

Background of Some Japanese Expressions about Food

(1) “*Fuwa-Fuwa*” and “*Mattari*”

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Summary

The Japanese language has numerous expressions about food properties. This is due to a lot of onomatopoeic words and when they describe food, such as “*fukkura* (fluffy),” “*toro-toro* (smooth and viscous),” etc. In fact, according to our data, about 70% of Japanese texture terms turned out to be onomatopoeic words. The Japanese also use abstract expressions, such as “*fukami* (depth),” “*hirogari* (expanse),” etc.

Language is a symbol of culture. Thus, food descriptive words not only describe food properties, but also suggest what society and culture are like. In this article, I would like to explain a little about the historical, cultural and social background of some Japanese descriptive words of food.

“*Fuwa-fuwa*” is an expression of a state of being very light, extremely soft and fluffy and describes the texture of omelets, marshmallows, cotton candies etc. The origin of the words is “*fu-ha* (a curtain rippling in the window)” seen in *Kojiki* (the oldest Japanese historical book written in the 8th century). In the Edo Era (the 17th-19th century), soft scrambled egg named “*fuwa-fuwa*” was eaten. Edo people as well as modern people most likely enjoyed *fuwa-fuwa*-texture.

“*Mattari*” is an expression of food texture and flavor. Young people in Tokyo use it as a vogue-world referring to a sticky and/or thick texture, mild and/or rich flavor of custard cream, fresh acream, etc. The origin of the word is “*matai* (perfect),” and in the Heian Era (the 8th-12th century) “*mattari*” was used among people in the Imperial Palace, which meant well-balanced flavor. It still lives in Kyoto as a dialectic word and the elderly people in Kyoto use it when they admire delicacy. However, our survey revealed that the young people in Kyoto use “*mattari*” as a vogue-word as those in Tokyo do. The change in this expression in Kyoto has probably been brought about by mass media.