

Makishimaizu Majikku: Borrowing Patterns of Spell Names in English in Overlord Anime

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English words are borrowed and changed into magical spell names (Engrish) in the anime Overlord. The research uses Honna's (1995) theory of borrowing patterns to identify how English is adapted into Japanese and given new meanings in the anime's magic system. The study applies a descriptive qualitative method, using data from both the dialogue and the visual appearance of spells in Overlord. The analysis follows Spradley's (1980) four steps: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analysis. The findings show that only two of Honna's seven borrowing patterns appear in the anime: Semantic Narrowing and Shift and Japanese Phrasings of English. In the first, English words such as Electrosphere, Shield Wall, and Indomitability lose part of their original meaning and gain a new, more specific sense as magic spells. In the second, phrases like Grasp Heart, Anti-life Cocoon, and Greater Teleportation show how Japanese combines English words to create new and unique spell names. These adaptations make the magic system sound more powerful and consistent. Overall, the study concludes that Overlord uses English borrowings not only for meaning but also for artistic style, helping to build a creative and recognizable fantasy world. The findings highlight how linguistic borrowing functions as a stylistic and cultural tool in Japanese media, showing that English serves not only as a source of vocabulary but also as a means of expressing identity, creativity, and globalization in anime. Future studies could compare Overlord with other anime to examine similar borrowing patterns and explore how audiences interpret Engrish spell names in relation to authenticity and world-building.

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INTRODUCTION

English has had a significant influence on popular culture in Japan, and this can be clearly seen in fantasy anime through the use of borrowed forms often referred to as Engrish. In the context of spell names, these English elements function not only as vocabulary, but also as aesthetic and symbolic components that reinforce the story's world. Honna (1995) describes this phenomenon as a "language inside a language," referring to how English elements are adjusted to Japanese pronunciation and writing, usually through katakana, while still maintaining an appealing sense of foreignness. Recent studies support this idea: Gama (2023) shows that gairaigo

in advertising creates a modern and prestigious image, while Allen (2020a) examines how English words are blended phonologically and semantically into Japanese.

In anime such as *Overlord*, this borrowing is clearly visible in spell names like Maximize Magic, Grasp Heart, and Triplet Maximize Magic. These spells are then written as マキシマイズ・マジック (Makishimaizu Majikku), グラスプ・ハート (Gurasupu Hāto), and other similar forms. Such pseudo-English expressions are adapted to Japanese phonological patterns to make them easier to pronounce, while still preserving a strong, magical impression. Astariani et al. (2024) explain that the processes of *gairaigo* and *wasei-eigo* often involve shortening and blending while retaining their foreign appeal. Hatanaka and Pannell (2016) also emphasize that these forms of “Japan-made English” function as a stylistic feature, making *Overlord*’s vocabulary distinct from its Japanese equivalents and enhancing the immersion of its world.

Research by Al Faridzi and Hariri (2025) expands this discussion into digital media, showing that *gairaigo* is deliberately used to build certain stylistic effects in online magazines. Although this pattern has been widely discussed in everyday and commercial contexts, its application in fictional works such as anime has rarely been examined (Erlina et al., 2022).

Several studies have identified borrowing patterns such as semantic shifts, shortening, and hybrid formations in education, advertising, and public discourse (Honna, 1995; Daulton, 2008; Irwin, 2011; Allen, 2020; Pratiwi 2023). However, most of them focus on social functions rather than fictional innovation. No research has specifically applied Honna’s (1995) typology to anime spell naming, leaving a gap in understanding how English shapes a story’s aesthetics and identity.

This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing English spell names in *Overlord*, identifying their borrowing patterns, and explaining how these patterns contribute to the construction of its fantasy world. The research question posed is: What kinds of borrowing patterns appear in the English spell names used in the anime *Overlord*?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many English words that have been absorbed into the Japanese language. This phenomenon happened because a lot of English loanwords are used to form new expressions in the Japanese language. Honna (1995) argues that English loanwords have become “a language within a language” in Japan and are not merely foreign imports but elements fully Japanized in structure and meaning. His concept of Japanisation explained how English words undergo phonological, morphological, and semantic adaptation to fit Japanese communication norms. Daulton (2008) further shows that English-derived lexemes are an essential component of Japan’s “built-in lexicon”.

Honna (1995) identifies seven major borrowing patterns that explain how English elements adapt within Japanese linguistic structures. The first is semantic narrowing or shift, where the meaning of a borrowed English word becomes restricted or altered. For example, “human” in human electronics refers to something “friendly to human beings” rather than a person. The second is Japanese English creation, where pseudo-English terms are invented to express culturally specific ideas, such as *skinship* or *after service*. The third pattern involves tail abbreviations, shortening long loanwords into two to four syllables, as in *pasokon* (personal computer) or *waapuro* (word processor). The fourth is acronyms, where it uses initials like OL (office lady) or TPO (time, place, occasion) to create compact and functional expressions. The fifth pattern is abbreviation of compound, which fuses segments from multiple words, like *sekuhara* (sexual harassment) being a classic example. The sixth is Japanese words combined with English loans, which mixes Japanese and English words, as seen in *karaoke* (“empty orchestra”) or *nominication* (from *nomu*, to drink + communication). Finally, the seventh pattern concerns wordplay where English loanwords are mixed with Japanese sounds or meanings to create puns or playful expressions, such as JR Ski Ski or Go, go, go! for “5:55.”

In anime, these patterns of linguistic borrowing function not just as linguistic features but also as instruments of style and expression of ideas. Series like *Overlord* employ English-derived

terms to build fantasy worlds that carry a sense of familiarity and sophistication. These spell names show what Kowner and Dalot-Bul (2008) describe as Japan's "dialectic relationship between Westernness and Japaneseness," where English is used as a marker of power, sophistication, and otherness. These creative borrowings follow Honna's (1995) taxonomy, displaying hybridization and semantic shift, yet they serve artistic and narrative purposes rather than purely communicative ones. Omar (2015) notes that English borrowings in Japanese often express identity and stylistic nuance, functioning as symbolic resources for self-presentation.

METHOD

Data and Data Sources

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to investigate the borrowing patterns found in English spell names within the *Overlord* anime series. The research adheres to the ethnographic analysis framework proposed by Spradley (1980), which emphasizes understanding cultural and linguistic phenomena as they emerge in their natural context. This approach allows the researcher to deeply examine how English lexical elements are adapted and reinterpreted through Japanese linguistic structures and cultural expression, particularly within the magical world of *Overlord*. By focusing on the structural and stylistic dimensions of the language, this approach facilitates an exploration of how linguistic borrowing contributes to meaning, identity, and aesthetic function in the narrative.

The data is collected from Season One of the *Overlord* anime. This dark fantasy anime is characterized by its extensive Japanese-language dialogue, vast magic system, and consistent use of pseudo-English or "Engrish" in spell naming. Season One was selected because it serves as the introductory season, establishing the foundational linguistic and narrative elements of the series. In this season, the anime first introduces and systematizes the magic terminology, offering the clearest view of how the spell-naming conventions are constructed and presented to the audience. This research utilizes purposive sampling, focusing specifically on spell names that contain English word elements, appear in dialogue or visual displays during casting scenes, and possess a specific magical function (e.g., attack, defense, or summoning) within the story.

The data corpus comprises both textual and visual materials. Textual data is sourced from the official Netflix subtitles and dialogue transcriptions where the spell names are mentioned. Visual data is obtained from screenshots and scene analyses that capture the moments of spell casting in the anime. Both types of data are analyzed concurrently to capture the linguistic and contextual meaning of each spell. This combination allows for observations on how phonological adaptation, morphological modification, and semantic shifts interact with visual and narrative cues, thereby strengthening the interpretation of how English language borrowing functions as a linguistic and stylistic device in the *Overlord* anime.

Data Analysis

Techniques of analysis by Spradley (1980) were employed in this study, consisting of four phases of analysis: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural themes.

In the domain phase, the framework of Nobuyuki Honna (1995) on English loanwords in Japanese was applied. Honna identifies seven main borrowing patterns: (1) semantic narrowing or shift (SNS), (2) Japanese phrasings of English (JPE), (3) tail abbreviations (TAB), (4) acronyms (ACR), (5) abbreviations of compounds (AOC), (6) Japanese words combined with English loans (JEL), and (7) wordplay (WPL). The purpose of applying this theory was to identify which borrowing patterns appear in the construction of spell names in *Overlord*. In the taxonomy analysis, the identified spell names were classified according to the type of borrowing patterns they represent. In the componential analysis, the borrowing patterns semantic narrowing or shift (SNS), Japanese phrasings of English (JPE), tail abbreviations (TAB), acronyms (ACR), abbreviations of compounds (AOC), Japanese words combined with English loans (JEL), and wordplay (WPL) were connected through a componential analysis presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship between Borrowing Patterns and Spell Categories in Overlord

SPELLS	SNS	JPE	TAB	ACR	AOC	JEL	WPL
Offensive spells							
Defensive spells							
Support spells							

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher found Two types of borrowing patterns used throughout season 1 of the anime. According to Honna (1995) theory, the data refers to two borrowing patterns of semantic narrowing and shift and Japanese phrasing of English . The table below displays the data study findings.

Table 2. Results of Borrowing Pattern

SPELLS	SNS	JPE	TAB	ACR	AOC	JEL	WPL
Offensive spells	v	v					
Defensive spells	v	v					
Support spells	v	v					

Table 2 indicates that two borrowing patterns were found in the data that is Semantic Narrowing and Shift and Japanese Phrasing of English. Both borrowing patterns appear across all categories of spells, including offensive spells, defensive spells, and support spells. In the following section, the researcher will discuss each borrowing pattern in detail and explain how they are applied within each spell category.

Borrowing Patterns

According to Honna (1995), semantic narrowing happens when borrowed English terms lose or change their original meaning to suit the context of Japanese communication and culture. In the Overlord, this process can be seen in several spell names that repurpose English vocabulary to fit the logic and performance of magic in the series. For example, Electrosphere (Erekutorosufia) is a spell used by Nabe to create a ball of electrical energy. In English, electrosphere is a scientific term referring to a charged part of the atmosphere, but in the anime, its meaning is narrowed to refer to a real offensive magical object. This transformation demonstrates Japanese-style creative reinterpretation of meaning. Daulton (2008) and Inoue (2019) have also noted that Japanese speakers often modify English semantics for new styles or functions.



**Figure 1. Nabe are chanting the spell Electrosphere
(source: Overlord Season 1 Episode 8)**

The adaptation of Electrosphere shows that loanwords are given local meanings that “connect” with Japanese visual aesthetics and fantasy narratives. This is in line with what McKenzie (2008) refers to as a “functional aesthetic code,” which is how English terms are given new life to become storytelling devices. The narrowing of the meaning of scientific terms to magical attacks provides an example of how Japanese media reconfigures English not only for accuracy but also for imaginative vibes. Gama (2023) also says that English in Japanese media functions as a symbolic enhancer, making terms feel more dramatic and cool for local audiences.



Figure 2. Nabe are chanting the spell Shield Wall
(source: Overlord Season 1 Episode 9)

Another clear example is Shield Wall (Shirudo Wooru), which functions to create a transparent barrier that protects the caster from attacks. In ordinary English, a shield wall is a formation of soldiers who arrange their shields together. However, in Overlord, the term takes on the meaning of individual defensive magic. The shift from a collective historical image to magical protective energy demonstrates Honna's (1995) principle of reinterpreting meaning. Here, the English term is narrowed to the meaning of protection and also shifts from a physical form to magical energy.

In addition, the use of Shield Wall is also in line with the analysis of Buesink (2021) and Garcia (2022), said that English in anime often symbolizes authority, power, and modernity. The aesthetics of the words shield and wall maintain the global prestige of the English language, but at the same time express the concept of protection that connects with the Japanese heroic ideal. So this language borrowing is like a semiotic negotiation between Western influence and local storytelling styles.



Figure 3. Ainz are chanting the spell Indomitability
(source: Overlord Season 1 Episode 12)

The third example, and perhaps the most profound in terms of theme, is Indomitability (Indomitabiriti), a support spell that increases the caster's physical and mental endurance. This word originates from the adjective indomitable, meaning unconquerable, but in *Overlord* its meaning is narrowed down to magical mental strength. In the context of *Overlord*, Indomitability becomes a symbol of inner resilience that makes the caster unshakable. This also connects with Nugraha and Febrianty's (2024) analysis of Ainz's character, characterized by emotional control and dominance.

The adaptation of Indomitability shows how loanwords in English can capture cultural values of determination and self-mastery. Honna (1995) says that Japanese loanwords are often adapted to convey culturally important values, and Bushido-style determination is evident here. Its meaning has narrowed from a general trait to a magical condition, meaning that English is used as a moral symbol. This supports Runner (2022), who says that language in Japanese stories is not only about meaning but also emotional and philosophical identity.

Japanese phrasings of English

Japanese phrasings of English is a pseudo-English phrase construction that follows Japanese language norms but still seems like English. Honna (1995) says this strategy allows creators to freely use English as a flexible style in terms of meaning. In *Overlord*, this pattern is used to create complex and powerful-sounding spell names by combining unique English vocabulary.

The first example is Grasp Heart (Gurasupu Haato), a deadly ninth-tier spell. The phrase “grasp heart” is not common in English, but it immediately conjures up a sense of control and destruction. In the anime, this spell allows Ainz to crush his enemies' hearts and kill them instantly. This fits with Garcia's (2022) idea of “expressive Engrish,” in which English is used for dramatic effect rather than grammar.



Figure 4. Ainz are chanting the spell Grasp Heart
(source: *Overlord* Season 1 Episode 3)

Analysis of Grasp Heart shows that English is not a necessity for communication, but rather a semiotic amplifier of narrative emotion. Kunert (2020) states that the phonological stylization of loanwords through katakana makes the symbolic effect even stronger. So the meaning of Grasp Heart is acceptable to Japanese audiences while also sounding “cool” to global audiences. English becomes a bridge between the familiar and the foreign.

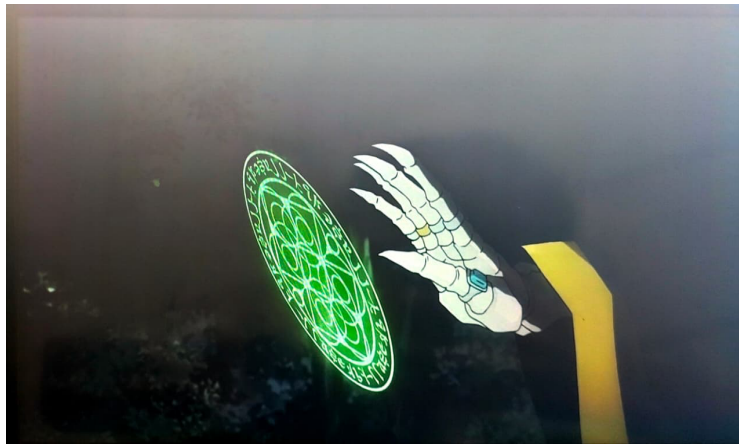


Figure 5. Ainz are chanting the spell Anti-life Cocoon
(source: Overlord Season 1 Episode 3)

The second example, Anti-life Cocoon (Anchirairu Kokun), combines anti with life and cocoon, resulting in a term that is grammatically awkward but still clear in Japanese logic. Anti-life touches on the idea of rejection, while cocoon evokes images of protection or transformation. This mantra creates a dome that rejects life while also providing protection. Inoue (2019) says this is proof that Japanese English (Engrish) is a space for semantic innovation, not just a mistake.

The aesthetic function of Anti-life Cocoon fits with McKenzie's (2008) premise of English as a localized expressive resource. This phrase combines the prestige of English with the Japanese mythical image of a barrier, thereby enriching world-building. Like "Grasp Heart," this term shows how Overlord uses English as a symbolic structure.



Figure 6. Shalltear are chanting the spell Greater Teleportation
(source: Overlord Season 1 Episode 12)

Lastly, Greater Teleportation (Gureta Terepoteshon) shows the typical hierarchical structure of English adaptations into Japanese. The word greater gives the impression of a higher level, suggesting superiority over ordinary teleportation spells. This fits with Buesink's (2021) observation about English modifiers that code power dynamics. In Overlord, Greater Teleportation clarifies the level of ability and logic of the magic system through comparative forms.

This pattern also demonstrates Japan's tendency to repurpose English morphology to distinguish functions or powers, as Honna (1995) suggests. The combination of greater and

teleportation gives a higher tone but remains easy for Japanese audiences to understand. This also matches Runner's (2022) research, which states that language in Japanese media acts as a symbolic marker and visual code that indicates sophistication.

The fact that only two borrowing patterns are dominant, namely Semantic Narrowing and Japanese Phrasing, points to a deliberate linguistic minimalism in *Overlord*. Instead of using many kinds of complex adaptations, the anime focuses on reinterpreting English to create a cohesive and immersive magic lexicon. This economical style aligns with Inoue's (2019) idea of functional English in Japanese media, where English is selectively chosen for maximum narrative effect. Compared to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Buesink, 2021) or Japanese commercials (Gama, 2023), *Overlord* is more unified and narratively integrated, so English is not just an afterthought but part of the world's aesthetic.

Additionally, the interaction between linguistic forms and visual representations in *Overlord* supports Runner's (2022) points that Japanese stories are multimodal. The chanting of spells, visual effects, and English phrases form a semiotic triad that deepens immersion. This reinforces McKenzie's (2008) argument that English in Japan has evolved from a foreign code to a medium of local expression to show global sophistication and cultural identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of English borrowing patterns in *Overlord* shows how the anime transforms foreign vocabulary into forms that feel locally grounded. English terms are not simply taken as they are, but reshaped to fit Japanese phonology, morphology, and cultural meaning. Following Honna's (1995) classification, this study identifies two main patterns, which are Semantic Narrowing and Shift (SNS) and Japanese Phrasing of English (JPE) which together illustrate the creative process of "Japanisation", the way Japanese media adapts English into a uniquely expressive code.

Through the Semantic Narrowing and Shift pattern, terms such as Electrosphere, Shield Wall, and Indomitability undergo refinement and semantic shifts to convey more specific magical or moral values. These transformations show that English is localized not only for practical purposes but also for aesthetic and symbolic effect. The shift of electrosphere from a scientific term to a spell, or indomitability into a form of mental resilience, reflects McKenzie's (2008) idea of a "functional aesthetic code" where English is repurposed to serve narrative and cultural expression. This pattern also supports Honna's view that borrowing in Japanese is not a sign of linguistic deficiency but an act of creative domestication. In *Overlord*, such semantic narrowing becomes a world-building device that deepens both character development and thematic layers.

The Japanese Phrasing of English pattern seen in expressions like Grasp Heart, Anti-life Cocoon, and Greater Teleportation highlights the blend of English and Japanese within anime discourse. These constructions may sound unusual in standard English, but they follow Japanese syntactic and semantic logic. This aligns with Garcia's (2022) concept of expressive English, where English is used stylistically for dramatic impact. This finding extends the work of Buesink (2021) and Gama (2023), showing that English in Japanese media operates as a semiotic resource that merges foreign prestige with local creativity. By integrating English compounds and modifiers into magical terminology, *Overlord* demonstrates the productive tension between global influence and localized artistic expression.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the understanding that Japanisation is not only a linguistic process but also a narrative and semiotic strategy. The consistent use of these borrowing patterns shows that English in Japanese media functions on three intertwined levels: (1) as a source of familiar vocabulary, (2) as a stylistic marker that evokes modernity or global sophistication, and (3) as a semiotic tool that shapes meaning, identity, and emotion. These insights align with broader discussions in World Englishes (Inoue, 2019), supporting the argument that English in

Japan has evolved into a highly contextual variety shaped by cultural reinterpretation.

Beyond the theoretical dimension, the findings also highlight the multimodal nature of borrowing in anime. The interplay between text, voice, and visuals—all reinforcing the adapted English phrases, it supports Runner's (2022) view of language as a semiotic medium in Japanese storytelling. Linguistic creativity in *Overlord* does not operate in isolation but interacts with audio and visual elements to construct meaning.

Overall, *Overlord* illustrates how English borrowing can function both as linguistic adaptation and as an aesthetic device in Japanese popular media. The anime showcases Japan's ability to reshape global linguistic material into culturally resonant symbols of power, identity, and imagination.

Future research could compare *Overlord* with other fantasy anime such as *Fairy Tail* or *Black Clover* to see whether similar patterns appear in their magic systems. Corpus-based studies could also track how frequently Japanised English forms appear in anime and games. Additionally, audience reception studies could explore how Japanese and international viewers interpret English terms whether as humorous, stylish, or as a form of authentic creativity. By combining linguistic, semiotic, and cultural perspectives, future studies can deepen our understanding of how English operates as a creative *lingua franca* in Japan's media landscape.

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