Gastronomic Romance Loanwords in Japanese

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Abstract

This study investigates the integration of gastronomic terms from Romance languages into Japanese, with the aim of identifying both the morphophonological strategies that shape their adaptation and the diachronic layers through which these borrowings entered the language. The research focuses on three central questions: (1) Which recurring adaptation mechanisms characterise the Japanese forms of Romance gastronomic loanwords? (2) To what extent do source languages (Italian, French, Portuguese, Spanish) exhibit distinct adaptation profiles once integrated into Japanese phonology? (3) How do historical periods of contact correspond to different structural outcomes and explain irregularities between source forms and loanword realizations?

The dataset consists of gastronomic loanwords of Romance origin attested in major Japanese lexicographic resources and contemporary culinary discourse. The methodology combines comparative analysis of Romance phonology with established models of Japanese loanword phonology, supplemented by a diachronic classification of borrowing strata. This approach makes it possible to distinguish between early borrowings mediated through Portuguese in the 16th century, later borrowings introduced during the Meiji period, and contemporary imports arising from globalized culinary culture.

Preliminary analysis indicates a clear stratification across borrowing periods. Early Portuguese loanwords show more extensive phonological restructuring, including final vowel insertion, reduction or simplification of consonant clusters, and less transparent correspondences that reflect older stages of Japanese phonotactics rather than the Romance source forms familiar today. By contrast, Italian and French borrowings from the 20th and 21st centuries display considerably higher segmental transparency, with consonantal sequences more faithfully preserved through regular epenthesis and moraic reorganisation. Across all layers, Japanese consistently prioritises moraic structure, resulting in recurrent patterns such as vowel epenthesis, secondary gemination, and the avoidance of dispreferred clusters through strategies like consonant lenition or palatalisation.

The diachronic analysis further reveals that contemporary borrowings show reduced structural modification, suggesting increased phonetic transparency resulting from direct exposure to Romance culinary terminology in mass media, gastronomy, and branding. These developments allow the identification of several productive adaptation templates, which not only describe current borrowing practices but also help explain apparent inconsistencies between older and newer Romance-derived forms.

By integrating diachronic and phonological perspectives, the study contributes to broader discussions in contact linguistics and loanword phonology. It provides evidence for how Japanese manages the integration of Romance phonological material and how the history of cultural transmission shapes modern lexical strata. The findings also offer a framework applicable to other domains of borrowing, highlighting the interaction between phonotactic constraints, contact history, and the sociolinguistic environments in which loanwords circulate.