affect comparability.

[3] This only applied to those songs that clearly had not been originally produced in Japan and thus could not be classified as J-pop. Example cases in the JPC include occasional K-pop songs by Korean artists. In the AC, there were very few songs associated with non-Japanese animation, like, for example, レット・イット・ゴー *retto itto gō*, being a translation of the English song "Let it go" from the Disney movie *Frozen*.

[4] Note that in cases where they are not identical, I coded for the performing artist, not the songwriter. It might be argued that songs rather reflect linguistic gender patterns of the person who wrote them, but in each case, it is impossible to determine whether they use certain features because of their own gender, or because they have in mind the gender of the artists for whom they are writing.

coded whether the song contains Standard English or Katakana English, as well as the absolute and proportional amount of Standard and Katakana English words.

The initial inspection of the songs was based on lyrics found at various websites such as jpopasia.com and metrolyrics.com. However, since some of the transcriptions on these websites were not official ones, but were provided by fans, manual inspection and (where required) correction was necessary. Since one cannot rely exclusively on the lyrics, one can neither take Roman script as a reliable indicator for Standard English nor *katakana* characters as an indicator for English transformed to fit the Japanese phonology. Thus, in a few exceptions, what I call Katakana English was not actually written in *katakana*. One of the methodological intricacies in determining the degree of nativization acoustically is that the boundary between Standard and Katakana English is not always clear-cut. Among the criteria for deciding that an expression is Katakana English rather than Standard English were (1) the insertion of additional vowels, (2) clearly audible pauses or longer closure in geminate consonants (the *mōra onso*, or 'mora phoneme'), and (3) the substitution of sounds or sound combinations not covered by the Japanese syllabaries, such as [s] and [z] instead of [θ] and [ð], or [ɕiː] instead of [siː].

For the total word count, I used the lyric's *rōmaji* transcription (romanization). This is because counting English words on the one hand, but Japanese characters on the other would have distorted the proportions, especially regarding *kanji* compounds and *okurigana* characters (characters usually used to complete the Chinese characters with Japanese inflectional morphemes). Particles were counted as separate words, agglutinative elements and their bases as one word.

*Analysis*. Visualizations, tests of significance, and statistical models were processed using R (R Core Team 2022). I provide the script at osf.io/4chua.

## 3. Results

Figure 1 shows the proportion of songs including different types of English compared to those not including any English at all. Overall, we can find English in an overwhelming majority of the songs: in both corpora, around 80 % of the songs feature English lyrics, whereas just 20 % of the songs are exclusively Japanese. In the JPC, there are slightly more songs containing English (83.3 %) than in the AC (80.0 %); however, this difference is negligible ($\chi^2$ = .055659, df = 1, p = .8135).
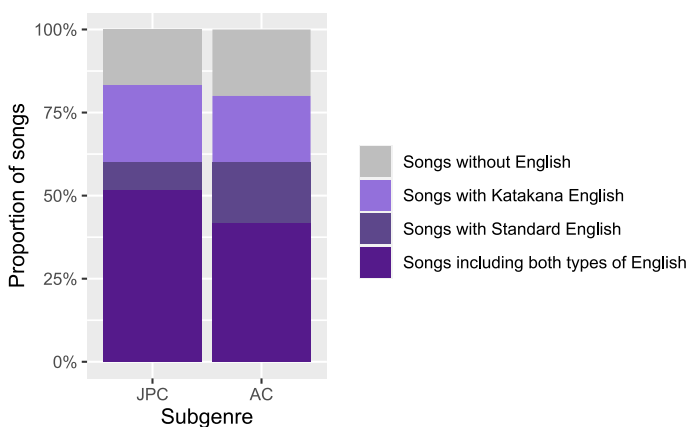


Figure 1: Proportion of songs including different types of English in the J-pop corpus (JPC) and the anime corpus (AC).

Looking at the two types of English reveals that, in general, if a song features English lyrics, it tends to use both Standard and

Katakana English, but there are also a few songs that just feature one of the varieties. In both the JPC and the AC, there are more songs that only include Katakana English than songs that only include Standard English, which was to be expected given the high preponderance of English loanwords in Japanese also outside of the pop music domain.
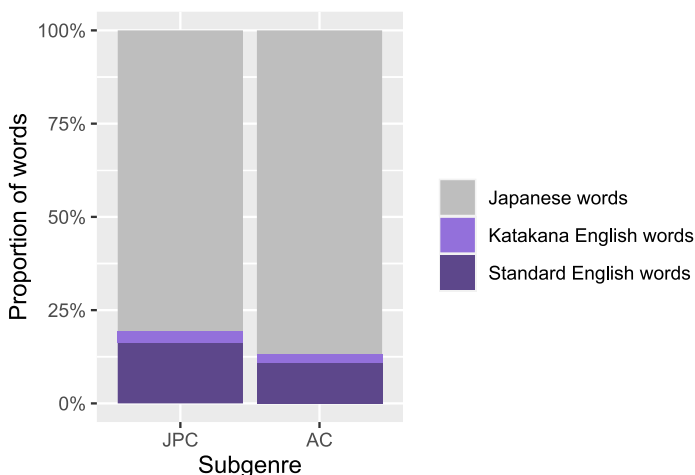


Figure 2: Percentage of English words in the J-pop corpus (JPC) and the anime corpus (AC).

However, the picture is a completely different one if we do not focus on whether the songs contain English or not, but on how many English words there are, adjusted for the total number of tokens in the corpus. Here, it is striking that most of the words are actually Japanese (Figure 2): the JPC features 80.8 % Japanese with only 3.0 % Katakana English and 16.2 % Standard English tokens, and the AC looks similar with 86.9 % Japanese words, 2.2 % nativized words and 10.9 % Standard English words. This means that while most songs do include

English, there are always just a few English words or phrases per song, sporadically inserted into the main body of Japanese lyrics. Also, the difference in the distribution of English words (of any type) versus Japanese words between the JPC and the AC is statistically highly significant ($\chi^2 = 199.49$, df = 1, p < 2.2e-16): there are fewer English words in anime songs than in general J-pop songs.
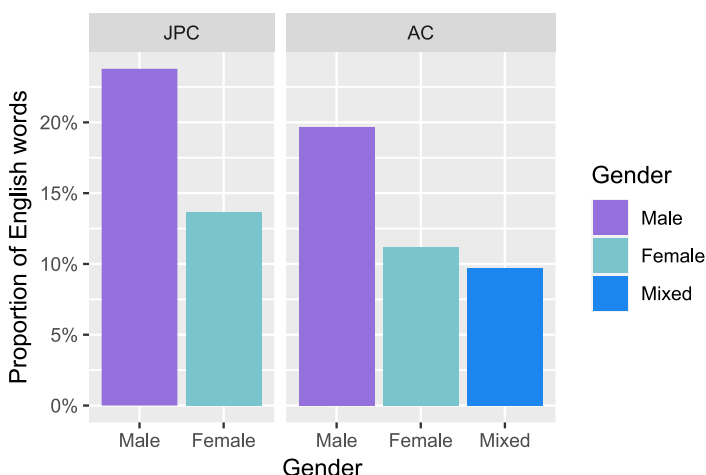
Figure 3: Proportion of English words by gender of performer in the J-pop corpus (JPC) and the anime corpus (AC).

For GENDER, Figure 3 shows that in both corpora, male solo artists and exclusively male bands use more English words than female solo artists and female-only bands. On average, 20.07 % of the words used by male artists in the JPC are English, but only 12.43 % of the words used by female artists. In the AC, the average percentage of English words used by men amounts to 16.48 %, while women reach 9.93 %. The anime corpus additionally featured some mixed-gender groups, which used

even fewer English words on average than the single-gender groups, respectively (8.40 %). The gender difference turned out to be extremely significant for both subgenres (JPC: $\chi^2$ = 237.03, df = 1, p < 2.2e-16; AC: $\chi^2$ = 177.66, df = 2, p < 2.2e-16): male artists used significantly more English than female artists.

To model the proportion of English across years, I fitted a binomial generalized linear model (GLM) with YEAR as the predictor of interest, also including GENDER and SUBGENRE.[5] Table 1 and Figure 4 (top panel) show that the use of English words increases across years as expected. Meanwhile, the effects of GENDER and SUBGENRE (Table 1 and Figure 4, bottom panels) again confirm that male artists use more English than female artists, and that general J-pop features more English than anime J-pop.

[5] I opted for a binomial GLM instead of standard multiple linear regression because the latter cannot deal well with proportional data. This is because, while proportional data are bounded, a standard linear regression model is not. One other option would be to use beta regression, but this type of model can only deal with values between 0 and 1, not values identical to either 0 or 1 (the data contain several songs with 0 % or 100 % English words). In the binomial GLM proposed here, each proportional amount of English in one song is one datapoint, but the model is weighted for absolute word tokens. This means that the model treats each word as a trial with a binary outcome, where the word being English is counted as a "success" and the word being Japanese is counted as a "failure" (the response variable encoding the proportion of successes in a given song). Refer to the scripts at osf.io/4chua for the implementational details.

Table 1: Results of a binomial GLM fitted to the proportion to English words in J-pop songs, weighted by word tokens.

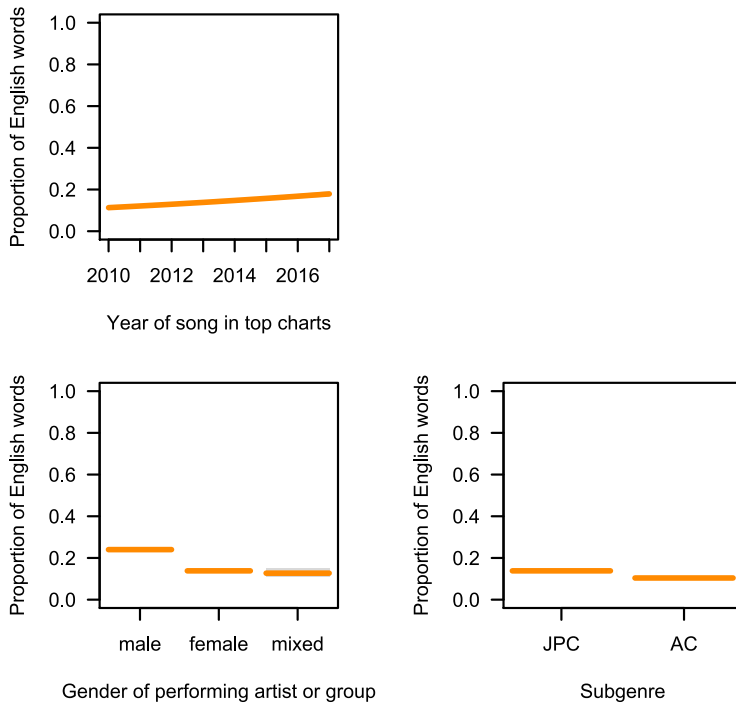|  | Estimate | SE | z value | Pr(>\|z\|) |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Intercept | -1.552e+02 | 1.643e+01 | -9.445 | < 2e-16 | *** |
| YEAR | 7.652e-02 | 8.163e-03 | 9.375 | < 2e-16 | *** |
| GENRE AC | -3.244e-01 | 3.595e-02 | -9.023 | < 2e-16 | *** |
| GENDER female | -6.778e-01 | 3.418e-02 | -19.828 | < 2e-16 | *** |
| GENDER mixed | -7.751e-01 | 9.531e-02 | -8.132 | 4.21e-16 | *** |



Figure 4: Predicted proportion of English words in a binomial GLM weighted by word tokens according to YEAR, GENDER, and SUBGENRE (JPC = general J-pop corpus, AC = anime corpus).

**4. Discussion**

Coming back to the hypotheses (Section 1), the results can be broken down as follows:

- H₁ *Supported.* Most J-pop songs include Standard English. Few songs are exclusively Japanese, and few songs exclusively English, but most of them feature both languages.
- H₂ *Rejected.* In terms of the overall word count, Katakana English is less prominent than Standard English.
- H₃ *Supported.* Japanese words dominate the lyrics, English is just used decoratively.
- H₄ *Rejected.* To the contrary, anime songs include significantly fewer English words than general J-pop songs.
- H₅ *Supported.* The amount of English words increases during the investigated time period.
- H₆ *Rejected.* To the contrary, men use significantly more English than women.

To explain some of these findings, the following sections will discuss language- and text-internal issues first, before turning to broader sociological and cultural issues.

**4.1. Phonological perspectives: Singability and rhyming**

Considering that Japanese speakers rarely code-switch to English in conversations (Moody 2006: 211), the result that most J-pop songs contain Standard English is a striking finding. However, this result is in line with the studies in both Moody (2006) and Takahashi & Calica (2015). More puzzling seems to be the lack of Katakana English.

As mentioned in Section 1, certain speech sounds are more ideal in pop music than others: More sonorous sounds and those that do not restrict the airstream on its way through the vocal tract are more singable than less sonorous or obstructing sounds. Consequently, vowels are best suited for singing, particularly in word-final position (Morrissey 2008: 209–210). Since Japanese has a strict open syllable structure, except for the moraic nasal /n/, but English has not, nativization of English borrowings should dominate the J-pop lyrics. Despite this, the results show that there are more Standard English words than Katakana English words. If sonority was one of the artists' main concerns, there should be much more nativized English. Morrissey's hypothesis thus does not seem to fit as a primary motivation.

This does not necessarily rule out phonological explanations: One hypothesis, for instance, is that English phrases are used to create innovative rhyme schemes (cf. Takahashi & Calica 2015: 869; Kawahara 2007; Stanlaw 2004: 104). An example song, both included in Takahashi & Calica's corpus and in the present JPC, is "Sansei Kawaii!" by SKE48, where we can find a line-initial, language-crossing rhyme in the lines "Sansei kawaī! Sunshine furisosogu" 'I agree, you're cute! Sunshine pours down' (Takahashi & Calica 2015: 869). Usually, rhyme is uncommon in Japanese verse since "[t]raditional Japanese poetry has no notion of rhyme" (Tsujimura & Davis 2008: 180). Only recently has rhyming been borrowed from English hip hop, creating a previously nonexistent Japanese rap rhyme schema—from which, interestingly enough, these lines also deviate, because this rhyme schema would require the line-final vowels to be identical instead of the line-initial sounds (Kawahara 2007: 115). Using English to enable innovative rhyming schemata, thus,

does not only open up new phonological dimensions but at the same time could also be a way of ambiguating cultural and linguistic identity and playing with traditions.

Overall, though, rhyming English lines seem to be the exception in the present data. We therefore must look beyond the phonological horizon on the search for explanations.

## 4.2. Literary functions: Markedness and style

Takahashi & Calica (2015: 870) assume that English might attract non-Japanese listeners due to the widespread use of English across Asia. If this is the case, the finding that songs usually include only a few English words each raises the question why artists do not use English more consistently and across-the-board. Very often, the English used in J-pop songs merely amounts to parts of the song title (and keywords from the title repeated in the text) but not to substantial parts of the lyrics themselves. Notable examples from the present corpora include "Toilet no Kamisama" 'God in the toilet' by Kana Uemura, "Sexy Cat no Enzetsu" 'the speech of the sexy cat' by Morning Musume '16, and "Shūmatsu not yet" 'weekend not yet' by Not Yet.

These observations indicate that singers more likely use English for stylistic emphasis rather than for merely conveying general information. Stanlaw (2004: 104) specifically mentions that artists use English to "express aspects of modern Japanese consumer culture" and "images of domestic life in Japan." Within the framework of stylistics, although some researchers claim that English is an unmarked language in J-pop (Moody 2009: 189), it is possible to argue that through deviation from the Japanese norm, Standard English expressions are stylistically foregrounded (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010: 34). In

Cognitive Grammar terminology, English is profiled against the Japanese base (Harrison et al. 2014). This increased prominence may explain why Stanlaw (2004: 104, 117) attributes various functions to the use of the English language in J-pop, such as a symbolic function (hinting at, e.g., a "Western-style" romance in a song instead of a Japanese one), a poetic function (strengthening expressive meaning compared to Japanese), an exotic function (creating 'dreamlike' or 'fairy-tale' realities), or a "means of 'relexifying' and 're-exoticizing' the Japanese language," which means either replacing a Japanese term or, by providing an English equivalent, relocating it "from the realm of the mundane to the exotic, so that it is thus 're-exoticized'". Reading the results from a literary studies perspective, then, can reveal functions of English that might explain its selective use to achieve specific stylistic effects.

## 4.3. "Cool Japan"? Language ideologies and cultural identity

Looking at language-external factors for the use of English, two arguments are commonly brought forward. First, because the USA and the UK form the heart of pop music as we know it today, foreign artists may simply adopt norms of language use based on the anglophone genre conventions. However, this argument is likely biased by a core stereotype about the Japanese: "they are expert imitators, but poor innovators" (Hosokawa 1999: 511). This "copycat myth" (Stanlaw 2004: 270) is not exclusive to "Western" views but also extends to Japanese self-perception, so that according to Iwabuchi (2002: 58), "many people in Japan now hold the view that the capacity for absorption and indigenization of foreign cultures is uniquely Japanese."

Second, artists may seek to become more popular by using English, driven by the economic imperative of selling the music overseas. However, Benson (2013: 23, 26) remarks that even songs recorded entirely in English often remain more successful in East Asian markets, and that "cross-border and cross-language initiatives […] are not always entirely motivated by commercial considerations." The relevant question to ask, then, is not just if the use of English is motivated by the desire for international success. We must also ask why it is motivated by the desire for national success. In other words, we face a language-ideological question: What images and prestige values are transported, and which attributes are indexed by the English language for Japanese artists and fans?

As hinted at in Section 1, Japanese attitudes towards the English language are ambivalent. On the one hand, foreign languages, but especially English, are perceived as decidedly negative. Stanlaw (2004) identifies three general stages in the development of Japanese-English language attitudes, as shown in Table 2 below.

Of particular interest for the present study are the Japanese attitudes towards English in Stage III. This "linguistic nationalism" is likely fueled by the myth of Japanese linguistic uniqueness and the belief that Japanese is inherently more difficult to speak than other languages (Moody 2006: 210; Stanlaw 2004: 257). These discourses have intermingled with *nihonjinron*[6] discourses about a racial and ethnic uniqueness of

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[6] *Nihonjinron*, roughly translating to 'discussions about the Japanese people,' is a term that "refers to the literature that Japanese elites have produced to define Japanese culture by its distinctiveness, especially from the West" (Maynard 1997: 221). Also see Said (1978) on orientalism.

the Japanese. Even the alleged lack of proficiency of Japanese speakers of English (despite a six-year English education of Japanese students with about 720–1200 estimated contact hours) results, so the theory goes, from the perceived threat this language poses to ethnolinguistic identity (Yano 2011: 133; Moody 2009: 185, 2006: 210).

Table 2: Stages in the development of Japanese-English language attitudes (Stanlaw 2004: 266).

| American attitudes towards the Japanese language | |
| --- | --- |
| Stage I | The 'Preble's Law' stage (1860s) |
| Stage II | The 'English as a world language' stage (1950s to 1980s) |
| Stage III | The 'We need to speak Japanese, too' stage (1990s) |
| | |
| Japanese attitudes towards English | |
| Stage I | The 'We need English' stage (1960s) |
| Stage II | The 'Japanese is OK, too' stage (1980s) |
| Stage III | The 'Japan that can say no/linguistic nationalism' stage (1990s) |

On the other hand, English can convey a range of positive connotations for Japanese speakers. Takahashi & Calica (2015: 870) mention that "[i]n J-pop songs, English is used to create a certain image, such as a 'modern,' 'cool,' or 'sophisticated' image, to the song by using it symbolically or indexically in association with American and British cultures." Moreover, Asian-accented English has been found to be among the least prestigious and least socially attractive varieties at the same time (Coupland & Bishop 2007). Provided that Japanese speakers are aware of these perceptions by foreigners, this might explain why nativization to Katakana English was less

common than expected compared to Standard English. The suggestion that the lack of Katakana English may be connected to negative attitudes towards Asian-accented English is also supported by the idea of the so-called native speaker syndrome, the supposed perception of many Japanese that only native-speaker English is genuine and worth learning (Yano 2011: 134, 131).

English in Japan is thus between the poles of being seen as an unwelcome intrusion into the "Japanese" cultural and ethnic landscape and as a fashionable, prestigious language. Between what emerges out of Yamagami & Tollefson's (2011) critical discourse analysis as the two Japanese discourse patterns "globalization-as-opportunity" vs. "globalization-as-threat," the use of English is in a precarious glocalized (see Robertson 1995) balance as an object of desire and an object of fear, responsible for "the feeling among many Japanese youth for the loss of Japan's 'genuine' cultural identity" (Hosokawa 1999: 509). No example could better illustrate what Trudgill, as far back as 1983, meant when he titled his soon-to-be influential paper "Acts of conflicting identity".

This ambivalence may also explain the fact that anime songs include significantly fewer English words than other J-pop songs. While anime is a hybrid of many cultural influences (McLeod 2013: 310), it is seen and marketed as an integral part of a "Japanese" cultural landscape. Japan has taken great pains in recent years to promote its popular culture abroad and to exploit and generate the kind of cultural capital that McGray, in his influential and often-cited 2002 article, so fittingly called "gross national cool" (also see Yano 2009 and Burgess 2015 on クールジャパン *Kūru Japan* 'Cool Japan'). Through initiatives such as the by now infamous commissioning of the *kawaii taishi* 'cute ambassadors,' charged with the task "to conduct PR and

other activities" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2009), anime, J-pop, and other kinds of perceived "Japaneseness" are exported and promoted across the world. If anime is to be advertised as an intrinsically Japanese product, the excessive use of English would counteract this goal and undermine the authenticity of such a campaign.

In addition, anime has a much harder time than J-pop signaling its "Japaneseness." Iwabuchi (2002: 33) notices that many narratives and characters in Japanese animation remain culturally "odourless" or are characterized by 無国籍 *mukokuseki* 'statelessness'. What he means by this is that anime often does not evoke associations of the country from which it originates because ethnic and racial attributes of animated characters are frequently erased in favor of Caucasian character models. This, of course, would pose no problem to general J-pop artists, since they are not masked behind a culture-veiling wall of raceless animation. Iwabuchi rhetorically asks:

> If it is indeed the case that the Japaneseness of Japanese animation derives, consciously or unconsciously, from its erasure of physical signs of Japaneseness, is not the Japan the Western audiences are at long last coming to appreciate, and even yearn for, an animated, race-less and culture-less, virtual version of "Japan"? (Iwabuchi 2002: 33)

No wonder, then, that in light of these artistic conventions, producers must revert to linguistic strategies in order to preserve at least a remainder of the "Japaneseness" that is to be transported by this kind of cultural product.

Finally, why do male artists use significantly more English than female artists? As mentioned above, the present findings contrast with Stanlaw (2004: 127) and Benson (2013: 31), who claim women to use more English than men. Their

data, however, is more dated than Takahashi & Calica's (2015), whose findings are consistent with mine. One possible, although not wholly convincing reason for men using more English than women is hinted at by Yano (2009: 686), who writes that "[i]f nothing else, Japanese cute is linked to a feminized position that is born in passivity […]." The idea of Japanese cute, which is ubiquitous in J-pop, might be at odds with a cool and self-assertive image that English is supposed to convey. Moreover, Zaborowski's (2012: 397) analysis of gender roles in J-pop indicates that women are portrayed as passive, and men as active—although most of his informants seem to have the impression that this has changed in current music. Sociolinguistically, the idea that male performers use more English makes sense if the use of English in Japan is indeed linked to assertiveness, a claim which to investigate is beyond the scope of this paper.

One way or another, Benson is right when he writes that "language choices in East Asian popular music appear to be systemically tied up with issues of ethnic and gender identity" (2013: 31). Gender categories seem to be linguistically reflected, or at least distinctly marked, in J-pop. This is despite the fact that various subcultures in Japanese popular (music) culture exhibit considerable subversive potential, like, for example, *visual kei* (see McLeod 2013). The possibility of hybridity and ambiguity in J-pop that the discussion of the present findings has brought forward offers the potential to counter, as McLeod argues in Bhabhanian terms, notions of racial, linguistic, and gendered "purity" by opening up the binary-transcending "third space" (Bhabha 1990: 211). This potential is exciting from linguistic, social, cultural, and literary perspectives alike.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that while most J-pop songs include English, artists only use it decoratively, likely to convey coolness and fashionability. In addition, songs associated with Japanese animation have been found to contain significantly less English than general J-pop, which might be rooted in a conscious or subconscious attempt of keeping anime a "Japanese" cultural product and counteracting the trend of *mukokuseki* in animation. Finally, the results have shown that in both corpora, men use significantly more English than women, which might be related to the fact that English seems to be associated with assertiveness and coolness, characteristics standing in contrast to an often "cute" feminine picture transported by imagery surrounding Japanese popular culture.

On a more general level, I have demonstrated that from data of language use in popular culture, like music, researchers can acquire interesting insights into language attitudes and ideologies. In the future, quantitative studies like the present one must be complemented by qualitative studies. These can look more closely at the content for which the English language is used in J-pop, at its lexis and grammar, and at the ways in which English is creatively used for stylistic and narrative purposes.

Either way, there is a much work to be done. *Shūmatsu* is not yet in sight, if you will—which is fortunate for analyzing Japanese popular music will enrich us with new and exciting insights into the dynamics of language choice for years to come.

## Data availability statement

The data, scripts, and materials used in this study can be found at osf.io/4chua.

## Acknowledgements

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