The Japanese language has borrowed a huge number of words from English. Some words retain similar sounds and meanings from the target language they are borrowed from. Some researchers suggest that loanwords are useful tools in L2 learning (Banta, 1982; Ringbom, 2007). On the other hand, other researchers have reported that linguistic changes occur when English words are borrowed by Japanese, such as phonological change (Kay, 1995; Tsujimura, 1996) and semantic change (Sheperd, 1996; Simon-Maeda, 1995). Although there are some findings on loanwords and different areas of linguistic change, there is a lack of research in semantic change. This study attempted to provide further findings on semantic changes to English loanwords in Japanese.

This study analyzed a list of high-frequency loanwords in Japanese to show how meaning changed in the process of borrowing, such as semantic (meaning) narrowing and semantic (meaning) expanding. The results showed that one-third of the loanwords underwent semantic change and that the most common semantic change was semantic narrowing. It is suggested that both teachers and learners should be aware of such meaning changes in loanwords.