

Semantic Borrowing through Kanji Characters in Old Japanese

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Chart 1: Borrowing Process

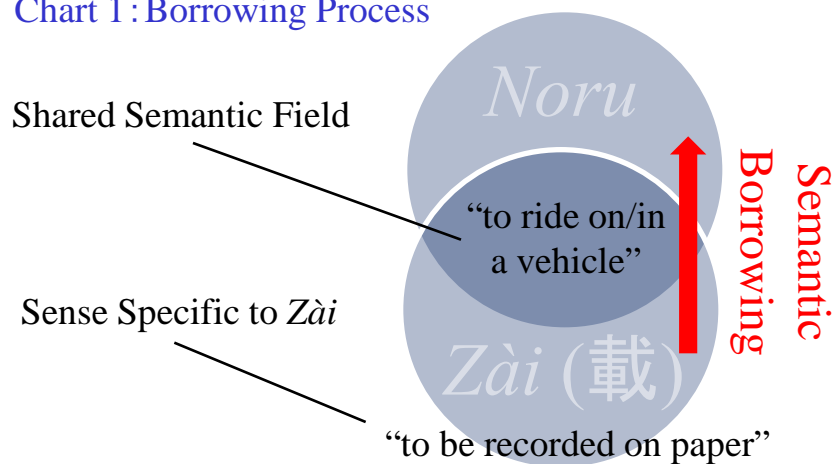
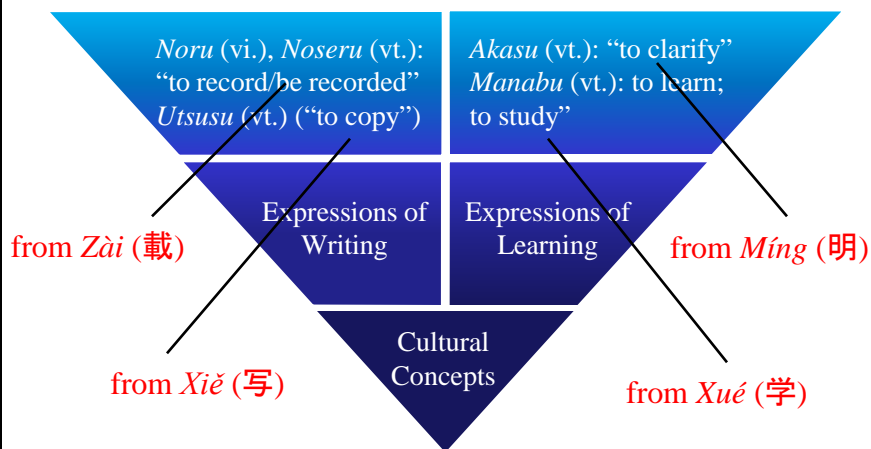


Chart 2: Semantic Fields Prone to Borrowing



Content:

I am currently researching the history of semantic borrowing from Chinese into Old Japanese. An example of such borrowing can be observed in the expression *Simbun ni noru* (“to be printed in the newspaper”), where *noru* (vt.) is used in the sense, “to be recorded on paper.” The Japanese verb *noru* originally only possessed the meaning “to ride on/in a vehicle;” however through consistent use of the word *noru* as a Sino-Japanese gloss for Chinese *zài* (載), which possesses both the meaning “to ride in/on a vehicle” as well as “to be recorded on paper,” *noru* eventually came to be used in this second sense as well. In other words, *noru* borrowed the meaning (sense) “to be recorded on paper” from Chinese *zài*.

Such examples as above are abundant, especially in terms relating to new cultural concepts introduced by the Chinese, such as writing, learning, Buddhism, and government. Semantic borrowing from Chinese is unique in the fact that the borrowing did not occur through a spoken medium, but a written medium—Kanji. This goes against traditional borrowing typology, where semantic loans are said to occur primarily due to homonymy and not synonymy.

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