

On Some Peculiarities of Abbreviations in Russian in comparison with Japanese

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary of a language and its building processes have always been of a great interest for researchers in various fields of science, not only linguistics.

Language is a constantly changing system; its speakers are at the same time its creators (Shanskiy, 2005, 252). Language, and especially its vocabulary, is highly sensitive to life of its speakers: what is happening around is almost immediately reflected in new vocabulary increase.

In this paper we would like to discuss and compare one very specific example of word-formation process in its relation to socio-cultural changes – process of creating new words by means of abbreviation in two highly different and unsimilar languages, Russian and Japanese.

Here we use the term “abbreviation” to denote all types of shortened words. In some linguistic works the term “abbreviation” (or Russian «аббревиация» with the same meaning) is used in a very narrow sense to denote initialisms (acronyms). On the other hand, we find the term *ryakugo* in Japanese, literally meaning “an abbreviated (shortened) word”. This term is used in broad sense for all types of shortenings, including back-clippings, fore-clippings, acronyms etc., each of them also having their own term: *karyaku*, *zenryaku*, *kashira moji*. Here our goal is to discuss similarities and differences between the two languages, and not to give the detailed description of each model in particular. We only provide some actual examples of abbreviations where needed. In this case the generalized term “abbreviation”, like *ryakugo* in Japanese, seems to be more suitable for our discussion.

2. Abbreviations in Russian

2.1. Beginning of the 20th century up to Soviet Times

Changes in the Russian society of the 20th century are reflected in the development of the Russian language. Namely, a great number of clippings has emerged thus making it one of productive word-formation models. Abbreviation is itself not new: shortened words can already be found in Russian by the end of the 19th century, but later rapid development forced the popularization of clippings. According to Shanskiy, some types of abbreviations (acronyms and syllable-based abbreviations) are first found in Russian political texts and official documents from the end of the 19th century. Examples are “ЦК” (“Central Committee”), “командарм”

(“Army commander”) etc. But such abbreviation model has become productive only after the October Revolution. Also it is notable, that pure abbreviation model was still less productive than the model of coining compounds from 2 stems, 1 of which was an abbreviated stem. Infix “a/e” was not used in such compounds, which is the influence of foreign loanwords (Shanskiy, 2005: 278 – 279).

Names of new organizations were coined, and great social events were reflected in personal names created by clipping (*Дзэдрэперма, Далус*). A great number of abbreviations were also created in the postwar Soviet Russia (Shanskiy, 2005). While serving a rapid rhythm of life of the new society, this phenomenon is also an attempt to oppose the “aristocratic” linguistic norms before the Revolution.

2.2. Present-day Russian:

Although some examples of abbreviations can be found in Russian nowadays, it may not be seen as a highly productive way to create new words, even in slang. Pure abbreviation is not common. Many words are created not by of abbreviation but by lexico-semantic means, when meaning of a word is modified by speakers: *зажигать* (“to lit up” vs “to party well”), *рулить* (“to rule” vs “to be cool”, *лечить* (“ to lie” vs “to cure”).

In the present-day Russian abbreviations can be divided into 1) acronyms for official use and 2) stylistically neutral truncations 3) truncations to be found in informal registers, especially internet communities, or in highly specified argot (i.e. computer/programmer slang).

A special group of abbreviations is formed by the so-called “short personal names”. Shortened first names can already be seen in literature of the 19th century, but shortening of surnames to create nicknames has become popular in the 2nd half of the 20th century. First names have fixed short forms (*Таня, Лена*), but surnames can yield a big variety of short forms, sometimes highly individual. Also, names of cities are often shortened in oral, highly colloquial forms of speech, but often change of stem or addition of an affix takes place: *Путер* vs *Петербург*, *Владик* vs *Владивосток*, *Барса* vs *Барселона*, *Стамбик* vs *Стамбул*.

2.3. Morphological Peculiarities of Abbreviations

Generally speaking, regardless of the genre, topic or speech register, acronymy and back clipping (apocope) have always been the two most popular morphological patterns to create abbreviations in Russian.

Acronym model has not changed greatly since the post-revolution times: initial letters are taken to form institution names etc. Some colloquialisms created by means of acronymy can be

found, though: *XЗ* (“no one knows”), a personal noun abbreviation *БГ* (“Boris Grebenschikov”), a relatively recent formation *МЧ* (“boyfriend”). Such abbreviations are initially used in written form of speech or imitate its written speech origin. They are pronounced by reading out each separate letter. Some of them have already become naturalized vocabulary items: *чп* (“private enterprise”), *дмн* (“road accident”).

2nd type – back-clipping – is more variable and less typical truncations, where morphemic boundaries are ignored, can be observed, i.e. a verb *нра* “I like”. Examples of this kind of abbreviation, or apocope where the final part of a word is cut off, can be found in a number of literary works of the 2nd half of the 20th century.

Я и с Леной посижу
И за тестом пригляжу
Отправляйтесь на *дежу*! («Операция ”Б”»)

Back-clippings can be created with or without respect to morphemic border of a lexeme. This process is very common, and, according to Shanskiy (Shanskiy, 2005: 288 – 289), new increase in its popularity was partly influenced by back-clipping in English and other European languages where back-clipping is a highly productive morphological model. (*Doc* < *Doctor*, *profess* < *professor* in translated works of O’Henry and Hemingway). Yanko-Trinitetskaya also gives some examples of apocopes that denote people (professions) (*дир* “director”, *пенс* “pensioner”) and points that all such words are stylistically marked and can be found mainly in lower registers. (Yanko-Trinitetskaya, 2001: 410-412).

Also, high productivity of back-clipping model is illustrated by a great number of new examples of such abbreviations to be found in written and oral speech. But many of them are still occasional words. Fore-clipping is relatively rare in Russian.

3. Abbreviations in Japanese

3.1. Japanese Language in the Turn of Two Centuries

Socio-historical changes in Japan of the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries resulted not only in the introduction of a new political system, but also led to a great revolution in science and culture. These changes are reflected in considerable language changes, especially in lexical field. But, opposite to word-formation processes in Russian of the same period, in Japanese of the beginning of the 20th century clipping (*ryakugo*) was not yet a popular word-forming process. Although examples of some specific form of abbreviation, i.e. simplification of

characters by monks, can yet be found in earlier Japanese (瑠璃 (*ruri*) > 王王 etc), they are used in written texts only, like “*m*” for “*meter*” nowadays (Kamo, 1944: 133) and are not abbreviations in the meaning of term we use here. In the beginning of the 20th century coinage of new *kango* to denote new phenomena predominated. According to Ishiwata, the beginning and the middle of Meiji period are characterized by big changes in Japanese lexicon, and especially by a rapid increase in number of *kango* words. “Since the start of Meiji era amount of new cultural phenomena and thoughts of European origin has increased. These were, for the most part, translated terms, and they were translated as *kango*. Professor Yamada Yoshio points that ‘the main role to introduce Modern Western culture into our language belongs to *kango*’”. Such tendency to translate technical terms can be already observed in *rangaku* literature of Edo period, but it saw a great increase with the start of Meiji era.” (Ishiwata, 1971: 358-359) A great number of *kango* appeared as a result of literal and sometime artificial translation (transliteration) of new loan-words into Japanese: *yakyu* “baseball”. In this case character for such new loanwords were chosen carefully to express the original meaning (*figyua* > 型競技 “figure skating”, *nokkuauto* > 打倒 “knock-out”, *reza: seizo:* > 擬革製造 “leather manufacturing”, *saron* > 特別食堂 “salon” etc) or to preserve the original phonetical form (*manekin* > 招金 “mannequin”, *singa:* > 新雅 “singer”) (Kamo, 1944: 42-44). We can see that language in Japan in the end of 19th - beginning of the 20th century is characterized by adoption of a great number of words for new notions and a somewhat artificially increased usage of characters (*kango*).

3.2. Modern Japanese Language

Post-war Japanese language also saw a relatively rapid increase in number of new words, but contrary neologisms of Meiji period, which were *kango* for the most part, the main feature of the post-war Japanese language is abundance of loanwords *gairaigo* that are not translated and used as *katakanago*. Also, important fact is that a great number of neologisms of this period denote objects and phenomena familiar to all layers of society regardless of education whilst Meiji period neologisms were familiar, for the most part, only to educated people (Tamamura, 1988:536).

The Japanese language of the latter half of the 20th century is characterized by an overflow of newly created abbreviations. In modern Japanese, especially nowadays, almost any lexeme can be clipped: word shortening has become an extremely productive way to create new lexemes, as Kubozono points (Kubozono, 2002: 82). We can suggest, that abbreviation started to get relatively popular in standard Japanese during Showa period (latter half). Matsumura (1977)

overlooks the process of formation and of Tokyo language that has become the base for standard Japanese and gives examples of some abbreviations. According to Matsumura, during that period “new *kango* started to be used. <...> A great number of abbreviations was created from *kango* compounds, and these abbreviations have separated from the original compound words and were used as independent *kango* words, which can be called the recent tendency. Also recent tendency is to use loanword-derived abbreviations as single independent words” (Matsumura, 1977: 185).

It is notable, that any lexeme can be shortened disregarding its semantic or grammatical features. Some interesting examples of shortened personal names can be found: *Burappi* < *Buraddo Pitto* “Brad Pitt”. Whereas many Japanese personal names have short abbreviated variants used to express affection etc, abbreviations like *Burappi* are coined for a different reason – to facilitate the pronunciation of a long unfamiliar word.

Abbreviations are created and used for various reasons. Apart from acronyms found in specialized terminology or official institutional names, there are clippings in Japanese that are used to emphasize one’s affiliation with a specific group (argot, technical terms) or help to express one’s deviation from social rules. (Kubozono). Also, some lexemes, used in everyday language to denote, for the most part, objects which people come across in daily life, resulted from shortening: *o-hiya* < *hiyashi* “cool, cold”, *o-kazu* < *kazu-kazu* “numerous [small dishes]”, *o-den* < *dengaku-yaki* (name of a dish). But these are examples of words that are no longer identified by most speakers as abbreviations.

Presenter’s previous research on abbreviations in Japanese has proved that, in spite of the well-established tendency to consider abbreviations as secondary, facultative lexemes, all abbreviations in fact have the potential to replace their full forms (prototypes) and enter the lexicon as generalized terms. Diachronically conducted survey proved that relation between items in the pair “full form – abbreviation” is not stable, abbreviation always being in minority: in fact such relation can gradually evolve into various patterns. 1) clippings have completely replaced base lexemes (“*risutora*” etc.), 2) clippings prevail over base lexemes (“*gempatsu*” etc.), 3) clippings are in the stage of gradually replacing base lexemes (“*kombini*” etc.), 4) clippings and base lexemes compete, neither of them becomes prevailing (“*jihanki*” etc.), 5) clippings are used more frequently, but they are still in minority (“*keitai*” etc.), 6) usage ratio of clippings does not increase (“*baraeti*” etc.), 7) clippings are rarely used with base lexemes being in the majority (“*ko:soku*” etc.), 8) usage ratio of clippings fluctuates depending on topicality (“*supakon*” etc.). (Kudoyarova, 2012).

3.3. Morphological Features of Japanese Abbreviations

Modern Japanese is one of a few languages that shows a great variety of abbreviations penetrating all spheres of language. The following types of abbreviations can be found in Japanese: back-clipping, fore-clipping, back-clipping or fore-clipping of either or both parts of a compound, acronymy. Back-clipping (or apocope) is the most popular model of abbreviation. The longer the word stem is, the higher its chance to be shortened to 1 or 2 syllables. Fore-clipping is less popular as the meaning of a newly created abbreviation is often obscure and can not be reconstructed by listeners/readers. Therefore fore-clipping is mostly used to create slang, i.e. criminal jargon, due to lower traceability of the original word and, thus, better guarantee of information “encoding” and confidentiality. Acronyms can be subdivided into two subtypes. The first one is represented by initialisms, where initial Latin letters of stems are taken to form an abbreviation. In this case stems are either loanwords or romanized Japanese words, i.e. *NHK* > *Nihon Ho:so: Kyokai*. The second type is somehow close to clipping of Chinese character compounds *kango*, where each stem is shortened (back-clipped). But some linguists suggest to classify the latter one as a special subtype of Japanese acronymy.

4. Speculations

4.1. Similarity of processes and influencing socio-historical factors

Both Russian and Japanese have undergone great changes in their lexical structure due to changes in the socio-historic background and re-evaluation of cultural values. This resulted in (but is not limited to) an overflow of new abbreviations seen in both languages, but in different periods. Both countries witnessed revolutions that lead not only to socio-historical changes: languages were also influenced, but in a slightly different way. Language processes (abbreviation) in Russia of the beginning of the 20th century can be taken as attempts to enjoy freedom from strict linguistic rules of the past – a phenomenon that is somehow typical for modern Japanese language of the 2nd half of the 20th century, whereas main objective of lexical changes in Japanese language of the same period (beginning of the 20th century) can be related to high-speed intake of new foreign culture, science and education after Meiji Revolution and adaptation of related terminology to Japanese language standards. In modern times tendencies in two languages have switched places: abbreviation has become highly productive in Japanese, while not so many shortened words are created in Russian.

4.2. Morphological processes and aims of abbreviation

Similar abbreviation models can be found in Japanese and Russian – back-clippings, acronyms, fore-clippings. There are more stylistically neutral back-clippings in Japanese than in Russian. Back-clippings in Russian are often accompanied by affixation or compounding, while a great number of pure abbreviations are used in Japanese. Still we can see “abbreviation plus affixation” models in Japanese, too, i.e. *ero-i* “erotic”. Some examples of fore-clipping in Russian may illustrate that fore-clipping is used for hiding some information or for creating slang: *бомать по фене* (“to talk using thieves slang”) where the verb *бомать* “to talk” is actually a fore-clipping of the verb *работать* (“to work”).

Usage of initialisms (acronyms) is of special interest. *Kango* acronyms in Japanese are stylistically neutral (i.e. *Soren < Sobietto Shakaishugi Kyowakoku Rengo:kai* “USSR”), while many Latin letter initialisms are still characterized by a strong stylistic markedness: *KY < ku:ki yomenai* (“someone who can not read the atmosphere – is not aware of the current situation or mood”). Specific feature of initialisms in Japanese is that they are created on the base of direct translations into English, or initial letters of romanized transliteration of Japanese are taken. Such acronyms in Japanese are often used for ambiguity, but in Russian words of this type are colloquial but are not supposed to help hide some information. They can be seen as imitation of written language, used, probably, to make an impact.

4.3. Shortening of personal names

Short forms of personal names (or nicknames) are used in both Russian and Japanese in less formal or completely informal setting. This can be found in many other languages, too. In most cases short forms (nicknames) for one particular name in Russian are fixed and range of variations is highly limited. In Japanese shortened personal names and nicknames also exist, but apart from such “nicknames” examples of shortening of personal names like “*Burappi*” can be found as well. This example shows, how a personal name may be shortened for merely linguistic purposes: “*Burappi*” is a good illustration of adapting an unfamiliar lexeme through love for playing with language, so common in Japanese language usage. In such case no morphological rules that might be effective for shortening of a personal name in general, are followed. Compactness and sound impact are preferential, and, thus, any part of a name can be omitted to create the best suitable variant. Motivation to create examples like “*Burappi*” different from Russian where goal is to create a highly colloquial, argotic and sometimes even scornful naming. Linguistic reasons similar to simplification/adaptation of a stem in Japanese, are not traced in nickname creation in Russian. At the same time no abbreviated surnames similar to Russian nicknames can be found in Japanese.

4.4. Naturalization of abbreviations

Naturalization of a word as an established vocabulary unit is of great interest. Will a new formation find its permanent place in the lexicon or will it remain secondary or occasional? What is the potential of each word to enter vocabulary, and what factors may influence this process? Both in Russian and Japanese some shortened words gradually replace their full forms. Still, in comparison to Japanese, Russian language is probably not the language where abbreviations are created in abundance: word formation in Russian is mostly characterized by prefixation and suffixation. According to Shanskiy, “affixation is the most productive, flexible and rich type of word-formation. <...> Creation of new lexemes by means of pure abbreviation when this process is not “accompanied” by any affixation, is in general not productive in Russian and is limited to nouns only” (Shanskiy, 2005: 279 – 287).

In Japanese language a lot of examples of naturalized abbreviations can be found, not only denoting specialized terms or institution names, i.e. *infure* > *infure:shon* (“inflation”) or *kombini* (“convenience store”). But in fact a lot of abbreviated words have been generalized in Russian, too, as main nominations for some objects / phenomena. Some items found their way to the lexicon: *закс*, *пор*, *дмн*, *чп* and are not occasional (or slang) formations anymore. Shanskiy points, that “a word continues to be an abbreviated one only until ‘a prototype, related to it, remains in the language’, i.e. a full word or a phrase from which abbreviation was coined. Otherwise it [an abbreviated word] starts to function as a usual unabbreviated lexical unit”. (Shanskiy, 2005: 288)

One more important factor for an abbreviation to become a generalized lexical unit – part of lexicon, sometimes registered in dictionaries – both in Japanese and Russian is language users’ awareness. An abbreviation is recognized as a secondary unit only until language users identify it as a short form of some other long word. When this relationship between two lexical items is no longer felt by language users, even if the prototype still can be traced, abbreviation can be considered to be the main nomination of an object / phenomenon and an independent lexical unit. I.e., *ko:ban* “police station” or *mise* “shop” are no longer identified as abbreviations, although their prototypes can still be found (*ko:bansho*, *misedana*) (Tanaka, 1977: 157) In Russian a great number of technical terms’ clippings was generalized, while in Japanese such specific terms are less likely to enter the lexicon as general namings.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper we gave a brief excursion into main morphologic features of abbreviations in Russian and Japanese and tried to view word-formation processes and, namely, necessity of

abbreviation from a socio-historical perspective. Two different periods with a relatively long time gap in between (beginning of the 20th century for Russian and the latter half of the 20th century for Japanese) are characterized by creation of a great number of new abbreviations. The author suggests that, despite the difference in historical and cultural backgrounds, there exists similarity in motivations (social mood etc) to create abbreviations in both periods – desire to break the long-preserved rules (in language etc) and express one's freedom and individuality. We have found that Russian and Japanese word-formation systems possess same abbreviation models, and even some similarities in usage and stylistics could be traced. This research can be further broadened by including such tasks as detailed analysis and comparison between each separate abbreviation model, statistic survey of abbreviation usage as well as a diachronic survey of naturalization processes.

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