

Differential Manifestations of Personal (Pro-)noun Omission in Japanese and Korean: A Functional-Pragmatic Account

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1 Introduction

The first and second personal pronouns are deictic words closely related to the verbalization of the speaker and hearer. Japanese and Korean first and second personal pronouns are similar in that they not only encode social deictic meanings, but also show relatively low ‘referential density’ (i.e. the average ratio of overt argument NPs (nouns or pronouns) to available argument positions in the clause; Bickel 2003) in discourse; in other words, they are frequently omitted in discourse.

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This paper analyzes the verbalization patterns (i.e. uses/non-uses) of the first and second personal pronouns in Japanese and Korean based on the functional-pragmatic analysis of their tokens in Japanese and Korean original TV drama scenarios and their counterparts dubbed in Korean and Japanese.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 presents an outline of Japanese and Korean personal pronouns, followed by a review of relevant previous studies. Section 3 provides an analysis of the data in terms of three types of verbalization pattern. Section 4 presents an analysis of yet another grammatical phenomenon that supports our cross-linguistic findings, i.e. noun-modifying constructions. Section 5 presents the conclusion.

2 First and Second PNs of Japanese and Korean

2.1 Personal Pronouns and Personal Terms in Japanese and Korean

It has been pointed out in both Japanese and Korean literature (e.g. Suzuki 1973; Kim 1988, *inter alia*) that the grammatical concept of “personal pronoun” is not necessarily indispensable. This is based on the facts that, unlike many languages that have this grammatical category, (i) first and second PNs in Japanese and Korean do not belong to a closed class, (ii) they have social deictic meanings, and (iii) they do not show grammatical agreement.

Let us take a look at the so-called second personal pronouns first. Japanese *omae* and Korean *ne*, can be both labelled as ‘less formal, casual *you*’, because they are used in a non-formal setting particularly when the hearer has socially lower or equal status compared to the speaker. On the other hand, *anata* in Japanese and *tangsin* in Korean can be labelled as relatively ‘formal *you*’, because they are usually used in a formal setting when the hearer has socially no higher status than the speaker.

However, their social deictic meanings are more complex than the description just presented. For example, even though it is true that *anata* and *tangsin* are relatively ‘formal’ forms, their use is pragmatically restricted when the hearer has higher social status than the speaker (e.g. a businessman does not address his boss as *anata/tangsin*). Alternatively, job titles such as *syatyoo/sacangnim* ‘boss’ could be used in place of second personal pronouns.

The same is true of first personal pronouns. It is not so uncommon to observe job titles or kinship terms (the so-called ‘fictive use’) being used instead of first personal pronouns when the speaker refers to himself/herself in Japanese and Korean (e.g., a young man could refer to himself as *oniisan/hyeng* ‘elder brother’ when he is talking to a child he does not know).

Considering these idiosyncratic features of personal terms in Japanese, Suzuki (1973) proposed the terms *jisyoosi* (terms for the self), *taisyoosi* (terms for the hearer), and *tasyoosi* (terms for others) in place of the first,

second and third personal terms in Japanese. In view of the morphosyntactic and semantic similarities of Korean personal terms to those in Japanese, it would be not be unreasonable to assume that these terms are also applicable.

Nevertheless, the so-called personal pronouns in the two languages should be distinguished from the other forms in that they are inherently deictic words whose main function is to mark the speaker and the hearer but not the third party. We will thus use ‘personal noun’ (PN), following Takubo (1997), as a cover term for those deictic words used to refer to the speaker and the hearer in a Japanese or Korean discourse.

2.2 PNs and Their Token Frequency

Jung (2020) investigated the usage frequency of personal terms occurring in Japanese and Korean novels (original) and their translations. She has found that PNs are more frequently omitted in Japanese than Korean, mainly because Japanese has richer structural clues such as benefactive verbs and passive constructions that help to identify the referent. For example, while a Japanese second PN can be omitted in (1a) because *yaru* ‘give’ marks the speaker as a giver (subject), and the hearer as a receiver (object), its Korean counterpart should appear on the surface of the sentence as a person involved in the direction of movement because *cwu* ‘give’ does not mark the speaker as a giver (subject) nor the hearer as a receiver (object).

- (1) (J) a. Mamotte yaru koto-wa dekinai. Sumanai.
 protect.GER give thing-TOP cannot sorry
 (K) b. *Ne*-l cikye-cwu-ci mos hay-mianhay.
 you-ACC protect-give-cannot do.CONJ-be.sorry
 ‘I cannot protect **you**. Sorry.’

(Jung 2020: 64, Glosses added)

Though her pioneering research is very insightful and suggestive, it is not without methodological flaws. First, since Jung’s studies (2020) were based on written data (novels), it is essential that spoken language data be considered. We will thus use TV drama scenarios and their dubbed version to see whether the same tendency can be observed. Second, we will need to pay attention to the fact that the same contrast of ‘use’ (Korean) and ‘non-use’ (Japanese) of PNs can be found even when there is no structural difference between the two languages, as in (2) (a Korean original drama and its Japanese translation). This seems to suggest that the omission of PNs is not just a matter of grammar, but may arguably be related to the preferred organization of discourse pragmatic information.

(2) (The speaker A, having sat on a chair and waited for her children for a long time, got upset.)

A: [Why haven't they shown up since I called them earlier.]

a. (K) *Nay*-ka casik-ul calmos kiw-ess-e.
I-NOM kid(s)-ACC wrong raise-PAST-DECL

b. (J) (\emptyset) kosodate-wo matigae-ta wa.
raising kids-ACC make an error-PAST SFP

‘(The speaker talks to herself) *I* failed to discipline them.’

(Korean TV drama *Sulkiowun Uysasaynghwal*)

Third, Jung (2020) failed to capture the similarities in PN omission between Japanese and Korean in contradistinction to languages like English, i.e. the fact that PNs in both languages tend to be frequently omitted.

We will address the following question: On what discourse/pragmatic conditions do Japanese and Korean explicitly express PNs or leave them implicit? We will pursue this question by comparing three types of PN omission patterns observed in our data.

3 The Data and Results

The data consists of one Korean original TV drama *Cohahamyen Wulinun* (abbreviated as ‘C’ hereafter) with its Japanese dubbed version (8 episodes, 351 minutes), and one Japanese original TV drama *Zenrakantoku* (abbreviated as ‘Z’ hereafter) with its Korean dubbed version (8 episodes, 380 minutes). We transcribed dubbed versions manually because there was no transcription available, and had our transcriptions checked by one Korean native speaker and two Japanese native speakers.

Table 1 demonstrates that less than half of first and second personal PNs in Korean original TV dramas were overtly expressed, while over 50% of the PNs were omitted in the Japanese dubbed version. Table 2, on the other hand, shows that more than 90% of first PNs, and 80% of second PNs in Japanese original TV drama were overtly expressed, while less than 10% of the PNs were omitted in the Korean dubbed version. These results show that PNs tend to be more frequently omitted in Japanese, while they tend to be more overtly expressed in Korean.

Japanese translation counterparts to Korean 1 st PNs	Number of tokens	Japanese translation counterparts to Korean 2 nd PNs	Number of tokens
1 st person PNs (e.g. <i>watasi</i> 'I')	268 (45.66%)	2 nd person PNs (e.g. <i>omae</i> 'you')	148 (35.49%)
1st person PNs omitted in Japanese	297 (50.60%)	2nd person PNs omitted in Japanese	246 (58.99%)
Proper nouns	0 (0%)	Proper nouns	11 (2.64%)
Lexical items other than 1 st PNs (e.g. <i>kotira</i> 'this way')	21 (3.58%)	Lexical items other than 2 nd PNs (e.g. <i>sotira</i> 'that way')	8 (1.92%)
2 nd person PNs	3 (0.51%)	1 st person PNs	4 (0.96%)
Total	587 (100%)	Total	417 (100%)

Table 1. Japanese translation counterparts to Korean PNs

Korean translation counterparts to Japanese 1 st PNs	Number of tokens	Korean translation counterparts to Japanese 2 nd PNs	Number of tokens
1 st person PNs (e.g. <i>na</i> 'I')	225 (94.54%)	2 nd person PNs (e.g. <i>ne</i> 'you')	196 (84.48%)
1st person PNs omitted in Japanese	13 (5.46%)	2nd person PNs omitted in Japanese	15 (6.47%)
Proper nouns	0 (0%)	Proper nouns	0 (0%)
Lexical items other than 1 st PNs (e.g. <i>ic-cok</i> 'this way')	0 (0%)	Lexical items other than 2 nd PNs (e.g. <i>kuccok</i> 'that way')	17 (7.33%)
2 nd person PNs	0 (0%)	1 st person PNs	4 (1.72%)
Total	238(100%)	Total	232(100%)

Table 2. Korean translation counterparts to Japanese PNs

3.1 PNs Verbalized in Both Languages

The first pattern to be discussed concerns PNs that are verbalized in both languages. PNs in this pattern usually mark information new to the hearer whose referent cannot be identified by (contextual) inference. It should be noted that these PNs are not normally omissible, as in (3).

- (3) (A girl A is hiding from her boyfriend. When she made eye contact with a boy B, she asked him not to tell her boyfriend that she was hiding.)
 B: [(Looking at A) Hilarious!]

- a. (K) {*Nay*/* ϕ } elkwul kulehkey ppanhi po-l swu iss-nun salam,
 my face like that stare-can-ADN.PRS people
 hun-chi anh-untey.
 common-NEG-but
- b. (J) {*Ore-no*/* ϕ } kao sonna huuni mi-ru yatu,
 I-GEN face like that manner see-NON.PST guy
 soo i-nai-ze.
 not much exist-NEG-SFP
 ‘It is rare to see someone staring at **my** face like that.’

(C: 1-1)

In example (3), *elkwul* and *kao* ‘face’ are NPs introduced for the first time in the discourse and it is not the kind of information being shared by the speaker and hearer at the time of the utterance. In other words, they represent “hearer-new” (and in this example, “discourse-new”) information (Prince 1992). Please note that the genitive *nay* and *ore-no* ‘my’ cannot be omitted in (3a, b); otherwise the referent of the ‘face’ cannot be identified. In this pattern, no significant difference was found between Japanese and Korean.

3.2 PNs Omitted in Both Languages

The second case under discussion concerns PNs that are omitted in both languages. One of the reasons makes it possible is because they bare many structural clues that helps to identify the referent of a PN without overtly expressing it. Aside from beneficiary verbs and passive construction pointed out in Jung (2020), the first-person restriction in the mental state verb construction can be considered as another structural clue. In (4), mental state desiderative verbs *-tai* in Japanese and *-ko siph-* ‘want to’ in declarative sentence requires that the co-occurring subject NPs mark first-person, which makes first PN omission possible.

- (4) a. (J) Kyuuryoo tyokinsi-te okaasanni ryokoo purezento
 salary save-CONJ mom-LOC travel present
 si-**tai**-na tte omot-te-nda
 do-want QUOT think-ASP-SFP
- b. (K) Pwucilen-hi welkup moa-se wuli emma yehayng
 hard-ADV salary save-CONJ our mom travel
 ponay-cwu-**ko siph**-ta kulen sayngkaki tul-tela
 send-give-want to-QUOT like that think-ASP-DECL
 ‘I think that (I) **want to** send you (=my mom) on a trip by saving hard.’

(Z: 1-4)

However, as mentioned in Section 2.2, structural clues cannot solely explain the whole story. For example, sentences lacking PNs without any structural clues can also be found in both languages. Consider examples (5a, b) where 2nd PNs that refer to the hearer Kawada, who refuses to be the head, are not overtly expressed in either language. Nevertheless, this omission does not cause any confusion in the interpretations of (5a, b).

- (5) (Muranishi and Arai visited Kawada and asked him to be the head of their new company.)
Kawada: [After all, I think you (=Muranishi) are suitable for the head of the company.]
Muranishi: [You (=Kawada) are the right person.]
Arai: (To Kawada, who refused to be the head)
a. (J) Zenkamon-yori-wa (φ) sinyoo-dekiru-kara-na.
 person with crime record-than-TOP trust-can-because-SFP
b. (K) Cenkwaca-pota-n (φ) sinyongha-l swu iss-canha.
 person with crime record-than-TOP trust-can-SFP
'One can trust (**you**) (=Kawada) more than the one who has a crime record.'
(Z: 1-3)

The omission of 2nd PNs in this case is arguably possible because 'contextual information' regarding who (=Arai) can be trusted more than the one with a crime record (=Muranishi) is being shared by the discourse participants. The omitted 2nd PNs mark hearer-old information (and discourse-old information as it is preceded by Muranishi's utterance) whose referent can be inferred due to the shared knowledge of the discourse.

Another issue to be addressed concerns the question of why the two languages leave some PNs unexpressed. From the viewpoint of transferability of information, it may be ideal to verbalize PNs as much as possible in order to avoid a misunderstanding. However, unlike English *you*, whose primary function is to mark the hearer, Japanese and Korean 2nd PNs tend to have socio-cultural meanings that make it difficult for the speaker to refer to the hearer "neutrally" (e.g., *anata* or *tansin* are infelicitous if they are used by a graduate student to refer to his thesis supervisor). In (5), the interpersonal and societal relationship between the discourse participants will influence the choice of "casual *you*" (Japanese *omae* and Korean *ne*) or "formal *you*" (Japanese *anata* and Korean *tangsin*). The omission of PNs in Japanese and Korean can thus be considered as a linguistic strategy to avoid such complex and fine-tuned interpersonal and societal adjustment of appropriate PNs.

3.3 PNs Omitted in One Language but Verbalized in the Other

The last and most interesting case concerns PNs omitted in one language, but verbalized in the other. According to our data, PNs in Japanese consistently show a stronger tendency to be omitted than their Korean counterparts.

One may attribute this tendency to the fact that Japanese has more structural clues such as beneficiary verbs that help to identify the referent easily compared to Korean, as shown in (1). However, the same contrast can also be observed when there is no such structural difference. See (6) that only one argument (the object *anata-wo*) is verbalized in Japanese, whereas three arguments (the subject *nay-ka*, topic *na*, and object *ne*) are verbalized in Korean.

(6) (A met her lover B after dumping him.)

A: a. (K) {**Nay/φ**}-ka malhay-ss canh-a. {**na/φ**} {**ne/φ**} an
 I-NOM say-PAST NEG-DECL I you NEG
 cohaha-n tako.
 love-PRS QUOT

 ‘**I** told (you). **I** don’t love **you** anymore.’

b. (J) (φ) it-ta-desyo. (φ) Moo {**anata/φ**}-wo suki-zyanai.
 say-PAST-SFP anymore you-ACC love-NEG

 ‘(**I**) told (you). (**I**) don’t love **you** anymore.’

B: [How much more time do you need? I know you still love me.]

(C: 1-6)

It should be noted that all the PNs in (6) are potentially omissible, which will then look superficially similar to (5). In this sense, these PNs can be said to be informationally ‘redundant’, because they do not cause any confusion in the interpretation of the sentences in omitted form (Compare to the PN in (3)). The reason that allows the omission to be possible, as explained in relation to (5), is arguably because the contextual information regarding who (=A) said what (i.e. the break up) to whom (=B) is shared by A and B.

Now, we need to address the question of why those ‘redundant’ PNs tend to be expressed in Korean while they tend to be omitted in Japanese.

3.4 Different Discourse Strategy Regarding Missing Information

It has been shown that Japanese and Korean differ significantly as to the omission of PNs that are potentially omissible and to some extent informationally redundant. We argue that the use or non-use of those PNs (which are rather optional than obligatory; compare (6) and (3)) is crucially related to the two contrastive ‘discourse strategies’ employed in the respective languages.

First, one can maximally verbalize PNs to make the sentence informationally accurate. This strategy is motivated by the preference for accuracy at the cost of redundancy. Secondly, one can maximally omit PNs to make the sentence brief. This strategy is motivated by the preference for economy at the cost of extra interpretive burden on the hearer such as the interpretation of contextual or structural clues (e.g. benefactive verbs; see Jung 2020).

The former strategy seems to be favored in Korean in which informational accuracy is a primary factor in the organization of discourse. Thus, the apparently ‘redundant’ information in Korean, can be analyzed as a linguistic clue to help identify the referent more easily in the absence of other structural and contextual information. In contrast, the latter strategy is arguably favored in Japanese in which economy is prioritized and redundancy is dispreferred.

4 Pragmatic Inference and the Noun-Modifying Constructions

The contrastive verbalization patterns towards potentially missing information in Japanese (tendency toward non-use) and Korean (tendency toward use) are manifest in another linguistic construction, i.e. noun-modifying constructions (also known as “relative clauses”) (see Lee and Horie 2020):

- (7) a. (K) *Peynchi-ey anc-a, [wulitul-i sa-nun] {kos/φ}*
 bench-LOC be seated-CONJ we-NOM live-PRS place
macunphyen-uy aphatu-lul chyetapo-n-ta.
 opposite side-GEN apartment-ACC look up-PRS-DECL
 ‘I take a seat on the bench and looked up to the apartment house
on the opposite side of the location where we live.’
- b. (J) *Benti-ni kosikake, [watasitati-no sumu]*
 bench-LOC be seated:CONJ we-GEN live
 {φ}mukai-no apaato-o miage-ru.
 opposite side-GEN apartment-ACC look up-PRS
 ‘I take a seat on the bench and looked up to the apartment house
on the opposite side (of the location) where we live.’

Examples (7a, b) are noun-modifying constructions with relational head nouns, i.e. nouns encoding relative spatial or temporal concepts such as *mukai* and *macunphyen* ‘(the) opposite side’. The locative reference point information needs not to be expressed in Japanese, whereas it needs to be verbalized in Korean, which accords with the contrast in PN omission observed previously. As extensively discussed in Lee and Horie (2020), this contrast is closely related to the extent to which pragmatic inference plays a role in recovering missing information in grammatical constructions.

5 Conclusion

This paper contrasted verbalization patterns of Japanese and Korean first and second PNs from a discourse-functional point of view. Specifically, we have shown that even though in general both languages omit PN frequently, Korean is shown to be more likely to express PNs overtly while PNs are more likely to be omitted in Japanese. This contrast is arguably related to the different discourse strategies employed in the respective languages. We have also shown that a similar contrast is also found in yet another grammatical phenomenon, i.e. the omissibility of reference point information in noun-modifying constructions with relational head nouns.

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