

## English or Japanglish?

### National Institute of Technology, Akita College

#### A & B

Sarada(Salad) Hanbaga (Hamburger)  
Sandoitchi (Sandwich) Soseji (Sausage)  
Kohi (Coffee) Keki (Cake)  
Aisukurimu (Ice-cream) Konbini (Convenience Store)  
Bareboru (Volleyball) Besuboru (Baseball)  
Basukettoboru (Basketball) Gorufu (Golf)

**C:** Hold on, what are you singing?

**A:** It's our favorite song called Tokyo bon. It's about a chance foreigners might get lost on a Japanese adventure.

**B:** If that happens, we are ready to lend a helping hand with Japanglish, which means we speak English using localized loanwords spelled out with the katakana alphabet.

**C:** I do not think it's always the case. We should speak standard English. Most Japanese people think katakana Japanese originated from English words with the same meanings. What do you think?

**A:** You are right. Sometimes Japanglish is difficult for foreigners to understand. We are learning English to communicate internationally in exchanges with people from various backgrounds. Some Japanglish can contribute to misunderstandings in global contexts.

**C:** It reminds me of one incident that happened last semester. I had a chance to talk with a short-term international student from Finland in English Club. He shared his struggles in learning Japanese and told me he failed his Japanese test. I had no clue how I should encourage him in English, then the phrase 'don't mind' came to my mind, and I often use it when my Japanese teammate makes a mistake while playing sports. So, I said to him 'Don't mind' very friendly. However, the Finish guy looked at me with a very confusing facial expression and responded to me nothing. I felt embarrassed since I did not know why he did not appreciate my kindness.

**A:** Do you mean that you mixed up Japanese Donmai and 'Don't mind' in English?

**C:** Exactly.

**B:** We can take advantage of some Japanese words with foreign origin when we learn English since they have similar pronunciations and meanings, such as baseball and sausage. However, we also need to be careful with using such loanwords despite their similarity to the original foreign words. Take the Japanese word 'sumato' and the English word 'smart' as an example; actually, we do not use them in the same way. So don't be surprised if a Japanese looks at your body, saying you are smart because we usually use it to describe someone slim.

**A:** And in your case, Donmai in Japanese means "Don't worry", but "Don't mind" in English means you accept something politely, or you would be happy with something.

**C:** I got to know their difference later in my English lesson. Then I realized that I told the Finish student, 'I don't care you failed the exam,' even though I was trying to encourage him. Therefore, I think learning standard English for the original and accurate meaning is essential.

**B:** I partially agree with you. I do not think we should fall into the trap of thinking that we should learn only one type of English, which is so-called standard English. According to David Crystal, English has a plural now, Englishes. Such as Nigerian English, Singapore English, Indian English, and Japanese English. When English is a global language, which means we adapt it to suit our circumstances because we use the language to talk about what's happening in our own country.

**A:** Right! We want to use English that reflects our local interests, history, and the things happening around us. Three years ago, when I went to the Kanto Festival with a friend, a foreigner approached us and asked us to take a picture for him. I replied with a single word nervously, "Okay! I took a picture of him with the Kanto lanterns in the background and asked him to confirm the picture I had taken: "This photo, OK? cheku, please." He thanked me and started asking me questions about my kimono. At that time, I concentrated on telling my story of Kimono with all the relevant English words that I knew, and I completely forgot the nervousness that had happened to me. I tried my best to communicate with the person without worrying about the grammar that I was always conscious of in English class. I still remember that funny scene where I struggled to make a short conversation even though I used a lot of Katakanas, but I enjoyed it even more!

**C:** I believe you made that foreign friend feel the Japanese hospitality.

**B:** We can use Japanese English not only for fun, also as a tool to learn new things. About two years ago, I was a member of an international exchange group that used an app called "Discord ."The app allows language learners to find language partners and practice speaking online, and on this platform, many different language speakers interact with each other in Japanese or English. A German man reached out to me soon after I registered on that platform. His name is Andre, and he wanted to practice Japanese; in turn, he would help me learn German. Then we started to talk online frequently. Interestingly, we used English as a mutual language. Neither of us spoke perfect English, which means I used Japanglish, and Andre used Germanglish, but we could still communicate effectively. This experience made me realize that English is a tool for social interaction that we rely on to socialize and strengthen social bonds with others.

**C:** What a great experience! You are right. We use language as a tool for communication and learning. Using English is much more than knowing the vocabulary and complicated grammar.

**A:** Also, we learn English, not so much as being naturally gifted, but from gaining opportunities to learn different styles and varieties and solve our problems in real life.

**B:** That's true. In every country in the world, there is a new variety of English growing that is culturally influenced, and it's also happening here in Japan.

**C:** So, every aspect of our culture, the food we eat, the English we speak, and there will be a Japanese flavor that foreigners might or might not understand.

All right! To end, which one should we use? Japanglish or standard English?

**A:** The answer is complex and challenging because how to keep the balance between standard English and local English is an ongoing debate. James and Lesley (2012) mentioned in their book named 'Authority in language: Investigating standard English' that all speakers of English have a number of opinions as to what is 'correct' or 'wrong' in the language they use.

**B:** But what is certain is that we learners should develop the skills of using English in multilingual settings with different purposes. We can benefit from learning relatively standard English for international communication and opportunities that will help us advance further in our future careers. At the same time, we should embrace Japanglish as a variety of cultures.

**C:** However, if your Japanese friends say to you, "Don't mind" when you are down, please "don't mind their Japanglish."

**All:** Thank you for listening.