

Differential discourse strategies regarding “redundant” information: A functional interpretation on usage frequency of referring expressions in Japanese and Korean

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Languages can differ in terms of the treatment of pragmatically “redundant” information (Rohdenburg 1996) even amongst “pro-drop” languages with relatively low referential density (Bickel 2003) such as Japanese (J) and Korean (K). While referring expressions (e.g. personal pronouns and demonstratives) that express contextually recoverable information can be retained or omitted in Korean, they are more likely to be omitted in Japanese:

(1) (A met her lover after dumping him.)

A: a. (K) **{Nay-ka / φ}** malhay-ss-canh-a. **{Na / φ}** ne an cohaha-n tako.
I-NOM tell-PAST-NEG-DECL I you NEG love-PRES QUOT
b. (J) **{φ/?Watasi-ga}** it-ta-desho. **{φ / ?Watasi}** anata-wo suki-jyanai.
I-NOM tell-PAST-SFP I you-ACC love-NEG

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

(*Cohahamyen Wulinun*, TV drama)

(2) (School teachers are talking about their students.)

A: [Come to think of it, she’s in your class, right? I mean, Jojo’s nephew.]

B: [Gulmi, right?]

A: a. (K) Ney. **{Ku haksayng-un/φ}** kupsikpi nay-ss-na-yo?
that student-TOP the charge for school lunch pay-PAST-INT-HON
b. (J) Ee. **{φ/?Sono gakusei-wa}** kyuusyokuhi, osame-te-masu-ka?
that student-TOP the charge for school lunch pay-ASP-HON-INT

‘Yes. Did (that student) pay for the charge for school lunch?’

(*Cohahamyen Wulinun*, TV drama)

Indeed, our corpus-based investigation of K drama (*Cohahamyen Wulinun*, 8 episodes in total and each episode is one hour long) and J drama (*Zenrakantoku*, 8 episodes in total and each episode is one hour long) scenarios and their translations revealed that (i) while more than 50% of personal pronouns (PNs) in the K drama scenarios are omitted in the J (dubbed) translation, more than 90% of PNs in J drama scenarios are translated into Korean (See Table 1 and Table 2 attached below).

Likewise, (ii) while approximately 60% of demonstratives (DMs) in the K drama scenarios are omitted in the J (dubbed) translation, more than 80% of the DMs in the J drama scenarios are translated into Korean (See Table 3 and Table 4 attached below).

Differential treatments of pragmatically redundant information are arguably related to the two competing motivations: “economy” and “transparency” (Hawkins 1986). Omission of the redundant information, motivated by economy, seems to be the norm in the Japanese discourse organization, arguably aided by pragmatic inference. Omission of the redundant information, though not completely neglected in the Korean discourse organization, is held in check in favor of semantic transparency.

Table1. J translation counterparts to K PNs

Japanese translation counterparts to Korean PNs	Number of tokens
1 st /2 nd PNs translated into Japanese	463 (46.02%)
1st /2nd PNs omitted in the Japanese translation	543 (53.98%)
Total	1006 (100%)

Table2. K translation counterparts to J PNs

Korean translation counterparts to Japanese PNs	Number of tokens
1st /2nd PNs translated into Korean	442 (94.04%)
1 st /2 nd PNs omitted in the Korean translation	28 (5.96%)
Total	470 (100%)

Table3. J translation counterparts to K DMs

Japanese translation counterparts to Korean DMs	Number of tokens
DMs translated into Japanese	100 (41.49%)
DMs omitted in the Japanese translation	141 (58.51%)
Total	241 (100%)

Table4. K translation counterparts to J DMs

Korean translation counterparts to Japanese DMs	Number of tokens
DMs translated into Korean	208 (80.93%)
DMs omitted in the Korean translation	49 (19.07%)
Total	257 (100%)

Data

Cohahamyen Wulinun (Love Alarm). Available from 2019.08.22, Netflix.

Zenrakantoku (The Naked Director). Available from 2019.08.08, Netflix.

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