

## JAPANESE PRODUCT NAMES INVOLVING ‘CONTRADICTION’: AN INTEGRAL LINGUISTIC VIEW ON THEIR SENSE-CREATING MECHANISM

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**ABSTRACT.** *Japanese Product Names Involving ‘Contradiction’: An Integral Linguistic View on Their Sense-Creating Mechanism.* In Japanese, there is a certain group of product names that cause a feeling of ‘contradiction’. By analyzing them, this paper aims to uncover a type of expressive knowledge that can be referenced to create the sense <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>. For instance, *nomu-purin* (drink-pudding), a pudding product consumed by drinking, appears to contradict, or be incongruent with, the empirical elocutional knowledge of pudding being eaten with a spoon. However, the expression immediately turns out to be congruent through its designation; the pudding designated is in a tube-like, rather than a conventional plastic or glass, container, enabling it to be consumed by drinking, so that the incongruence is suspended. This suspension characterizes the product as having the innovative feature of drinking rather than eating. This eaten-without-a-spoon

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feature in turn suggests ease of consumption, which is attractive to consumers: the sense of the product name *nomu-purin*. Furthermore, some of these product names, e.g., *taberu-rāyu* (eat-chili oil), have become part of the Japanese idiomatic knowledge and can, via evocation, serve as a basis for interpreting similar product names, e.g., *taberu-dashi jōyu* (eat-broth soy sauce) and *taberu, sukiyaki* (eat, sukiyaki).

**Keywords:** *suspension, sense, designation, evocation, expressive knowledge*

**REZUMAT.** *O perspectivă lingvistic-integrală asupra mecanismului de creare a sensului în cazul unor denumiri de produse japoneze care implică o 'contradicție'.* În japoneză există o categorie de denumiri de produse care provoacă o impresie de 'contradicție'. Prin analiza acestora, lucrarea de față își propune să circumscrie un tip de cunoaștere expresivă care poate fi utilizată pentru a crea sensul <produsul desemnat este o ofertă inovatoare și atractivă pentru consumatori>. De exemplu, *nomu-purin* (budincă de băut), un produs pe bază de budincă dar consumat prin băut, este o expresie incongruentă, întrucât pare să se afle în contradicție cu cunoașterea elocutională (în mod obișnuit, budinca se mănâncă, nu se bea). Cu toate acestea, expresia se dovedește a fi congruentă prin designația sa; budinca respectivă este ambalată într-un recipient tubular, nu într-unul convențional din plastic sau sticlă, ceea ce permite consumarea ei prin băut, astfel încât incongruența este suspendată. Această suspendare caracterizează produsul ca având caracteristica inovatoare de a fi băut, mai degrabă decât mâncat. Această caracteristică sugerează, la rândul său, ușurința consumului, ceea ce este atractiv pentru consumatori, generând astfel sensul asociat denumirii produsului *nomu-purin*. În plus, studiul nostru evidențiază faptul că unele dintre aceste denumiri de produse, de exemplu *taberu-rāyu* (lit. a mânca - ulei de ardei iute), au intrat în cunoașterea idiomatică japoneză și pot servi, prin evocare, ca bază pentru interpretarea unor noi denumiri de produse similare, de exemplu *taberu-dashi jōyu* (lit. a mânca - sos de soia pentru supă) și *taberu, sukiyaki* (lit. a mânca, sukiyaki).

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *suspendare, sens, designație, evocare, cunoaștere expresivă*

## 1. Introduction

In Japanese, there is a certain group of product names that cause a feeling of 'contradiction'. One such example is *nomu-purin* (drink-pudding).<sup>3</sup> *Purin* is a noun modified by the prenominal form of the verb *nomu* (to drink), which,

<sup>3</sup> See the following website for the product information:  
<https://frozen24.com/products/%E3%83%97%E3%83%AA%E3%83%B3%E5%B0%82%E9%96%80%E5%BA%97%E6%98%A5%E5%A4%8F%E7%A7%8B%E5%86%AC%E9%A3%B2%E3%82%80%E3%83%97%E3%83%AA%E3%83%B3-2%E6%9C%AC%E5%85%A5%E3%82%8A>, (available as of April 26, 2025)

although it is the same as its dictionary form, functions as a noun modifier. *Nomu-purin* as a whole means 'pudding [that one] drinks', which at first glance contradicts our empirical knowledge that pudding is eaten with a spoon. This contradiction, within the Integral Linguistic framework of E. Coseriu, is characterized as "incongruence".

A product name of this sort, because of its incongruent nature, might seem likely to be refused as nonsense. However, the actual situation is otherwise: consumers are likely to find out a way to accept it in a "congruent" manner. Turning our attention back to *nomu-purin*, its consumers can immediately understand it as congruent through its reference, or "designation" (Coseriu 1985). The pudding referred to (or designated) is in a tube-like, rather than a conventional plastic or glass, container, enabling it to be consumed by drinking.

There is a wide range of similar examples in the Japanese community, such as *taberu-rāyu* (eat-chili oil), *kiru-mōfu* (wear-blanket), and *haru-tansan* (apply-carbonic acid), which share a morphological structure in which the right-hand noun is modified by a left-hand prenominal verbal form. This suggests that the practice of naming products using such contradiction is integrated into "expressive knowledge": "a knowledge about how certain discourses should be constructed in certain situations" (Coseriu 1985, xxix).

It might be said that product names such as *nomu-purin* sound unique because of their counter-intuitive, and therefore attention-grabbing, nature (which can potentially lead to increased sales). However, is such an attention-grabbing function really the ultimate purpose of this naming? There are other simpler yet congruent ways to make products eye-catching. In the case of pudding, simply giving the product a name with exaggeratedly admiring phrases—such as *kizetsu suru hodo oishii purin* 'a pudding so delicious it could make you faint'—is sufficient for it to stand out. This leads us to assume that the expressive knowledge involved in the creation of product names under discussion is also oriented toward something beyond merely attracting attention, which this paper will identify as a certain text-specific content, or "sense" (Coseriu 1985, 2007 [1980]). More specifically, we will argue that the sense of product names involving contradiction (henceforth, PNCs) is <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>. <sup>4</sup> PNCs sound unique not only because of their incongruent, thus eye-catching titles, but because of this very sense.

After introducing some theoretical notions necessary for the upcoming discussion, Section 3 explains how incongruence leads to the sense of PNCs, using *nomu-purin* as an example. This section also provides further examples to

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<sup>4</sup> To indicate the sense of PNCs, angle brackets are used.

help gain a better understanding of the sense-creation mechanism of PNCs. These product names, however, do not always remain limited to ad hoc usage. Some can enter the Japanese lexicon, or idiomatic knowledge. Once they become part of idiomatic knowledge, they can be referenced to create other product names, sometimes by adding further deviations to the base product name. Section 4 demonstrates such phenomena with the famous product name *taberu-rāyu* (eat-chili oil) ‘chili oil [that one] eats’. PNCs can also make theoretical contributions. The phenomenon where incongruence (and incorrectness) is accepted in a specific context is termed “suspension” (sublation, *Aufhebung*) (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1980], 2007[1988]). Coseriu (2001[1976], 2007[1988]) distinguishes three types of suspension in discourse, but Section 5 points out that the suspension involved in PNCs does not seem to correspond to any of these three types. Thus, it might be regarded as a fourth type of suspension in discourse. Once PNCs are classified as a new type of suspension, they can be clearly distinguished from superficially similar yet crucially different product names, such as *nomu-masuku* (drink-mask) (Chika and Sumide 2025). Section 6 concludes the discussion.

## 2. Some Theoretical Notions

### 2.1. Linguistic Knowledge (Competence)

For Coseriu, language is, first and foremost, an activity (Coseriu 1978), and this activity can be captured from three different points of view: activity as such, “the knowledge that underlines the activity”, and “the product that is created by the activity” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 71, trans. ours).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Coseriu posits that “language is a *universal* human activity that is carried out *individually*, but always according to *historically* determined techniques («languages»)” (Coseriu 1981, 269, trans. ours).<sup>6</sup> This means that linguistic activity can be divided into three different levels: universal, historical, and individual. Combining these three points of view and three levels produces the following table:

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<sup>5</sup> “das Wissen, das der Tätigkeit zugrundeliegt”, “das Produkt, das durch die Tätigkeit geschaffen wird” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 71)

<sup>6</sup> “[e]l lenguaje es una actividad humana *universal* que se realiza *individualmente*, pero siempre según técnicas *históricamente* determinadas («lenguas»)” (Coseriu 1981, 269)

**Table 1.** The Integral Linguistic View toward Language  
(Coseriu 1985, xxix, with slight modifications)

Levels	Points of view		
	Activity	Knowledge	Product
Universal	Speaking in general	Elocutional knowledge	Totality of utterances
Historical	Concrete particular language	Idiomatic knowledge	(Abstracted particular language)
Individual	Discourse	Expressive knowledge	Text

Within this framework, linguistic knowledge (competence) is of particular importance for our discussion. Idiomatic knowledge is a good starting point for distinguishing the three levels of knowledge. This knowledge is “to know how to speak according to the linguistic tradition of a community” (Coseriu 1998, 13, trans. ours).<sup>7</sup> Thus, English vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation constitute idiomatic knowledge.

Elocutional knowledge “comprises everything that applies in principle to all languages independently of their respective linguistic structuring” (Coseriu 1985, xxix). Specifically, it is concerned with “how one speaks congruently and coherently” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 224, trans. ours),<sup>8</sup> according to principles of thought and the general knowledge of the world (Coseriu 1985, xxix). The existence of this knowledge can be demonstrated by observing deviations. For example, “The five continents are four: Europe, Asia and Africa” (Coseriu 1985, xxvii) normally sounds strange because the numerals are inconsistent: the speaker claims five is four and lists only three continents. This negative judgment is based on our principles of thought. It should be noted that the negative judgment persists regardless of language: in Japanese, too, five is not four, and four is not three. Thus, elocutional knowledge goes beyond the historical level.

Finally, expressive knowledge is “a knowledge about how certain discourse should be constructed in certain situations” (Coseriu 1985, xxix). For example, in Japan (and many other communities), formal business emails are generally expected to begin with the recipient’s name (and their title). Thus, if an email starts directly with the main body without mentioning the recipient’s name, the recipient will assume that the sender lacks proper expressive knowledge relevant to email writing.

<sup>7</sup> “saber hablar de acuerdo con la tradición lingüística de una comunidad” (Coseriu 1998, 13)

<sup>8</sup> “wie man kongruent und kohärent spricht” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 224)

## 2.2. Linguistic Judgments

As noted above, expressions can be evaluated from the viewpoint of all three types of knowledge (Coseriu 1985, 1998, 2007[1988]). The continent example above is judged negatively because it deviates from elocutional knowledge. The strangeness rooted in elocutional knowledge is termed “incongruence”. On the other hand, utterances that accord with this knowledge are called “congruent”. For instance, “I boiled the piano” (Coseriu 1985, xxx) is more likely to be regarded as incongruent, while examples that align with our empirical knowledge like “I boiled eggs for breakfast” are fully acceptable, or congruent. At the historical level, expressions can be judged in two ways as well. Sentences such as “He likes reading books” are “correct” manifestations of idiomatic knowledge, whereas “He like reading books” is regarded as “incorrect”, as the absence of the third person singular -s is a deviation from standard English grammar. The individual level also has its own judgment. The above email example is judged negatively for lacking the recipient’s name. Expressions deviating from expressive knowledge are “inappropriate”. On the other hand, a business email which includes the recipient’s name as well as a subject line, the main body, a closing phrase such as “Best regards”, and the sender’s name will normally be regarded as “appropriate”.

What is important here is that judgments at different levels are independent of each other. The sentence “The five continents are four: Europe, Asia and Africa”, for instance, is grammatically correct, but nevertheless incongruent at the universal level. The email message without the recipient’s name is inappropriate even if it is written logically and coherently (i.e., congruently) in correct English.

## 2.3. Linguistic Contents

The three-level distinction also serves to categorize linguistic content: designation (or reference) at the universal level, signification (language-specific meaning) at the historical level, and sense at the individual level (Coseriu 1985, 2007[1988]).

Designation “is the relation to extra-linguistic objects or to the extra-linguistic reality itself, be it a state of affairs or the corresponding content of thought” (Coseriu 1985, xxx). Signification, on the other hand, “is the linguistically-given content in a particular language, the particular form of the possibilities of designation in a given language” (Coseriu 1985, xxx). In discourse, the designation and the signification function as a “textual sign (*Textzeichen*)” (Coseriu 2007[1980], 65), which expresses the text-specific content, or sense: sense is “the particular linguistic content which is expressed by means of designation and meaning [=signification] and which goes beyond

designation and meaning [=signification] in a particular discourse, such as a speaker's attitude, intention, or assumption" (Coseriu 1985, xxx). However, this is a simplified view of sense creation (Tămâianu-Morita 2014). Sense is manufactured not only through a textual sign (designation and signification) but also through other factors like suspension. In fact, Coseriu mentions that one must consider "what the 'building blocks' of the complex unity of sense are and how these building blocks can be put together to form a higher unity of sense" (Coseriu 2007[1980], 165, trans. ours).<sup>9</sup> Thus, sense must be identified by considering a complex unity of suspension, evocation (Coseriu 2007[1980]), etc. as well as designation and signification (see Tămâianu-Morita (2014) for details).

The following table summarizes the key theoretical notions introduced in this section:

**Table 2.** A summary of key theoretical notions

Levels	Knowledge (Competence)	Judgments	Content
Universal	elocutional knowledge	congruent/incongruent	designation
Historical	idiomatic knowledge	correct/incorrect	signification
Individual	expressive knowledge	appropriate/inappropriate	sense

### 3. Proposal

As discussed earlier, product names involving contradiction, or PNCs, sound unique. This uniqueness clearly arises from their incongruence, as deviations from norms tend to be conspicuous in a negative way (cf. Coseriu 2007[1988]). However, closer observation shows that PNCs do not merely serve to grab consumers' attention. The following subsections demonstrate that their uniqueness is also derived from the sense shared among them: <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>.

#### 3.1. The Sense-Creating Mechanism Based on Contradiction

Let us take *nomu-purin* (drink-pudding)<sup>10</sup> as an example to illustrate how the sense of PNCs is related to incongruence. *Nomu-purin* signifies

<sup>9</sup> "welches die 'Bausteine' komplexer Sinneinheiten sind und wie sich diese Bausteine zu höheren Sinneinheiten zusammenfügen lassen" (Coseriu 2007[1980], 165)

<sup>10</sup> This product was developed by *Purin Senmonten Haru Natsu Aki Fuyu*. However, it now appears to be sold as *tenshi-no-nomu-purin* (angel-genitive-drink-pudding) 'Angel's pudding [that one] drinks', where the element *tenshi-no* (angel's) is added in the left-most position to modify *nomu-purin* (<http://www.purin-shop.com/?pid=109554691> (available as of July 6, 2025)). This modification does not affect our discussion, as the contradictory combination between *nomu* and *purin* remains intact.

‘pudding [that one] drinks’. This signification is in contradiction to our elocutional knowledge that pudding is eaten with a spoon, leading to an incongruent judgment.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this incongruence, the expression is immediately accepted once consumers understand its designation. The pudding designated is in a tube-like, not a conventional plastic or glass, container. This unusual form enables it to be consumed by drinking, so that the incongruence is “suspended”, a phenomenon where incongruence (or incorrectness) is accepted in a specific context (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1980], 2007[1988]; for details, see Section 5).<sup>12, 13</sup>

However, the incongruent product name is not merely accepted through its designation; one can also intuit the creator’s intention to give the product such an unusual name, as seen in Coseriu’s assertion that “[t]he essential in the suspension in text lies in recognizing an intentionality, a purpose” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 125, trans. ours).<sup>14</sup> In judging some expression as (in)congruent, one refers to general knowledge of the world. Upon encountering *nomu-purin*, one judges it as incongruent due to its inconsistency with the image of ordinary pudding eaten with a spoon (although this incongruence is suspended, as seen above). In other words, based on Coseriu (2007[1980]), *nomu-purin* “evokes” the conventional way of consuming pudding. This evocation leads consumers to contrast the product’s feature described by the left-hand element (i.e., drinking) with the evoked convention (i.e., eating), which in turn allows them

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<sup>11</sup> What is interesting with respect to incongruence observed in PNCs is the product name *kezura-nai-kakushitsu-kea?* (“scrub-not-keratin-care?”) by Liberta Co., Ltd., meaning ‘keratin care [in which one] does not scrub’. This name includes a question mark, which seems to signal a feeling of contradiction. Typically, keratin care involves removing dead skin cells or hardened areas using a foot file, pumice stone, or exfoliating scrub. The process often includes soaking the skin in warm water to soften it, followed by gentle scrubbing or filing to slough off excess keratin. Given this, keratin care without scrubbing, as suggested by the product name, sounds contradictory. This contradiction is likely represented by the question mark. Incidentally, the product is now sold without the question mark (the version with the question mark can be seen on the following website introducing the exfoliating product: <https://www.dreamnews.jp/press/0000017472/>, (available as of July 9, 2025)). It would be interesting to explore why the question mark was removed from the product name, but it is left for future research.

<sup>12</sup> Notice that the incongruence is not entirely eliminated from the product name, but rather is accepted through appropriateness (cf. Coseriu 2007[1980]). If the incongruence were completely removed, *nomu-purin* would no longer be eye-catching, nor would the sense derived from the incongruence be perceived. The incongruence, though accepted, remains present in the expression and contributes to the sense creation.

<sup>13</sup> Incongruence can also be suspended through correctness. This type of suspension, however, is not relevant to the present analysis and will therefore not be discussed further. For more details, see Coseriu (2007[1988]).

<sup>14</sup> “Das Wesentliche bei der Aufhebung im Text liegt darin, daß man eine Intentionalität, eine Absicht erkennt” (Coseriu 2007[1988], 125).

to notice that drinking is an innovative feature of the product. In fact, a company promoting this product explains on its website (provided in Footnote 3) that it was developed as a new kind of pudding.

However, being innovative is only one aspect of the product in question. The drinking feature would also strike consumers as attractive. In contrast to eating, drinking requires neither a spoon nor any analogous utensil. As the pudding can be consumed directly from the tube with one hand, it can be enjoyed more easily. Some may even imagine that if these tools are not used, the washing process can also be dispensed with. In this way, *nomu-purin* conveys a subtle yet tangible message of ease of consumption, which is likely to appeal to consumers. Indeed, this product is promoted with the description “[...] easy to drink, no spoon needed”.<sup>15, 16</sup>

The discussion thus far shows that the incongruence observed in *nomu-purin* makes a significant contribution to the creation of the sense: <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>. Note that this is a generalized sense shared by all PNCs, and thus the concrete sense of each product name is further specified. In our pudding example, the product is innovative and attractive with respect to its drinkable feature and ease of consumption, respectively.

### **3.2. Additional Examples for the Understanding of the General Property of the PNC Sense**

As mentioned in Section 1, PNCs similar to *nomu-purin* are common in Japan. Interestingly, the product naming under discussion targets not only commercial products, but, for instance, recipe names and promotional phrases (thus, PNCs will be used below as a cover term). This fact indicates that the practice of employing contradiction against elocutional knowledge in product naming represents a form of expressive knowledge in Japanese society. Below, we gain a deeper understanding of this expressive knowledge by analyzing further examples of PNCs.

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<sup>15</sup> The original Japanese is “[...] 手軽に飲めて、スプーンもいらない”. The example is cited from the website referenced in Footnote 3.

<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the linguistic contrast between *nomu* and *taberu* may evoke the absence of a mastication process. For instance, rice is normally paired with the verb *taberu* (*Gohan-o taberu* ‘[I] eat rice’). If one says *Gohan-o nomu* ‘[I] drink rice’, the utterance conveys that the person swallows rice without chewing. When contrasted with *taberu*, the verb with which *purin* normally collocates, *nomu* would imply that the pudding product in question can be consumed easily without the need for mastication. We are grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out the possible linguistic contrast between these two verbs discussed here.

**(i) *Taberu-rāyu* (eat-chili oil)**

*Taberu-rāyu* (e.g., by Moheji) is another, but even more famous, example of food products. This name literally means ‘chili oil [that one] eats’. *Rāyu* is a liquid condiment typically mixed with soy sauce and vinegar and used as a sauce for dumplings (*gyōza*). Since one can never eat ordinary *rāyu*, which is incompatible with the act of mastication evoked by *taberu*, *taberu-rāyu* leads to an incongruent judgment.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, unlike ordinary *rāyu*, *taberu-rāyu*, sold in a small jar, contains various ingredients such as fried garlic, fried onion, etc., which enables it to be eaten directly, for example, as a topping on rice (a typical way of eating it). In this way, referring to the real product results in suspension of the incongruence.

As with *nomu-purin*, the incongruence of *taberu-rāyu* helps convey the PNC sense: <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>. The following quotation from an online news article (especially the underlined part) describes the product’s innovative and attractive features:

[...] Traditionally, ordinary *rāyu* (chili oil) has been a staple condiment used to add an accent to soy sauce or dipping sauces, particularly when eating *gyōza* (dumplings).

By contrast, “*taberu-rāyu*” contains ingredients such as fried garlic and fried onion, and is enjoyed by pouring it over rice or tofu. In addition to the ease with which one can enjoy the spiciness of chili oil, its unexpected feature of “chili oil as a side dish” is thought to have attracted attention and have contributed to its popularity. (emphasis ours)<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the evoked normal way of using *rāyu*—typically as a condiment eaten with dishes like *gyōza*—*taberu-rāyu* is innovative in that it can be enjoyed on its own, as a side dish with rice. In other words, it allows consumers to easily experience the spiciness of *rāyu* without needing to prepare other foods to go with it.

<sup>17</sup> However, *taberu-rāyu* has already been so popular in Japan that the name seems to have been incorporated into Japanese tradition and it may no longer sound contradictory, a point to which this paper returns in Section 4.

<sup>18</sup> <https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/469274?display=b> (available as of July 2, 2025). The original Japanese text is as follows:

“[...]もともとラー油と言えば、ギョウザなどを食べるときにアクセントとして、しょうゆやタレに垂らして食べるのが定番の調味料でした。一方の「食べるラー油」には、フライドガーリックやフライドオニオンなどの具材が入っており、ごはんや豆腐にかけて食べるという楽しみ方です。ラー油の刺激を手軽に味わえることに加え、「ラー油がおかずになる」という意外性も話題となり、人気になったと考えられます。”

**(ii) *Kiru-mōfu* (wear-blanket)**

An item classified into living wares can also be named with reference to the expressive knowledge concerning PNCs. Take as an instance *kiru-mōfu* (by Nitori Co., Ltd.),<sup>19</sup> whose right-hand element *mōfu* is modified by the prenominal form of the verb *kiru*. This item means 'a blanket [that one] wears', which deviates from our experience, as a blanket, especially Japanese *mōfu*, is normally used to cover oneself while sleeping, not to be worn like clothes. For this reason, *kiru-mōfu* is judged incongruent, but it is suspended through its designation: one can actually wear the blanket designated because its form is like a full-length coat.

Extracting the incongruent judgment from consumers, the name evokes the conventional way of using blankets, emphasizing its innovative feature: wearing. This innovative feature also appeals to consumers. In fact, the company promoting *kiru-mōfu* advertises it as follows: "The appeal [of this product] is that [it] lets you move around freely while staying wrapped in the warmth of a blanket" (trans. ours).<sup>20</sup> The sensation of being enveloped in a warm blanket while sleeping is truly exceptional. Allowing consumers to experience the same feeling while awake—and, moreover, to move around freely while wearing it—can justifiably be described as both innovative and attractive.

**(iii) *Haru-tansan* (apply-carbonic acid)**

This product is a cold compress that is applied to the legs. The foaming agent contained in the compress releases carbonic acid, which is said to provide a refreshing sensation to the legs.

Its official name is *haru-tansan-jieru-pakku* (apply-carbonic acid-gel-patch) 'gel patch with carbonic acid' (by Kao Corporation),<sup>21</sup> but on its package, *haru-tansan*, literally meaning 'carbonic acid [which one] applies', is emphasized with much larger letters, so that consumers are likely to notice this phrase first. Of particular interest is that this product was once sold under a different name: *tansan-de yawaraka ashi-pakku* (carbonic acid-with flexible foot-patch) 'a foot patch [that makes your foot] flexible with carbonic acid'.<sup>22</sup> The original name

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<sup>19</sup> See the following website for the product information:

[https://www.nitori-net.jp/ec/cat/Roomwear/BlanketWears/1/?srsltid=AfmBOop0ssbllRAbfxR6xHP5PiTIzudWMdb6B7BVZdBiqiEdEPLDYFN\\_](https://www.nitori-net.jp/ec/cat/Roomwear/BlanketWears/1/?srsltid=AfmBOop0ssbllRAbfxR6xHP5PiTIzudWMdb6B7BVZdBiqiEdEPLDYFN_) (available as of May 5, 2025)

<sup>20</sup> "毛布にくるまった暖かさのまま、自由に動き回れるのが魅力です。" (cited from the website referenced in Footnote 19)

<sup>21</sup> The English translation is taken from the company's website:

<https://www.kao-kirei.com/jp/en/item/khg/megrhythm/4901301376954/?tw=khg> (available as of June 12, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> The former version can be accessed on the website cited in Footnote 21.

gives the product a descriptive characterization which makes it easier to understand, if not perfectly congruent (because one might wonder how carbonic acid is used as an ingredient in a compress).

The name *haru-tansan* may be somewhat more confusing than the former version. For Japanese people, the noun *tansan* most often brings to mind a carbonated beverage, such as sparkling water or soda. Given this, the name *haru-tansan* should feel strange to consumers: how can *tansan* be applied to their legs? However, once they see the rest of the name, i.e., *jieru-pakku* ‘gel patch’, and the product designated, consumers find that carbonic acid is a significant ingredient of gel patch and can thus be applied to the legs in the form of cold compress. As a result, the incongruence is suspended.

Given the conventional images evoked by *tansan*, the name *haru-tansan* reminds consumers of the refreshing sensation of drinking a carbonated beverage (in fact, the package depicts bubbles reminiscent of a fizzy drink), as described on the company’s website: “The only one in Japan! Gel patch with cooling sensation packed with plenty of carbonic acid (foaming agent). Once applied, the refreshing feel lasts for about 6 hours. The comfortable feel spreads gently. Feel refreshed and light even after walking a lot. [...]”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the application of carbonic acid to the legs is confirmed as the product’s innovative and attractive features.

#### (iv) *Kone-nai-hanbāgu* (knead-not-Hamburg steak)

The expressive knowledge under discussion can be referenced, as mentioned above, not only in naming commercial products, but also, for instance, in recipes (although these, especially those published online or in books, can be considered commercial, as they are expected to attract a large audience). Such recipe names also demonstrate the PNC sense. Let us consider *kone-nai-hanbāgu*, meaning ‘Hamburg steak (which is made) without kneading’.<sup>24</sup> The Japanese *hanbāgu* refers to a seasoned ground beef patty in which kneading is a key cooking step. This empirical knowledge tells us that *hanbāgu* made without kneading sounds blatantly contradictory. Despite this, people recognize the congruency of the recipe name if they see, on the website, how the Hamburg steak is cooked without kneading.

The incongruent recipe name evokes the conventional cooking process, and those with cooking experience may find that making a seasoned ground beef patty from scratch requires some effort, particularly when it comes to mixing. Thus, the recipe’s hassle-free feature (i.e., without kneading) appears innovative and appealing to those planning meals. The attractive feature is emphasized on

<sup>23</sup> This citation is from the website cited in Footnote 21.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nhk.jp/p/asaichi/ts/KV93JMQR8/recipe/te/779N2277Z1/rp/1000002319/> (available as of May 7, 2025)

the website featuring the recipe: “You can make a juicy, meaty hamburger steak without the hassle of kneading!” (trans. ours).<sup>25</sup>

**(v) *Yomu-bunpōsho* (read-grammar book)**

*Yomu-bunpōsho* serves not as a product name itself, but as a promotional phrase (catchy tagline) for a book, specifically, *Chūkyū Doitsugo-no Shikumi* (The Mechanism of German: Intermediate) (T. Seino, 2008, Hakusuisha). In Japan, books often have a paper band (called *obi*) wrapped around the book cover, containing promotional phrases. *Yomu-bunpōsho* functions as such a phrase for this German grammar book. This phrase is printed on the spine side of the paper band, helping to attract readers’ attention, especially when the book is displayed upright on a bookstore shelf.

According to our world knowledge, a grammar book is divided into grammatical topics, and users typically consult on a specific topic, although some may read through the entire book. In this sense, *yomu-bunpōsho*, meaning ‘[a] grammar book [that one] reads’, is not fully compatible with our elocutional knowledge. However, when looking into the book, readers will notice that a wide range of topics are covered, such as subject and predicate, gender and number, the function of the genitive case, the usage of *in*, etc.; each topic is given a brief but useful explanation in two pages. This organization leads one to *read* these two pages to understand one topic. Thus, the seemingly contradictory phrase *yomu-bunpōsho* turns out to be congruent.

As with the previous examples, this contradiction triggers the PNC sense. Specifically, *yomu-bunpōsho*, printed on the spine side of the paper band, evokes the conventional way of using a grammar book, namely, *hiku* (consult, look up) or *sanshō suru* (refer to). Contrary to simply referring, reading encourages users to gain a more comprehensive understanding. The innovative character of this grammar book (i.e., reading) suggests its appeal in that it helps users deepen their understanding of German. This book’s innovative and appealing quality is highlighted on the front of the band: “[...] for those who want to go further [in their understanding of German], [this book] reveals thought patterns in German that ordinary grammar books rarely touch upon”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “こねる手間いらずで、肉感たっぷりのジューシーなハンバーグに仕上がります！” (cited from the website referenced in Footnote 24)

<sup>26</sup> The original Japanese is as follows: “[...]さらなる一歩を目指す人のために、ふつうの文法書では触れられないドイツ語の考え方を伝授します”.

## 4. *Taberu-rāyu* as a Basis for Similar PNCs

### 4.1. *Simple Evocation of Taberu-rāyu*

As discussed in the previous section, the expressive knowledge underlying PNCs (including recipe names and taglines) is often referenced in Japanese society. Some of these names remain unique to individual products, but others move beyond ad hoc usage. As Coseriu (1985, xxviii) notes, “what is produced within a particular language as such either remains a unique ‘text fragment’ (hapax) or is taken over as part of the linguistic knowledge of a community to be continued as a new tradition”. It is possible that product names, too, are adopted by speakers and become part of the Japanese lexicon, or idiomatic knowledge (probably as “norm”, not “system” (Coseriu 1973a)). In this respect, *taberu-rāyu* is particularly noteworthy.

*Taberu-rāyu* became a nationwide sensation around 2010 and has since become common in Japan (see the website referenced in footnote 18 for the product’s history). This product has had a notable impact on subsequent products, such as *taberu-orību oiru* (eat-olive oil) ‘olive oil [that one] eats’ (by Odawaraya) and *taberu-dashi jōyu* (eat-dashi soy sauce) ‘soy sauce with dashi broth [that one] eats’ (by Shinmarusho Corporation), to name a few. These product names are likely to evoke *taberu-rāyu*, giving the impression that they were created by replacing *rāyu* (the right-hand element of the original name) with *orību oiru* or *dashi jōyu*. In fact, they share similar innovative and appealing features with *taberu-rāyu*: *taberu-orību oiru* (eat-olive oil) and *taberu-dashi jōyu* (eat-dashi soy sauce), both sold in small jars, are innovative in that, although olive oil and soy sauce are typically liquid seasonings, they can be eaten exactly because of the generous inclusion of solid ingredients, and they are attractive for their ease of use as toppings or side dishes. This strongly suggests that *taberu-rāyu* has been incorporated into Japanese tradition, or idiomatic knowledge, at times serving as “idiomatic context” (Coseriu 1973b) for the creation and interpretation of other PNCs.

### 4.2. *Evocation of Taberu-rāyu with Another Type of Incongruence*

While some product names like those given above can be readily interpreted by simple analogy with *taberu-rāyu*, others require greater effort to interpret and accept. For example, *taberu, sukiyaki* (eat, sukiyaki) (by Kuze Fuku & Co.) depends entirely on knowledge of *taberu-rāyu* (see below for discussion of the comma between *taberu* and *sukiyaki*). Without awareness of the *rāyu* product, it would be difficult to suspend the incongruence of *taberu, sukiyai*.

*Taberu, sukiyaki* sounds odd, but for a reason different from *taberu-rāyu*. In contrast to *taberu-rāyu* and other PNCs, this product name causes no feeling of contradiction. *Sukiyaki* is a Japanese dish of beef and vegetables cooked in a pot; it is too obvious that one eats *sukiyaki*. This obviousness produces another form of incongruence: being less informative. As Coseriu (2007[1988], 96) puts it, we do not usually state what is already known from our general knowledge of things. From an elocutional perspective, the modification of *sukiyaki* with *taberu* (eat) should be avoided. That is why *taberu, sukiyaki* is incongruent.

However, this incongruence can be suspended if (and perhaps only if) one notices the evocative connection with *taberu-rāyu*. The *taberu, sukiyaki* product is sold in a jar. Unlike ordinary *sukiyaki*, its ingredients are finely chopped and simmered until they are soft and melty, allowing the product to be eaten over rice or other dishes. These characteristics and the product name strongly evoke *taberu-rāyu*. Although *taberu, sukiyaki* itself is not contradictory, this evocation becomes a cue to the innovativeness and appeal of PNCs like *taberu-rāyu*: the suggestion that the innovative form of *taberu, sukiyaki* allows consumers to enjoy *sukiyaki* without the need to cook the ingredients in a pot over a heat, thus making it more convenient and appealing.

Furthermore, unlike the previous PNCs, this product name includes a comma between *taberu* and *sukiyaki*. While the comma may serve multiple functions, we assume that it helps highlight the evocative link of *taberu, sukiyaki* with *taberu-rāyu*. As noted above, certain products appear to be named by replacing *rāyu* in *taberu-rāyu* with other elements, as in *taberu-orību oiru* and *taberu-dashi jōyu*. This replaceable feature of *rāyu* may be signaled by the comma: it breaks the morphological bond between *taberu* and the presumed right-hand element *rāyu*, thereby making the latter element replaceable with another element. In other words, the comma may imply—especially to those familiar with product names like *taberu-orību oiru*—that *taberu, sukiyaki* was created by replacing *rāyu*.

If one notices this evocative association with *taberu-rāyu* based on such clues as argued above, the incongruence is suspended, and the intended sense becomes interpretable; otherwise, *taberu, sukiyaki* may remain opaque or confusing.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, one can find a similar *sukiyaki* product named in a contradictory way: *kakeru-sukiyaki* ('pour-sukiyaki')—that is, 'sukiyaki [that one] pours' (by Shinmarusho Corporation). *Sukiyaki* is not typically eaten by pouring it over rice; rather, it is cooked in a pot and eaten directly from it, or divided onto individual plates before eating. Thus, the name diverges from common culinary expectations. However, this deviation in *kakeru-sukiyaki* is 'more' easily accepted than that of *taberu, sukiyaki*, because the expressive knowledge concerning PNCs

### 4.3. Strengthening of the PNC Sense by Means of Incorrectness

It can be assumed that, as a PNC becomes established in Japanese, it gradually loses its feeling of contradiction and, consequently, its innovative and attractive qualities. As argued above, *taberu-rāyu* is now highly recognized and is a regular part of the Japanese lexicon, so that even people familiar with ordinary *rāyu* (i.e., a liquid condiment drizzled on foods) are less likely to pay attention to the product's innovative and attractive features (although, as discussed in Section 3, careful thought can revive the contrast with a normal usage of *rāyu*). In this situation, however, some seek to revive the weakened impact by introducing another expressive strategy that creates unnaturalness. Examples include *meccha-taberu-rāyu* (a lot-eat-chili oil) (by Kenchan Farm) and *taberu-rāyu-to-kakinotane* (eat-chili oil and kakinotane snack) (by Niigataken Kanko Bussan).<sup>28</sup>

Both products feature *taberu-rāyu* in their names and contain various ingredients, just as regular *taberu-rāyu* does. In this respect, they preserve the original sense of *taberu-rāyu* (i.e., an innovative *rāyu* product with ease of consumption). On the other hand, they are supplemented with extra elements which serve to make their names novel: *meccha* (a lot) and *to-kakinotane* (and kakinotane snack).

Japanese has a morpho-syntactic rule called the *Lexical Integrity Principle* (LIP) (see Kageyama 2016), which can be regarded as part of idiomatic knowledge. The LIP forbids syntactic operations within a lexical unit (cf. Anderson 1992). For example, *kōkyū-hoteru* (high class-hotel) is a compound constituting a lexical unit. Modifying only *kōkyū* with *taihen* (very) from outside the lexical unit creates the incorrect compound \**taihen [kōkyū-hoteru]* (very [high class-hotel]) (Kageyama 2016, 491), where the bracketed portion is intended to function as a compound word.

*Taberu-rāyu* is a compound in which *rāyu* is modified by the prenominal form of the verb *taberu* (Chika and Sumide 2025). Being a fixed lexical unit, it should not undergo any syntactic operations. Thus, *meccha-taberu-rāyu* (a lot-eat-chili oil), meaning ‘chili oil [that one] eats a lot’, violates the LIP, as the adverb *meccha* modifies *taberu* (i.e., *meccha [taberu-rāyu]*). Similarly, *taberu-rāyu-to-kakinotane* (eat-chili oil-and-kakinotane snack), meaning ‘chili oil and kakinotane snack [that one] eats’ (in other words, the *taberu-rāyu* product

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helps us interpret the former, whereas the latter requires not only such knowledge but also the evocation of *taberu-rāyu*.

<sup>28</sup> *Kakinotane* is a Japanese snack that has a slightly spicy soy sauce flavor and is shaped like persimmon seeds.

which contains *kakinotane* snacks as its main ingredient), includes the conjunction *to* coordinating *rāyu* and *kakinotane* (i.e., [*taberu-rāyu*]-*to-kakinotane*), violating the LIP again. Why, then, can these product names exist despite their incorrectness?

Ikarashi and Naya (2021), though focusing on Japanese noun-noun compounds, show that LIP violations are permitted if contextually justified (the suspension of incorrectness). Their analysis predicts that reasonable motivations should exist for these *rāyu* compounds as well if their strangeness is accepted.

The incorrect phrase *meccha-taberu* 'eats a lot (of this product)' is motivated by the intention that this *taberu-rāyu* is so delicious that one ends up eating a lot and just cannot stop. To put it differently, the incorrect modification is justified by appealing to its extremely pleasant taste, which enhances the product's attractiveness. The incorrect coordination observed in *taberu-rāyu-to-kakinotane* is justified by its heightened sense of innovativeness. *Kakinotane* snacks are not a typical ingredient: *rāyu* and *kakinotane* form an unexpected combination. The incorrect coordination (i.e., *rāyu-to-kakinotane*) draws attention to this innovative ingredient. In this way, both incorrect product names are motivated by the intention to strengthen the PNC sense, which in turn revives the weakened impact of the original product name, accompanied by a new attractive or innovative feature.

## 5. Suspension in Discourse: A Fourth Type

### 5.1. Suspension through Designation

As noted in the first section, Coseriu (2001 [1976], 2007 [1988]) distinguishes three types of suspension in discourse: metaphorical, metalinguistic, and extravagant. Metaphorical suspension takes place, for example, when someone says *Kare-wa sakana da* 'He is a fish' upon seeing a person swim very fast. Since he is not literally a fish, the sentence is incongruent. Nevertheless, it can be accepted as a metaphor: *sakana* 'fish' symbolically expresses very high speed; thus, the utterance conveys a metaphorically congruent message 'he swims too fast'.

Metalinguistic suspension, on the other hand, typically occurs when quoting someone's incongruent utterance. Suppose Person A says, "One minute is 70 seconds". According to our general knowledge, one minute is 60 seconds, so the utterance is incongruent. However, when reporting this to someone else, the reporter must maintain the incongruence; otherwise, the report will fail. In other words, incongruence is metalinguistically suspended in quotation.

Lastly, extravagant suspension is observed, for example, in jokes and puns, such as *Kondoru-ga* (condor-nominative) *jūmen-ni* (ground-dative) *merikondoru*

(get buried) ‘A condor slams into the ground and is buried half-way’, where the bird *kondoru* ‘condor’ sounds like the underlined part of *merikondoru* ‘to get buried’, signaling a joke. In this Japanese joke, the absurdity is intentionally asserted for humorous effect.

On the other hand, the PNCs addressed in this paper do not seem to fit into any of these three types of suspension. *Nomu-purin*, for example, refers to a kind of pudding, and thus, no metaphors are involved (see also Section 5.2). Nor is it a metalinguistic quotation. Absurdity is not relevant to *nomu-purin*, as the pudding it designates is actually drinkable. Rather, upon encountering *nomu-purin*, one is presented with a new reality: the pudding can be consumed without a spoon. This is an unexpected reality from the perspective of our existing world knowledge. However, the designation of such a product name is directed toward altering our elocutional knowledge, that is, consumers’ assumptions regarding how pudding is consumed; they see that the pudding is packaged in a tube-like container, which allows it to be drunk. The incongruence is accordingly suspended, even though the new reality still contradicts our normal understanding of the world (i.e., pudding is eaten with a spoon). If this analysis is valid, PNCs could be classified under a fourth type of suspension in discourse.

### 5.2. Distinction from Product Names Superficially Similar to PNCs

Our insight into the type of suspension involved in PNCs allows us to distinguish them from other types of contradictory product names. Consider *nomu-masuku* (drink-mask) ‘a mask [that one] drinks’ (Chika and Sumide 2025) as an example.<sup>29</sup> *Nomu-masuku* does not refer to a kind of mask, but to plant extracts that are expected to work like films which help prevent viruses from multiplying in the throat by covering the throat surface. *Nomu-masuku* is similar to examples like *nomu-purin* (drink-pudding) in that it causes a feeling of contradiction: nobody drinks a mask, which is used to cover the mouth and nose. Thus, one might assume that *nomu-masuku* is a PNC with the same sense as *nomu-purin*. In fact, Chika and Sumide (2025) classify *taberu-rāyu* and *nomu-masuku* in the same category of compounds (although they note that *taberu-rāyu* and *nomu-masuku* may show different characteristics (Chika and Sumide 2025, fn. 5)).

However, considering the types of suspension, the similarity turns out to be superficial. *Nomu-masuku* is not a name of a mask product, but of plant extracts. *Masuku*, as Chika and Sumide (2025) point out, metaphorically refers

<sup>29</sup> Chika and Sumide (2025) introduce and analyze a number of similar examples. The original example cited in the text is from the following website:

<https://www.medicalherb.or.jp/archives/164864> (available as of June 17, 2025)

to plant extracts believed to protect against viruses, like a mask. In other words, *nomu-masuku* involves metaphorical suspension. Its sense is naturally dependent on the symbolic value of the mask, namely something like <if you drink this plant extract, it works like a mask which protects against viruses> (cf. Chika and Sumide 2025). By contrast, *nomu-purin* is a kind of pudding; no metaphor is involved. *Nomu-purin*, as previously discussed, leads consumers to discover an innovative pudding product, and to associate its innovation with the attractive feature of being easy to consume without a spoon.

As clarified in this section, identifying the suspension involved in PNCs as a fourth type provides a principled account for distinguishing them from product names that, though superficially similar, differ fundamentally in their sense-creation process.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has proposed, through an analysis of product names that cause a feeling of contradiction, that there exists a type of expressive knowledge in the Japanese community that can be referenced to create the sense <the product designated is an innovative and attractive offering for consumers>. It has also shown that, once such a product name becomes established in the language as part of idiomatic knowledge, it can work as a basis for naming other products. Moreover, the analysis has suggested that these product names could be classified as a fourth type of suspension in discourse, which represents a theoretical contribution arising from this analysis.

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