Within studies of loanword phonology over the past two decades, the issue that has received the most attention is whether unfaithful adaptation patterns are primarily caused by misperception at the psychoacoustic level (Peperkamp 2005), reinterpretation by the native phonology (LaCharité & Paradis 2005), or some combination of both (Kubozono 2006). The data forming the basis of such debates, however, has predominantly come from either loanword forms as they exist in modern languages or experimental data obtained from speakers of these languages. As such, relatively little attention has been paid to the diachronic dimension of loanword adaptation. Moreover, the few available studies that do explore this aspect of loanword phonology only examine segmental adaptations (Ito & Mester 2006; Smith 2006/2009; Kang 2010). The process of historical change in the prosody (stress, accent, tone, etc.) of loanwords is therefore still very ill-understood.

The present study fills this gap by investigating how the pitch accent patterns of English, Dutch, Portuguese, French, German, Spanish, and Italian loanwords borrowed into Japanese have changed over the course of the last 120 years. All loanwords contained in Yamada (1892), the oldest dictionary of modern Japanese marking accent information, were compiled into a database, and their accentuation was systematically compared both to their equivalents in several modern Japanese dictionaries as well as to the stress patterns of the original words in the various source languages at the time of borrowing. Results suggest that, in fact, relatively little change is observed overall in the words’ accentuation patterns, in part because the accent location favored by the native phonology actually coincides with the source language’s stress location in the majority of cases. However, many of the words that did change over the 120-year period shifted away from the source-faithful pattern towards two separate types of native ‘default’: (1) having no accent (i.e. unaccentedness), and (2) having an accent on the antepenultimate mora. This suggests two competing historical processes of ‘nativization’ whereby the prosody of loanwords are gradually assimilated into the native prosodic phonology.
References


