

Honorifics in Japanese and Korean Picture Books: Comparing the Speech Levels between Japanese Originals and their Korean Translations

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Abstract

It is well known that both Japanese and Korean have various speech levels that occur at the end of sentences. Also, the ways they are used in conversations are very similar; a speaker should choose the appropriate level depending on the situation and the interlocutor. Regarding honorifics, a lot of research has been conducted focusing on the similarities and differences between Japanese and Korean. Less research, however, has focused on younger speakers or listeners such as toddlers or kindergarteners. The present study aims to clarify the differences in the use of honorifics (non-honorifics) by young speakers in discourses in Japanese and Korean. I analyzed the speech levels in four Japanese original picture books and their Korean translated counterparts targeting zero to seven-year-olds, since there may be differences between Korean and Japanese society in regard to the timing of learning or using honorifics. The results show that speech levels differed from the original versions in many narrations and conversations in the Korean versions. For example, deferential forms were added to the Korean versions, though they were not present in the original Japanese versions. I discuss the reasons linguistically, socio-linguistically, and culturally.

1. Introduction

After Japanese picture books were translated into Korean and published in Korea for the first time in 1988, the picture book genre became very popular in Korea (Park, 2018). Japan and Korea have much in common, e.g. the majority of Japanese and Korean people share the same hair and eye color. These similarities allowed Japanese picture books to be published in Korea easily (Ko, 2011). According to data from the Korean Publishers Association in 2015, Japanese children's literature is ranked as the second-most pub-

lished genre of foreign books in Korea.¹⁾

In addition, Japanese and Korean are regarded as very similar languages with respect to grammatical structure and honorifics. Both Japanese and Korean have honorific systems and the ways they are used in discourse are very similar. Table 1 represents the speech levels in Japanese and Korean.

Table 1. Speech levels in Japanese and Korean

	Japanese	Korean
Plain ²⁾	au 会う ³⁾	manna 만나 ⁴⁾
Deferential ⁵⁾	aimasu 会います	mannayo 만나요
		mannapnita 만납니다

For Japanese, there is one plain (non-honorific) and one deferential (honorific) form, respectively. For Korean, there is one plain form and two deferential forms. There are indeed officially six speech levels in Korean, but the majority of younger speakers use only three different speech forms (Brown, 2010) as shown in Table 1. As mentioned above, both Japanese and Korean speakers should choose between the plain form and deferential form at the end of the sentence. The plain form would be chosen by older, high status, or non-intimate speakers depending on the situation. In contrast, speakers who are younger, low status, or intimate would choose the deferential forms.

Since the honorific systems and honorific behavior of Japanese and Korean are very similar, it has been assumed that usually one language is translated into the other by using the same speech levels in novels and movies. However, it is easy to find instances where the speech levels are translated

1) http://member.kpa21.or.kr/kpa_bbs/2015년-출판통계; 1374 foreign children's books translated in Korea in 2015. 205 books (15%) are Japanese.

2) The term 'plain' form is usually used when distinguishing Japanese speech levels as opposite of '*masu*' form. I found alternate terms in many research papers used instead of 'plain' such as non-polite, non-honorifics, or intimate. The term 'plain' is used in the present paper.

3) 'to meet' in Japanese.

4) 'to meet' in Korean.

5) 'deferential' is used in this study instead of polite or '*masu*' form.

differently (Choi, 2013) even in picture books. For example, the Japanese plain form is translated into Korean as deferential forms and vice versa.

2. Previous Studies

Fujimoto (2012) analyzed ten original Japanese picture books and their Korean translated counterparts focusing on cultural differences of linguistic expressions. For example, in Japanese children's books, animals are usually mentioned as animal-*san*, e. g. *usagisan*, 'Mr./Ms. Rabbit', however, *-san* was deleted in the Korean version, because adding an equivalent linguistic expression in Korean would be unfamiliar to children in Korea (Fujimoto, 2012: 11).

Fujimoto (2012) also pointed out that the Japanese original non-polite (plain in this study) form tends to be translated into polite (deferential in this study) forms in Korean and its usage is manifested in the cultural differences in Japan and Korea (Fujimoto, 2012: 53).

Studies regarding Japanese and Korean picture books have been conducted in the field of literature translation in Korea. Sung (2013), for example, compared characters' names between Japanese original picture books and their Korean translations, and also English original picture books and their Korean translations, and found that the former are often translated into Korean names while the latter remain in the original English names. Sung (2013: 113) pointed out that it reflects adults' ideology: an aversion to Japanese names by Korean adults in picture book translations.

Kim (2016) analyzed how the original titles of Japanese picture books were translated into Korean. Kim (2016) found that the original Japanese titles were translated in a variety of ways, literally and freely translated, and argued that translators strived to accurately improve the readability in the translations, interpreting the authors' intentions and descriptions even though their attempts sometimes led to mistranslations (Kim, 2016: 388).

Most studies on original Japanese books and their Korean translated counterparts have focused on the cultural differences in translation rather than on the linguistic ones. In the present study, therefore, the use of honorifics will be examined by comparing the Japanese original picture books and the Korean translated versions.

3. Methods

In order to clarify the differences in terms of usage of honorifics between Japanese and Korean, I collected four original Japanese books and their Korean translated counterparts. Table 2 shows the titles, authors, translators, publishers, and published year of the four picture books in Japan and Korea.

Table 2. List of books analyzed

	Title ⁶⁾	Author	Publisher (Published Year)		Translator	
			Japan	Korea		
1	<i>Apple</i> ⁷⁾	Hiroshi Tada	Bunken Shuppan (1975)	Borim (1996)	Gun Jeong	
2	<i>Moon</i> ⁸⁾	Akiko Hayashi	Fukuinkan Shoten (1986)	Hollym (1988)	Yeongjun Lee	
3	<i>Balloon</i>	Komako Sakai	Hakusensha (2003)	Woongjin (2007)	Hyangok Ko	
4	<i>Acorn</i>	Miwa Nakaya	Gakken (2013)	Woongjin (2014)	Nanju Kim	

6) I shortened the titles. The original titles are as follows.

Apple: りんごがドスン [Apple falls] / 사과가 쿵 [Apple falls]

Moon: おつきさまこんばんは [Good evening, Mr. Moon] / 달님 안녕 [Good evening, Mr. Moon]

Balloon: ロンパーちゃんとふうせん [Romper and balloon] / 노란 풍선 [Yellow balloon]

Acorn:どんぐりむらのどんぐりえん [acorn kindergarten in acorn village] / 도토리 마을의 유치원 [acorn kindergarten in acorn village]

7) *Apple* is the highest selling Japanese picture book in Korea (Park, 2018).

8) *Moon* was the first Japanese picture book published in Korea (Park, 2018).

All the original Japanese picture books were written by different authors (*Apple*: male/*Moon*, *Balloon*, and *Acorn*: female) and published in different years (1975–2012) by different publishers. Their Korean versions were all translated by different translators (*Apple* and *Moon*; male, *Balloon* and *Acorn*; female), and published in different years (1988–2014) by different publishers except *Balloon* and *Acorn*. *Apple* and *Moon* are targeting children aged 0 to 3, and *Balloon* and *Acorn* are targeting children aged 4 to 7.⁹⁾ *Apple* and *Moon* mainly consist of narrations while *Balloon* and *Acorn* include not only narrations but conversations between obvious characters; *Balloon* mainly between a boy and his mom, *Acorn* mainly between some kindergarteners and their teachers. I divided the books into two categories depending on the targeting ages and analyzed, quantitatively, all the utterances in both Japanese and Korean picture books focusing on speech level. In addition to quantitative analysis, I also conducted a qualitative analysis of several issues, such as address terms and the type of sentences.

4. Results and Discussion

By analyzing the speech level of all the sentences, I found that sentences in the plain form are used only in the original Japanese versions of *Apple* and *Moon* targeting children aged 0 to 3, and those were translated into Korean as plain forms and deferential forms depending on the situation. For the picture books targeting children aged 4 to 7, *Balloon* and *Acorn*, both deferential and plain forms are used in the original Japanese versions and Korean translated versions.

4.1. *Apple* and *Moon* (Targeting ages 0 to 3)

Table 3 indicates the instances of speech levels in *Apple* and *Moon*. They target children aged 0 to 3 and each book had less than 24 sentences. In *Apple* and *Moon*, no deferential forms were used in the original Japanese version, while two sentences in *Apple* and nine sentences in *Moon* were translated into deferential forms in the Korean version.

The story of *Apple* is that animals found a big apple and ate it while

9) Targeted ages were found at the online bookstore 'aladin' in Korea. <https://www.aladin.co.kr>

Table 3. Instances of speech levels in Apple and Moon

	Deferential		Plain		Undefined ¹⁰⁾		Total	
	J	K	J	K	J	K	J	K
<i>Apple</i>	0	2	20	18	0	0	20	20
<i>Moon</i>	0	9	14	10	5	0	19	19

*Unit: utterance

describing the taste. It is ambiguous who the speaker and the listener are in this story. The original Japanese version of *Apple* consists of twenty sentences, including ten onomatopoeias, and the remaining sentences are in the plain form. Basically, the sentences in the original Japanese book are also translated into plain forms in the Korean version, however, the two plain form sentences were translated into deferential forms in Korean as shown in (J1), (K1), (J2), and (K2).

(J1) is an idiomatic expression which is said after having a meal and is hard to translate into English. Korean has the same idiomatic expression and is used the same way as (J1), so it can be translated easily to into Korean (K1). In terms of speech level, however, (J1) and (K1) are different: (J1) is a plain form while (K1) is a deferential form *-(su)pnita*, which is a polite/formal speech level in Korean.

[After all the animals finished eating the big apple.]

(J1) *gochisoo-sama* [plain]

Banquet-AH¹¹⁾

‘That was a nice meal’

10) There are some utterances which are hard to determine whether they are deferential or plain in Japanese, for example, a greeting expression “Konbanwa (Good evening)” because it can be used toward to older, same-aged, and younger interlocutors.

11) In this paper, the following abbreviations are used: AH (address honorific suffix), DEC (declarative), EXH (exhortative), HON (honorifics), IMP (imperative), NEG (negative), NOM (nominative), PAST (past), POSS (possessive).

(K1) *cal mek-ess-supnita* [deferential]

well eat-PAST-DEC

'I enjoyed my meal'

Later in the story, it starts raining right after the animals finished eating the big apple but they figure out that they can stay under the eaten apple to avoid getting wet.

[It starts raining after the animals finished eating the big apple.]

(J2) *demo daijoobu* [plain]

but ok

'But it's OK'

(K2) *haciman kekceng eps-eyo* [deferential]

but worry do not exist-DEC

'There's nothing to worry about'

(J2) is said but it is not clear who said it: the animals or the narrator. The literal translation of (J2) would be '*haciman kwaynchanha* (but it's OK)' in Korean. However, the translator translated it freely and used the deferential *-e/ayo* form like (K2) even though the plain form is used in the original Japanese.

Moon is a story about a speaker or some speakers; it is not clear who are the speakers and how many of them exist. They are waiting for the moon to rise and they talk to the moon when it finally appears. Except five undefined utterances such as '*Konbanwa* (Good evening)', the rest of the 14 sentences are plain forms in the original Japanese version. However, the Korean version of *Moon* has nine deferential forms and ten plain forms. Table 4 shows different speech levels between the Japanese and Korean versions of *Moon*.

Except # 6 and # 9, which are undefined, all of the Japanese utterances are plain forms in table 4. All of these were translated into Korean using deferential forms. It is not clear who the speaker or the listener is in # 1 and # 2. From # 3 to # 8 'Mr. Cloud' is spoken to by an undefined speaker. The

Table 4. Different speech levels between Japanese and Korean in *Moon*

No	Japanese / Korean
1	<i>hora o-sora-ga kurai kurai</i> look HON-sky-NOM dark dark 'Look, the sky is really dark.'
	<i>pwa-yo hanul-i kkamkkamhaycye-ss-eyo</i> Look-EXH sky-NOM become dark-PAST-DEC 'Look, the sky became dark.'
2	<i>o-tsuki-sama-da</i> HON-moon-AH-DEC 'It's Mr. Moon.'
	<i>yaa! tal-nim-i tt-ess-eyo</i> oh moon-AH-NOM rise-PAST-DEC 'Yay! Mr. Moon has risen.'
3	<i>dame dame kumo-san</i> no no cloud-AH 'No, no, Mr. Cloud.'
	<i>kwulum accessi! an tw-ayyo</i> cloud Mr. no-DEC 'Mr. Cloud! No!'
4	<i>ko-nai-de ko-nai-de</i> come-NEG-IMP come-NEG-IMP 'Don't come, don't come.'
	<i>nao-myen an tw-ayyo</i> come out-if no-DEC 'Don't come out.'
5	<i>o-tsuki-sama-ga nai-chau</i> HON-moon-AH-NOM cry-begin 'Mr. Moon will cry.'
	<i>tal-nim-i wu-nikka-yo</i> moon-AH-NOM cry-because-DEC 'Because Mr. Moon cries.'
6	<i>mata kondo</i> again next.time 'See you.'
	<i>tto manna-yo</i> again see-EXH 'See you.'

7	<i>kumo-san doi-te</i> cloud-AH move-IMP 'Mr. Cloud, move.'
	<i>kwulum accessi pik-hye cwu-seyyo</i> cloud Mr. move-and give-DEC 'Mr. Cloud, please move.'
8	<i>o-tsuki-sama-no kao-ga mi-e-nai</i> HON-moon-AH-POSS face-NOM see-ABLE-NEG 'I can't see Mr. Moon's face.'
	<i>tal-nim elkwul-i an poy-eyo</i> moon-AH face-NOM no see-DEC 'I can't see Mr. Moon's face.'
9	<i>Konbanwa</i> Good.evening 'Good evening.'
	<i>annyenghaseyyo</i> good evening 'Good evening.'

speaker also uses deferential forms toward Mr. Cloud in the Korean translation.

In # 3 and # 7, the speaker addresses Mr. Cloud by using *-san* in Japanese. Japanese *-san* can be translated in many ways into Korean, but the translator used '*accessi* (Mr.)' which can be translated as '*ojisan* (Mr.)' in Japanese. Some expressions are defined as masculine or feminine in Japanese. According to Fujimoto (2012), Korean translators tend to translate '*-san*' as '*accessi* (Mr.)' or '*acwumeni* (Mrs.)' depending on what kind of expressions are uttered.

All the '*Konbanwa* (Good evening)' phrases including the title, were translated into plain forms in the Korean version except # 9, which is the only one spoken by *Moon* toward to the speakers.

4.2. *Balloon and Acorn* (Targeting children aged 4 to 7)

Balloon and *Acorn* are targeting children aged 4 to 7. The total sentences are more than 40 and 70, respectively. Unlike *Apple* and *Moon*, *Balloon* and *Acorn* consist of narration and conversations between obvious characters. In regards to speech levels, I found deferential forms not only in the Korean

version, but also in the Japanese version. Table 5 shows the instances of speech levels in *Balloon*.

Table 5. Instances of speech levels in *Balloon*

	Deferential		Plain		Undefined		Total ¹²⁾	
	J	K	J	K	J	K	J	K
Narration	4	23	26	7	0	0	30	30
Mom→Child	1	0	5	8	2	0	8	8
Child→Mom	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	3

*Unit: utterance

First, in *Balloon*, the differences of speech levels between the Japanese narration and the Korean narration are significant. In the original Japanese version, 26 plain forms and 4 deferential forms are used. In contrast, 23 deferential forms and 7 plain forms are used in the Korean version. Secondly, the mom used the deferential form toward her own child and the translator translated this into the plain form in the Korean version. Finally, there are no differences between the child's utterances toward his mom in Japanese and Korean.

It is interesting that the mom in *Balloon* used a deferential form toward her own child in (J3) and it was translated into Korean using the plain form as (K3).

[Mom tried to get a balloon down from a tree but she couldn't do it.]

(J3) *moo akirame-mas-yoo* [deferential]

now give.up-POL-EXH

'Now, let's give up!'

(K3) *icey kuman phokiha-ca!* [plain]

now stop give up-EXH

'Now, let's give up!'

12) The total sentences of narration are from the conversations between teachers and children, who are the main characters. Utterances by sub characters are not included.

In reality, Korean parents also use deferential forms when they talk to their own children, especially when they are very young, in order to show them the polite way to speak naturally. However, the deferential form in the original Japanese version is translated into the Korean plain form.

Acorn is a story of a kindergarten. It consists of narration and conversations between characters. The main conversations are between kindergarteners and their teachers. Table 6 shows the instances of speech levels in *Acorn*.

There are not many differences between the Japanese original text and the Korean translated version with respect to narration and the utterances of teachers toward the kindergarteners. Actual conversations in kindergartens were reflected in this story both in Japan and Korea, because kindergarten teachers and caregivers usually use plain and deferential forms when they talk to kindergarteners for many reasons, e.g. in order to teach in a natural way how to use honorifics.

Table 6. Instances of speech levels in *Acorn*

	Deferential		Plain		Undefined		Total	
	J	K	J	K	J	K	J	K
Narration	70	80	0	1	13	2	83	83
Teacher→Child	4	4	11	13	0	0	15	17 ¹³⁾
Child→Teacher	2	8	6	0	0	0	8	8

*Unit: utterance

However, the sentences uttered by the kindergarteners toward their teachers are remarkably different in the Japanese and Korean versions; zero plain forms are used in the Korean version while mainly plain forms are used in the Japanese version as shown in (J4) and (K4).

[The children play shop keeper and they want the teacher to come to check their shops.]

13) The number of total sentences of teachers speaking to children is different between the Japanese and Korean versions because one Japanese sentence is translated into two Korean sentences.

(J4) *sensei! kocchini-mo ki-te!!* [plain]
 teacher here-too come-IMP
 ‘Teacher! Come here, too!’

(K4) *sensayng-nim wuli kakey-to o-seyyo* [deferential]
 Teacher-AH our shop-too come-IMP
 ‘Teacher, come by our shop too, please!’

The original version and the Korean translation also reflect real conversations in kindergartens; Japanese society allows young children (preschoolers) to use plain forms toward adults including their kindergarten teachers and caregivers, while Korean children are not allowed to do so.

In Korean, there might be higher expectations that even young children will use honorifics with their interlocutors compared to Japanese. Park & Kim (2010) clarified that young Korean children (ages 3 to 5) acquire honorifics in order of hearer-honorific, subject-honorific, and object-honorific expression, and use honorifics in real life. According to Park & Kim (2010: 155), the importance of children using honorifics ages 3 to 5 was specified on the early child education guidance by the Korean government (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Figure 1 shows signs at a Japanese (left) and a Korean (right) children’s park. Both signs tell visitors to be careful playing on the equipment. All the sentences are directly giving warnings to the children who would use the play equipment, except the final sentences. The final sentences address



Figure 1. Signs at a Japanese (left) and a Korean (right) children’s park

adults, parents or guardians. The Korean sign uses deferential forms throughout as shown in (K5) and (K6). In other words, no matter who the reader is, the deferential forms should be used because it is a public sign.

(K5) *noli kikwu thanun chinkwulul milkena tangkici maseyyo*
'Don't push or pull friends who are on the play equipment.'

(K6) *eluntulun noli siselul iyonghaci maseyyo*
'Adults should not use the equipment.'

In contrast the Japanese sign switches speech level from the plain form (1-3) to the deferential form (4) as shown in (J5) and (J6).

(J5) *suwatte tesurio motte subetene*
'Sit down and grip the handrail when you go down.'

(J6) *yoojiwa tsukisoiga hitsuyoodesu*
'Toddlers need to have a guardian.'

Japanese society allows not only the young children to use the plain form to older or high-status interlocutors, but also the public to use the plain form toward younger children.

4.3. Speech Level Shifts

In addition, I found that speech level shifts occur in the Japanese and Korean picture books targeting children aged 0 to 3 as shown in (J6), (J7), (K6), and (K7) which are excerpts from the original Japanese picture book *Moon* and its Korean translated version.

(J7) *yoru-ni nat-ta-yo*

(K7) *pami toyessney*
(It's night time)

(J8) *hora o-sora-ga kurai kurai*

(K8) *pwayo hanuli kkamkkamhaycesseyo*

(Look, the sky is really, really dark)

(J7) and (J8) are uttered in plain forms. In the Korean version, (K7) was translated using the non-honorific form while (K8) was translated using the honorific form. In other words, speech-level shift occurred in the Korean version though they were not present in the original Japanese.

5. Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the differences between Japanese original picture books and their Korean translated versions in terms of speech levels. I found that the speech levels in original Japanese picture books and their Korean translated versions are different even if the books consisted of less than 25 sentences targeting children aged 0 to 3. Honorifics were added to the Korean versions, though they were not expressed in the original Japanese versions.

Compared to Japanese, in Korean, there might be higher expectations that even young children should use honorifics in a conversation with older interlocutors. In other words, this may occur due to a difference regarding the age at which socializing children to use honorifics begins in Japan and Korea. In both Japanese original texts and their Korean translated versions of the picture books targeting kids aged 4 to 7, the results show that the deferential and plain forms are used differently depending on the situation. Such a differences suggest that real linguistic behaviors between children and adults in Japan and South Korea are reflected in the fictional text formulations of both countries, respectively.

Finally, I also found that speech level shifts occur in Japanese picture books. I would like to investigate how the speech level shifts occur in Japanese original picture books and how they are translated in the Korean version, by analyzing extended data.

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