Katakana and Japanese National Identity. The Use of Katakana for Japanese Names and Expressions

DOI: 10.12775/sijp.2020.56-59.7

ABSTRACT
This paper examines Japanese names and expressions written using katakana in the contemporary Japanese media and their relation to Japanese national identity. In modern Japanese, katakana is normally used for Western loanwords as well as certain mimetics and phonetic annotations. However, it is observed that today some Japanese words are also written in katakana. They include place names associated with past tragedies such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or Fukushima, as well as names and expressions associated with internationally renowned Japanese culture such as Kurosawa, Kitano, Murakami, samurai, etc. The use of katakana for these words reflects the awareness of the Japanese that they are known to the world outside Japan. Such words are treated as if they were ‘re-imported’ to Japan following their acceptance as loanwords abroad. It also involves a change in perception of certain historical events or cultural products from something seen and discussed within Japan to something that is exposed to external eyes. In other words, when the script type is shifted to katakana, the gaze looking at Japan from within is replaced by a gaze looking at Japan from without. This shift is important in understanding the current dynamics of Japanese identity negotiation. Drawing on media accounts, the paper will analyse recurrent wordings in the news media to reveal: 1) the types and characteristics of Japanese words and expressions written in katakana, 2) how those specific words are associated with Japanese national consciousness and 3) images of Japanese identity suggested by the use of katakana. It will be argued that Japanese words in katakana represent images that the Japanese themselves project onto the eyes of the external world. Through the examination of the primary data extracted from media sources, the ultimate goal of the paper is to contribute to the understanding of Japanese national identity and its representation in contemporary media.

KEYWORDS: discourse, media, identity, katakana, loanwords, translation

1. Introduction
The katakana script, the angular syllabary of Japanese, was developed during the Heian Period (794-1185) as a derivative of Chinese logographic writing (kanji), together with hiragana, the cursive syllabary. The two syllabaries were originally used to write grammatical elements of the
Japanese rendition of Chinese texts, *kanbun-kundoku*, which became the basis of the writing system of modern Japanese (Frelvesvig 2010: 157-158). In the contemporary orthographic system of Japanese, *katakana* has been mainly used for Western loanwords (*gairaigo*), mimetics, phonetic annotations for *kanji* and other situations in which the phonetic element of the speech is emphasised. As a result, the use of *katakana* is often associated with a sense of exoticism or foreignness (Stanlaw 2005) with further manifestation of particular characteristics such as quality, reliability, and practicality (Haarman 1989), modern, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan character (Takashi 1990), ambivalence and hybridity (Guarné 2015), as well as social identity of the users such as age, gender, profession and educational level (Ishiwata 1985, Loveday 1996, Jinnouchi 2007) and global and international identity of Japan (Jinnouchi 2007).

It should however be pointed out that the use of *katakana* is not limited to the ‘standard’ purposes but extended to many other creative ones as a means of visual differentiation for various reasons. In particular, it is interesting to note that certain Japanese names and expressions have a tendency to be written in *katakana* in the contemporary Japanese media. They are often names of Japanese people or places as well as words that are known internationally, such as *Kurosawa*, *Murakami*, *Hiroshima*, *Nagasaki*, *samurai* and so on. This tendency has become evident in the past few decades. One of the possible roots of the trend, although the practice had existed previously, was the death of Akira Kurosawa in September 1998, followed by the decision to bestow a People’s Honour Award (*Kokumin Eiyōshō*) in October of the same year, on which occasion many media sources quoted his name as *sekai no Kurosawa* ‘world-class Kurosawa’, using *katakana* for his name and praising his international achievements. This paper will examine the motivation and effect of the use of *katakana* for such words, placing a particular focus on its relation to Japanese national identity. The hypothesis of the paper is that the use of *katakana* for Japanese words reflects the awareness of the Japanese that they are known to the world outside Japan and therefore the names and expressions written in *katakana* represent images that the Japanese project themselves onto the eyes of the external world as a sender of messages to the world.

2. **Katakana as a Mode of Visual Representation of Meanings**

The discussion in the paper will be based on the premise that linguistic communication is a negotiation of meaning between ‘encoder’ (meaning producer) and ‘decoder’ (meaning interpreter) (Hall 1980) and that shared
common sense is built through the mediation of language (Fairclough 1989, 1995, Fowler 1991, Conboy 2007). Thus, by analysing a particular use of language in the mass media, it is possible to gain an understanding of certain facts or events in a given society. In this context, language includes a number of constituents, from the choice of vocabulary or expressions to the tones of voice or intonation in the case of spoken language and images or other visual signifying elements in the case of written language (Talbot 2007: 10). From this point of view, the paper will consider the choice of scripts from among kanji, hiragana, and katakana as a mode of visual representation of certain meanings.

Regarding the use of katakana, Guarné (2015: 179) states:

“There is a common denominator between the special conditions in which the katakana is applied to Japanese and Sino-Japanese words and its use for writing a loanword, that is the graphic representation of a difference, whether related to the particular features, intentionality, or the origin of the written word”

In other words, through the use of katakana, a certain particularity related to the word is emphasised. The analysis in the paper will therefore discuss what particular images are evoked and what messages are encoded in relation to Japanese national identity when katakana is chosen for Japanese names and expressions that are normally written with kanji and/or hiragana.

3. Types, Categories, and Recurrent References
The analysis was carried out employing written texts in news media extracts from both online and printed sources in contemporary Japan (2010-2017) in order to reveal the following elements:

I. Types and characteristics of Japanese words and expressions written in katakana;
II. How those specific words are associated with Japanese national consciousness;
III. Images of Japanese identity suggested by the use of katakana.

With regards to I., the following three groups of Japanese words were commonly identified in the choice of katakana as a script:

- Names of Japanese persons in cultural fields;
Naoko Hosokawa

- Names of places in Japan related to negative legacies of the past;
- Words or expressions related to Japanese cultural symbols and slogans.

With regard to II., the following three recurrent references and features were recognised:

- Japanese names tend to be in katakana when they follow the expression sekai no [world-class, global-level];
- Japanese words or names tend to be in katakana when they are in a quote from an overseas media or celebrity;
- Japanese words or names tend to be in katakana when there is an explicit or implicit overseas recipient of the information.

Based on the above features, it can be said that whenever katakana is used for Japanese words or names, it implies the recognition of an ‘Other’ outside of Japan and therefore shifts the point of view from the domestic to the foreign. In other words, the use of katakana can be seen as a sign of the consciousness of the Japanese that a particular term or name is recognised abroad.

4. Analysis
The following are some examples of the use of katakana for each of the three categories introduced above. In each extract, the part written in katakana and its associated reference are underlined.

Names of Japanese Persons in Cultural Fields
In this category, the expression sekai no [world-class, global-level] is often observed, the most eminent example of which is sekai no kurosawa to refer to the internationally renowned film director Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998) (Extract 1-3). Following the example of Kurosawa, katakana is used for the expression sekai no, followed by the names of other film directors, music composers, novelists, and artists, such as Takeshi Kitano (1947-), Hayao Miyazaki (1941-), Seiji Ozawa (1935-), Ryūichi Sakamoto (1952-), Haruki Murakami (1949-), and Ryū Murakami (1952-) (Extract 4-9). The format [sekai no + name in katakana] is often emphasized with quotation marks. The implicit message seems to be that the person in the reference has created cultural works of such high quality that Japan can proudly uphold them to the world.
Names of Japanese athletes who perform abroad are also often written in *katakana*. In some of such cases, there is a referent to the word *sekai* [the world] (Extract 10), while in other cases their names are introduced as part of a quote from a foreign source such as a local expert of the sport or an authority figure such as (then) President Barack Obama (Extracts 11-13). It should also be mentioned that when their full names are quoted, the order of the names is also often reversed in the Western style whereby the given name comes first rather than the Japanese style in which the family name comes first, such as “Shinji Okazaki” in Extract 11 and “Hideki Matsui” in Extract 13. In particular, in Extract 13, the name of the other athlete, Yoshitomo Tsutsugō, is written in *kanji* and in the Japanese order with his family name first (Tsutsugo Yoshitomo), implying that he has not yet reached an international level of recognition, although he is expected to in the future.

1. ここで「世界のクロサワ」組の俳優とスタッフがロケ撮影を敢行した。
   Koko de “sekai no Kurosawa” gumi no haiyū to sutaffu ga roke satsuei o kankō shita.
   ‘Here, the actors and staff members of the “sekai no Kurosawa” team carried out shooting.’ (Mainichi Shimbun, 13 May 2016)

2. 世界のクロサワと言われる映画監督、黒澤明氏の代表作を一つ挙げろと言われたら、やはり「七人の侍」だろう。
   Sekai no Kurosawa to iwareru eiga kantoku, Kurosawa Akira-shi no daihyōsaku o hitotsu agero to iwaretara, yahari “Shichinin no samurai” darō.
   ‘When it comes to Akira Kurosawa, also known as sekai no Kurosawa, the first film we think of would be Seven Samurai.’ (Yomiuri Shimbun, 14 October 2016)

3. 江戸期の浮世絵が世界のクロサワを生んだ。
   Edoki no ukiyoe ga sekai no Kurosawa o unda.
   ‘Ukiyoe during the Edo Period gave inspiration to sekai no Kurosawa.’ (Diamond Online, 17 December 2016)

4. 世界のキタノ、仏勲章叙勲式
   Sekaino Kitano, futsu kunshō jokunshiki
   ‘Sekai no Kitano attends the award ceremony in France to receive the Legion of Honor.’ (Mainichi Shimbun, 26 October 2016)
5. 雪国の看守を演じるのに、日焼けをしてはまずいと気づいたあたりはさすが名監督「世界のキタノ」
Yukiguni no kanshu o enjiru no ni, hiyake o shite wa mazui to kizuita atari wa sasuga meikantoku sekai no Kitano.
‘It is the great movie director “sekai no Kitano” who noticed that it would be no good to have a sun tan when acting as a prison guard in a snowy region.’ (Sankei Shimbun, 6 April 2017)

6. 「体調？こればっかりは天のみぞ知る。自分にできることはしていますか」とだけ明かした“世界のサカモト”
“Taichō? Kore bakkari wa ten nomi zo shiru. Jibun ni dekiru koto wa shite imasu ga” to dake akashita sekai no Sakamoto.
‘My health condition? Only God knows. I am doing what I can do though”, said “sekai no Sakamoto”.’ (Hōchi Sports, 21 December 2016)

7. 「世界のオザワ」のエピソードは、あまりにも有名である。
“Sekai no Ozawa” no episōdo wa, amari ni mo yūmei de aru.
‘This anecdote of “sekai no Ozawa” is too well known.’ (Sankei Shimbun, 27 October 2016)

8. 「世界のムラカミ」はここで生まれた。
“Sekai no Murakami” wa koko de umareta.
‘Sekai no Murakami [Haruki Murakami]” was born here.’ (Huffington Post, 13 October 2016)

9. “世界のムラカミ”の圧倒的な芸術世界をご堪能ください。
“Sekai no Murakami” no attōteki na geijutsu sekai o gotannō kudasai.
‘Please enjoy the breath-taking artistic world of “sekai no Murakami [Ryū Murakami]”’. (Asahi Shimbun, 8 October 2015)

10. 4年前のワールドカップ・南アフリカ大会では（…）世界に「ナガトモ」の名前を響かせた。
Yonenmae no wārudo kappu Minami Afurika taikai de wa [...] sekai ni "Nagamoto" no namae o hibikaseta.
‘He made the name “Nagatomo” famous in the world at the FIFA World Cup in South Africa four years ago.’ (Huffington Post, 13 June 2014)
11. 我々はクレバーにスマートに戦い、シンジ・オカザキが2つのチャンスをものにしてくれた。
Wareware wa kurebā ni sumāto ni tatakai, Shinji Okazaki ga futatsu no chansu o mono ni shite kureta.
‘We played in a clever and smart manner and Shinji Okazaki successfully seized the two opportunities.’ [a quote from a British football club coach] (Sankei Sports, 21 September 2016)

12. イチローのような野球選手がマイアミの球場を輝かせる。
Ichirō no yō na yakyū senshu ga Maiami no kyūjō o kagayakaseru.
‘Baseball players like Ichirō give lights to the ball park in Miami. [quote of President Obama] (Asahi Shimbun, 28 December 2016)

13. 「ヒデキ・マツイの後継者になるのでは……」とメジャー関係者が多い視線を送るのが(...筒香嘉智だ。
“Hideki Matsui no kōkeisha ni naru no de wa” to Mejā kankeisha ga nesshisen o okuru no ga [...] Tsutsugo Yoshitomo da.
‘It is Yoshitomo Tsutsugo that the Major League Baseball experts expect to be the successor of Hideki Matsui.’ (Mainichi Shimbun, 27 March 2017)

Names of Places in Japan Related to Negative Legacies of the Past
It is also common to write Japanese place names such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima in particular, in katakana. These places are internationally well-known due to their tragic history – destruction by atomic bombs in 1945, and devastation by a large tsunami followed by a nuclear plant accident in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. In such cases as well, the reference to the world or to the international community is frequently observed (Extracts 14, 16, and 17), while an implicit or explicit reference to international audiences is also common (Extract 15). It is important to note here that these place names also appear often in their kanji variation in the media. When written in katakana, the place names Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima are not merely references to geographic location but symbolise a historical experience that should be remembered not only by Japan but all over the world. This image is reinforced by the terms sekai [the world] and kokusai shakai [the international community]. In the same context, the word hibakusha is also written in katakana, particularly in relation to the draft Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in which the Japanese word hibakusha was used to refer to the victims of atomic bombs (Extract 18). In this category, therefore, katakana is used for negative memories
that the world should learn a lesson from, while in the first category – positively to refer to the talented Japanese that Japan should be proud of. In both cases, *katakana* is employed to highlight international relevance, indicating an international audience.

14. 世界の原子力関係者が「フクシマの教訓」を総括したうえで、原発の安全性強化に動き始めた。
*Sekai no genshiryoku kankeisha ga “Fukushima no kyōkun” o sōkatsu shita ue de genpatsu no anzensei kyōka ni hatarahi jūjimeta.* ‘Those who are involved in nuclear power generation in the world have started working to enhance the safety level of nuclear power plants based on the “Fukushima lessons”.’ (Nikkei Shimbun, 6 March 2012)

15. 『フクシマ』を題材にしたドキュメンタリー映画(…)特別上映される。
*“Fukushima” o daizai ni shita dokyumentarii eiga [...] tokubetsu jōei sareru.* There will be a special *projection* of a documentary film about "Fukushima". (Mainichi Shimbun, 30 September 2016)

16. 第二のヒロシマ、ナガサキをつくらないために世界へ呼びかけ続けている被爆者の方たち
*Daini no Hiroshima, Nagasaki o tsukurenai tame ni sekai e yobikakesuzukete iru hibakusha no katatachi* ‘Those who were affected by the atomic bombs continue calling out to the world not to make the second Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ (Kōchi Shimbun, 15 June 2017)

17. ここ数年は、国際社会が「ヒロシマ・ナガサキ」を再発見する過程でもあった。
*Koko sūnen ha, kokusai shakai ga “Hiroshima/Nagasaki” o sai hakken suru katei de mo atta.* ‘There was a process in which “Hiroshima and Nagasaki” were rediscovered by the international community in the past several years.’ (Asahi Shimbun, 20 June 2017)

18. 核兵器禁止条約草案の前文に「ヒバクシャ」
*Kakuheihi kinshi jōyaku sōan no zenbun ni “hibakusha”*
“Hibakusha” used for the preamble of the draft Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Mainichi Shimbun, 23 May 2017)

Words or Expressions Related to Japanese Cultural Symbols and Slogans

Finally, there are other Japanese words and expressions sometimes written in katakana. Common examples include samurai (Extracts 19 and 20), emoji [pictograph] (Extracts 21 and 22), omotenashi [Japanese hospitality] (Extracts 23 and 24), as well as mottainai [wasteful] (Extract 25) and karōshi [death caused by overwork] (Extract 26). There are certain common features in these words and expressions.

In Extract 19, the term samurai is written in katakana to refer to the football players in the Japanese national team in the FIFA World Cup. This is based on the fact that the nickname for the Japanese team is ‘Samurai Japan’ and as such, the term samurai is sometimes used to refer to a Japanese man, while the original meaning of the word is a warrior in the feudal period, in which case the word is written in kanji or hiragana. By writing the term in katakana, therefore, the meaning shifts from a warrior in feudal Japan to a Japanese man in general. Furthermore, the term in the second meaning is often used in an international context, such as the FIFA World Cup. In Extract 20, the meaning of the term samurai shifts even further. The samurai bond is a term officially used in finance to refer to foreign bonds denominated in Japanese yen. The term was created in line with other foreign bonds such as Yankee bonds for U.S. dollar-denominated bonds, bulldog bonds for British pound denominated bonds. It is interesting to note that katakana is always used for this term, presumably because it is considered to be an international term created for the global financial market.

The word emoji was registered in the Oxford Dictionaries in 2013 as “a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion”, along with other new terms such as bitcoin, selfie, and phablet. Furthermore, the term was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2015. According to its website, the word was selected as the use of the word emoji “more than tripled in 2015 over the previous year according to data from the Oxford Dictionaries Corpus”. This was reported also in Japan, and at around the same time, the term started to be written in katakana as well, especially when there is a reference to ‘the world’ as well as to foreign sources such as Oxford Dictionaries (Extract 21) and President Obama (Extract 22). In Extract 22, other well-assimilated Japanese loanwords used

---

1 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2015
Naoko Hosokawa

in English, such as *karate*, *karaoke*, *manga*, and *anime*, are also written in *katakana*.

Another Japanese expression that has recently been written in *katakana* is *omotenashi*. This is a term used for Japanese hospitality. The word gained attention in 2013 when a Japanese newscaster Christel Takigawa made a speech at the 2020 Olympic bid, using the word as one of the reasons to promote Tokyo as the host city. After this speech, Tokyo won the bid and with the gesture of joining both hands and bowing used by Takigawa pronouncing this word, *omotenashi* became a buzz word of the time, often written in *katakana*. It is of a particular interest that the gesture used by Takigawa is not a common one to greet people in Japan, although it is used for prayers in Shinto shrines and in other special situations. The gesture is more commonly used for greeting in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia, although it is sometimes mistakenly believed to be Japanese by foreigners. The use of the gesture by Takigawa can be considered to be a sort of self-Orientalisation and treated as something exotic. The gesture is now copied by many Japanese when referring to the term *omotenashi*. It can therefore be suggested that along with this gesture, the term *omotenashi* was also re-translated and self-Orientalised by the use of *katakana*. This phenomenon of re-translation and self-Orientalisation applies not only to the case of *omotenashi* but also to that of other Japanese words and expressions written in *katakana* when there are explicit or implicit foreign audiences, such as ‘visitors to Japan’ (Extract 23) and foreigners receiving Japanese hospitality, with fortune-telling paper strips written in foreign languages and bilingual shrine maidens (Extract 24).

The expression *mottainai* first attracted international attention when a Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai introduced this term as a slogan for environmental protection in 2005. Since then, various Japanese politicians including former Prime Minister Jun’ichirō Koizumi, as well as the current Tokyo Mayor and former Minister of Environment Yuriko Koike, have used this expression in their speeches. As a result, overseas media and journalists started quoting this expression, using *katakana* script. In Extract 25, the expression is written in *katakana* as part of a quote from the President of the International Olympic Committee Thomas Bach. Similarly, the expression *karōshi* is sometimes written in *katakana* and it is considered to be related to the fact that the term *karōshi* is included in Oxford Dictionaries Online, as “(in Japan) death caused by overwork or job-related exhaustion”. As the Japanese have become aware that the problem of overwork is attracting international attention, this term is written in *katakana* in certain situations, even though *kanji* is the most
common script choice. In Extract 26, a lamp designed by a British designer is introduced, which shifts the focus of the phrase to an outside vantage point, which is considered to be the reason for the choice of katakana. It is also worth noting that there is a contrast between ‘Anglepoise’ as the overseas product name and ‘the Japanese’ in the extract, which also implies the use of katakana for karōshi as symbolic of ‘the characteristics of the Japanese seen from the outside’.

19. サッカー・ワールドカップ南アフリカ大会で(...)サムライたちはどこまで勝ち進むのか。Sakkā wārudo kappu Minami Afurika taikai de [...] samurai tachi wa doko made kachisusumu no ka. ‘How far can samurai go at the FIFA World Cup in South Africa?’ (Yomiuri Shimbun, 25 June 2010)

20. 海外勢による円建て外債（サムライ債）も発行された。Kaigaizei ni yoru endate gaisai (samuraisai) mo hakkō sareta. ‘Bonds of foreign companies denominated in Japanese yen (samurai bonds) were also issued by overseas issuers.’ (Nikkei Shimbun, 31 May 2017)

21. 「エモジ」は世界共通語？ オックスフォード辞典に登録。“Emoji” wa sekai kyōtsūgo? Okkusufōdo jiten ni tōroku. ‘Is “emoji” a world common word? Registered in the Oxford English Dictionary.’ (NewSphere, 30 August 2013)

22. 「カラテ、カラオケ、マンガ、アニメ、エモジ（絵文字）」。今年4月の安倍晋三首相の訪米時、オバマ米大統領が披露した日本語だ。“Karate, karaoke, manga, anime, emoji”. Kotoshi shigatsu no Abe Shinzō shushō no hōbei, Obama beidaitōryō ga hirō shita nihongo da. “Karate, karaoke, manga, anime, and emoji” these are the Japanese words that the U.S. President Obama used when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the U.S. in April this year.’ (Mainichi Shimbun, 31 July 2015)

23. シニア、ガイドで生き生き 訪日客を「オモテナシ」。Shinia, gaido de ikiiki hō nichikyaku o “omotenashi”. ‘Elderly people are enjoying their active life as tour guides, offering “omotenashi” to visitors to Japan.’ (Nikkei Shimbun, 30 May 2016)
24. 神社もオモテナシ 外国語おみくじ・バイリンガル巫女…
Jinja mo omotenashi gaikokugo omikuji/bairingaru miko…
‘Shrines also offer omotenashi with omikuji (fortune telling paper strips) in foreign languages and bilingual shrine maidens…’ (Asahi Shimbun, 7 September 2016)

25. バッハ会長は「『モッタイナイ』を避けなければならないという精神で協力する」と経費削減方針に理解を示した。
Bahha kaichō wa “‘mottainai’ o sakenakereba naranai to iu seishin de kyōryoku suru” to keihi sakugen hōshin ni rikai o shimeshita.
‘President (of the IOC) Bach expressed his understanding of the cost cut plan by stating “we will cooperate with the spirit of avoiding ‘mottainai’”.’ (Nikkei Shimbun, 20 October 2016)

26. アングルボーイズの売り上げは恐らく、「カロウシ(過労死)」現象に日本人が感じているつらさの度合いを明らかにするだろう。
Angurupōizu no uriage wa osoraku, “karōshi” genshō ni nihonjin ga kanjite iru tsurasa no doai o akiraka ni suru darō.
‘The sales of Anglepoise (lamps designed by a British designer) will probably demonstrate the degree of tiredness felt by the Japanese with the “karōshi” phenomenon. (Nikkei Shimbun, 19 October 2016)

5. Impact on Japanese Identity
Based on the extracts examined in 4. certain characteristics are found to be common to the cases in which katakana is used for Japanese names, words, and expressions, which can be summarized in the following way:

1) The term in katakana is often emphasised with quotation marks or parentheses;
2) The term has a strong association with the image of Japan as seen from abroad, whether in a positive or negative light;
3) The meaning of the term can shift, with the new meaning related to the original one by metonymy: when written in katakana, a word such as

---

2 Geeraerts (1997:96) defines metonymy as “a semantic link between two readings of a lexical item that is based on a relationship of contiguity between the referents of expression in each of those readings”. He shows an example of the expression ‘one drinks a whole bottle’, by explaining that “it is not the bottle but merely its contents that are consumed: bottle can be used to refer to a certain type of receptacle and to the (spatially contiguous) contents of that receptacle”. Further, he explains, “the concept of contiguity mentioned in the definition of metonymy should not be
samurai is interpreted to refer to a Japanese man accomplishing a remarkable achievement in the international arena, rather than to a warrior, and Fukushima is interpreted as the overall experience related to the Great East Japan Earthquake with the subsequent nuclear plant accident rather than as a place name. Such a semantic shift can also be found in foreign loanwords coming into Japanese as gairaigo.

This paper suggests that from the above characteristics, it is possible to infer important implications related to the recent shift and development in Japanese identity in three intertwined steps. First of all, it is important to note that the choice of katakana for Japanese goes against the general convention of employing kanji or hiragana. It is therefore clear that the script choice is deliberate and intentional, as signaled by the frequent emphasis with quotation marks and parentheses. It is thereby underlined that the Japanese term in katakana has international relevance and that the Japanese are aware of it. Finally, it is important to draw a comparison between Japanese terms written in katakana and foreign loanwords that are also, but more conventionally, written in katakana.

Despite the diversity in the creative use of katakana observed in the fields of literature or mass media, the script is today so strongly associated with foreign (English) loanwords that the term katakanago (words in katakana) is used synonymously to the term gairaigo (words that come from the outside, loanwords). At the same time, however, the increasing use of such katakanago has been highly controversial with many claiming that it is a sign of the impoverishment of the Japanese vocabulary. Such critical views on katakanago are considered to stem from the fear of losing Japaneseness (Hosokawa 2015), as the increase in loanwords is seen as the representation of increased foreign influence threatening the Japanese national identity.

This has resulted in the psychological demarcation between kanji (along with hiragana) as Japanese and katakana as foreign (Loveday 1996: 48), despite the fact that all the three script types combine to create the Japanese orthographic system. It recently attracted the attention and criticism of the mass media that under the current Japanese family registration (koseki) system, the names of non-Japanese nationals, even if they were born in

---

understood in a narrow sense as referring to spatial proximity only, but broadly as a general term for various association in the spatial, temporal, or causal domain”.

3 Examples include rideyūsu [reduce], from the general verb that means to make the quantity smaller, to the environmental term that means to reduce waste, or reshipiento [recipient], from a person to receive something, to a patient to receive organ transplantation (NINJAL 2006:187, 194).
Naoko Hosokawa

Japan, are supposed to be registered in katakana (or kanji)\(^4\), which can be considered discrimination based on nationality. Apart from its nationalistic characteristics, this example shows strong mental associations between nationality and script type.

Furthermore, katakana is also associated with foreigners’ speech and katakana is often used to transcribe into Japanese the speech of a foreigner\(^5\), or, in fictional settings, of a creature from outer space. This fact is often criticised by foreigners living in Japan or by students of Japanese, as it gives an impression that their Japanese sounds like a foreign language, very different from the Japanese spoken by the Japanese. On the other hand, when the Japanese speak non-fluent broken English or English with a strong Japanese accent, it is derided as katakana eigo (katakana English). Thus, in this case, broken English is associated with katakana, whereas fluent English is associated with the Roman alphabet. In both cases, the use of katakana can be linked with the inferiority complex of the Japanese, who on one hand feel the increasing dominance of English influence on their language, while on the other are not confident about their English, which at least partially explains the negative images associated with katakana, whether with katakanago (loanwords) or katakana eigo (bad English spoken by Japanese).

In such a context, the use of katakana for Japanese names and expressions can be seen as an antithesis of the conventional view on katakana, suggesting that Japanese words can be exported abroad, just like numerous English loanwords that we are witnessing in Japanese, and that katakana can thus be not only a sign of threat to the national identity but also a way by which to manifest Japanese identity. With rapid internationalisation, globalisation, the digitalisation of information, and shifts in the power structure of the world, many societies are experiencing identity crises and searching for new forms of expressing their identity. As part of such a global trend, the use of katakana for Japanese terms can be seen as a statement that Japanese society can be a source of global concepts and international influence.

Japanese linguistic identity has long been associated with kanji and hiragana, as well as each of the corresponding vocabulary types, kango (Sino-Japanese) and yamatokotoba (Japanese native words). In the same way, Japanese cultural identity is rooted in Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism. While these values remain important elements in the Japanese language and culture today, it is merely a partial representation of

\(^4\) http://www.moj.go.jp/content/000011715.pdf
\(^5\) For example, see: https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASK4W66G8K4WUCVL01T.html.
contemporary Japan and the country faces a two-fold challenge to its identity. On one hand, Japan’s modern profile is, for the most part, not easily distinguished from that of Western societies, from which loanwords are flowing to Japan, while on the other hand, the rise of Japan’s East Asian neighbours, such as China and Korea, which share common Buddhist and Confucian heritage, may undermine the distinctiveness of traditional Japanese values. From this point of view, writing Japanese terms in *katakana* can be seen as a response to the challenges to the future linguistic identity of Japan.

The shift of script type for Japanese words from *kanji* and *hiragana* to *katakana* can thus be interpreted as a shift of Japanese identity from that of a recipient and learner of concepts imported from abroad via loanwords to a producer and sender of new international concepts through its own words exported abroad. It can be understood as an antithetical response to the inferiority complex surrounding loanwords and *katakana* expressive of an identity crisis in contemporary Japan. From this point of view, *katakana* is not merely an indicator of the etymology of a word but also the graphical representation of its symbolic meaning and therefore its use should be regarded and examined as a manifestation of diverse messages and creativity.

### 6. Conclusion

This paper has examined cases in which Japanese names, words and expressions are intentionally written in *katakana* against the general orthographic rule and its aim has been to see its implications for the linguistic and national identity of contemporary Japan. The analysis of extracts from news media, both printed and online, has revealed the fact that particular Japanese names and words tend to be written in *katakana* following common patterns. Whether it is the names of famous Japanese figures achieving success abroad, place names associated with a tragic history, or Japanese slogans made famous internationally, *katakana* is chosen to highlight the consciousness of eyes outside Japan looking in. One of the most obvious arguments to support this hypothesis is the frequent reference to the word *sekai no* [world-class] that accompanies names in *katakana*. Given the fact that *katakana* is mainly used for Western loanwords today and that the increase in the number of such loanwords has been a contentious issue, perceived as a threat to linguistic identity of Japan, the use of *katakana* for Japanese terms has important implications for Japanese identity. The long-held inferiority complex represented by words in *katakana* is now being transformed into
confidence, in line with the idea that loanwords can be Japanese. In other words, the Japanese word in *katakana* is a word re-translated into Japanese from an international context, and therefore a representation of ‘re-translated Japan’ that is a sender of international messages. This phenomenon is also important to study, as it shows the process in which Japanese terms are ‘de-semanticised’ and ‘re-semantised’. First of all, they partially lose their original meaning, as *katakana* tends to highlight the phonetic element of speech. Secondly, they are re-defined as internationally relevant words through the association of *katakana* with the idea of ‘something foreign’. While the debates on the increase of *katakanago* as Western loanwords capture substantial attention both in the public and academic arena, this paper has thus shed light on a less discussed but increasingly important use of *katakana* to contribute to the understanding of the depth and complexity of script choice in Japanese.

**References**
Conboy, Martin. 2007. *The Language of the News*. London: Routledge.
Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
Fowler, Roger. 1991. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge.
Frellesvig, Bjarke. 2010. *A History of the Japanese Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Geeraerts, Dirk. 1997. *Diachronic Prototype Semantics: Contribution to Historical Lexicology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Guarné, Blai. 2015. “Cultural Intersections: Ambivalence and Hybridity in Japanese Katakana.” [In:] John Ertl, John Mnock, John McCreery and Gregory Poole [eds.] *Reframing Diversity in the Anthropology of Japan*. Kanazawa: Kanazawa University Center for Cultural Resource Studies Graduate Program for Cultural Resource Management, 165-181.
Haarmann, Harald. 1989. *Symbolic Values of Foreign Language Use: From the Japanese Case to a General Sociological Perspective*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyer.
Hall, Stuart. 1980. “Encoding/Decoding.” [In:] Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Howe and Paul Wills [eds.] *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Routledge, 128-138.
Hosokawa, Naoko. 2015. “Nationalism and Linguistic Purism in Contemporary Japan: National Sentiment Expressed through Public Attitudes towards Foreignisms”. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15/1, 48-65. New York: John Wiley&Sons.

Ishiwata, Toshio. 1985. *Nihongo no naka no gaikokugo*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Jinnouchi, Masataka. 2007. *Gairaigo no shakaigengogaku: Nihongo no gurōkaruna kangaekata*. Tokyo: Sekaishisōsha.

Loveday, Leo. 1996. *Language Contact in Japan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Stanlaw, James. 2005. *Japanese English: Language and Culture Contact*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univresity Press.

Takashi, Kyoko. 1990. A sociolinguistic analysis of English borrowings in Japanese advertising texts. *World Englishes* 9/3, 327-341.

Talbot, Mary. 2007. *Media Discourse: Representation and Interaction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
AUTHOR’S PROFILE

Naoko Hosokawa
Naoko Hosokawa is a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute. She obtained a PhD in Oriental Studies from the University of Oxford. She also holds an M.Sc. in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science, an M.A. in Political Science from Columbia University, and a B.A. in Policy Management from Keio University. Her main fields of research are sociolinguistics and media discourse analysis related to the question of national and regional identity.